

Title of Report:	Planning Committee Report – LA01/2022/1567/F
Committee Report Submitted To:	Planning Committee
Date of Meeting:	28 May 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Decision
To be discussed In Committee YES/NO	NO

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them
Lead Officer	Development Management and Enforcement Manager

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil
Included in Current Year Estimates	No
Capital/Revenue	N/a
Code	N/a
Staffing Costs	N/a

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	No
Legal Opinion Obtained	No

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:

	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

No: LA01/202/1567/F

Ward: BALLYMONEY & THE GLENS

App Type: Full Planning

Address: Lands approximately 615m E of 16 Coolkeeran Road, Armoy, in townlands of Kilcroagh and Carrowlaverty, approx 2.5km SE of Armoy

Proposal: Construction of a wind farm comprising 5no. wind turbines (maximum 150 metres to blade tip), an electrical substation / control building, battery energy storage (BES) area, construction compound, delivery route junction improvements at exit Off A26 Frosses Road / A44 Drones Road Roundabout onto the A44 Drones Road; A44 Hillside Road / Magheramore Road / B5 Lagge Road Junction; and B15 Coolkeeran Road, a new access onto the Coolkeeran Road and all associated ancillary works

Con Area: n/a

Valid Date: 10.01.2023

Listed Building Grade: n/a

Target Date: 02.05.2023

Agent: Clyde Shanks,

Applicant: Armoy Wind Farm Ltd

Objections: 1 **Petitions of Objection:** 0

Support: 157 **Petitions of Support:** 0

Executive Summary

- The proposal is for the construction of a Wind Farm comprising 5 no. Wind Turbine, with a maximum tip height of 150, and associated infrastructure. The proposal will have a maximum generating capacity of up to 25MW and includes a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). Off site road junction improvement works are required at various points along the turbine delivery route.
- As a major application this proposal was subject to the Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) process and the public consultation laid out within that before the application was submitted.
- The application was accompanied by an Environmental Statement.
- 1 objection has been received regarding the proposed development.
- 157 letters of support have been received regarding the proposed development.
- The proposal has been assessed against the relevant policy, mainly Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy, and is unacceptable in terms of impact on visual amenity and landscape character.
- This proposal is unacceptable at this location having regard to the Northern Area Plan 2016 and all other material considerations.
- Refusal is recommended.

Drawings and additional information are available to view on the Planning Portal-

<https://planningregister.planningsystemni.gov.uk/simple-search>

1.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Committee has taken into consideration and agrees with the reasons for the recommendation set out in section 9 and the policies and guidance in sections 7 and 8 and resolves to **REFUSE** planning permission for the reason set out in section 9.

2.0 SITE LOCATION & DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site is located within the townlands of Kilcroagh and Carrowlaverty. The site is located on the western slopes of Croaghan Hill approximately 2.5km to the south-east of Armoy and 9km south west of Ballycastle. The hill has a distinctive form which is highly visible in the wider lowland landscape. It is characterised by upland grazing and moor and has a strong wild character. The hill forms part of a north- south ridgeline with the distinctive Knocklayde to the north.
- 2.2 Access to the wind farm is proposed from Coolkeeran Road which sits to the west of the site. The land rises from Coolkeeran Road to the Croaghan summit to the east. The site area is 42.73ha.
- 2.3 There are several single dwellings and farms in proximity to the site dotted along the Coolkeeran and Altarichard Roads. The village of Armoy is the closest settlement to the site with the hamlet of Magherahoney sitting to the south-west.

3.0 RELEVANT HISTORY

- 3.1 **LA01/2017/1654/F** - Construction of a wind farm comprising 6 no. wind turbines (maximum 149.9 metres to blade tip), an electrical substation / control building, energy storage area, construction compound, junction improvements at A8 Ballymena Road/Belfast Road/Browndod Road/Drumahoe Road roundabout, A8/ Shanes Hill Road roundabout, A36 Shanes Hill Road - bend at Starbog Road junction, A36/A44 roundabout, A44/Hillside Road junction, a new access onto the Coolkeeran Road (158m South of 24 Coolkeeran Road) and all associated ancillary works – **Refused** 02.10.2018

- 3.2 **2018/A0199** – Appeal against refusal of LA01/2017/1654/F - **Appeal Dismissed** 08.01.2020
- 3.3 **LA01/2022/0284/PAN** - Construction of a Wind Farm comprising 5no Wind Turbines (Max 150m to blade tip), and electrical substation/control building, battery energy storage (BES) area, construction compound, delivery route junction improvements, a new access onto Coolkeeran Road and all associated ancillary works – **PAN acceptable** 06.04.2022
- 3.4 Of particular relevance is application LA01/2017/1654/F for ‘Construction of a wind farm comprising 6 no. wind turbines...’ which was refused by the Council on 2 October 2018 and dismissed by the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) at appeal on 8 January 2020. The current application is a similar application. However, there are several differences including the reduction from 6 turbines to 5 turbines, an increase in tip height from 149.9m to 150m, slight relocation of turbines and the addition of a BESS.
- 3.5 Section 46 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 states that the Council may decline to determine a relevant application under certain conditions. These include if a similar application has been refused by the Council in the 2 years prior to the receipt of the subject application; or if the PAC has dismissed an appeal against the refusal of a similar application; and, the Council thinks there has been no significant changes in the relevant considerations since the refusal/dismissal.
- 3.6 In this instance, more than 2 years has passed since LA01/2017/1654/F was refused by the Council and the associated appeal, 2018/A0199, was dismissed by the PAC.
- 3.7 The reasons for refusal for LA01/2017/1654/F related to the unacceptable impact of the proposal on visual amenity and landscape character, built heritage and public safety. Historic Environment Division objected to LA01/2017/1654/F on the grounds that the proposal would adversely impact the integrity of the setting of a scheduled state monument and a listed building. The PAC, in its decision, did not uphold the HED’s objections, nor did it uphold the Council’s objection relating to public safety. HED has not objected to the current application in cognisance with the PAC decision and it is not considered unacceptable in terms of public safety. However, the issues

relating to the impact on visual amenity and landscape character remain and are discussed below.

4.0 THE APPLICATION

- 4.1 The proposal is for a wind farm comprising 5 turbines, an electrical substation/control building, battery energy storage area (BES), temporary construction compound and associated ancillary works. The proposal will also involve several road junction improvements to facilitate the transport of abnormal sized loads. Each turbine will have a maximum tip height of 150m. It has been proposed to use a turbine with hub height range of 78m to 91.5m and rotor diameter range from 117m to 136m.
- 4.2 Each turbine will have a generational capacity of 3.6MW to 5MW, giving a potential total installed capacity of between 18 MW to 25 MW.
- 4.3 Micro-siting of up to 25m is proposed. However, micro-siting is precluded in some directions due to the identification of constraints to development through the EIA process. Micro-siting is restricted where it is prudent to ensure potential impacts are avoided.
- 4.4 The application was accompanied by a voluntary environmental statement.

Design & Access Statement

- 4.5 A Design & Access Statement is required under Article 6 of the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order (NI) 2015 as the application is considered to be a major application. The application falls within the major category due to the 25MW generation capacity of the wind farm.
- 4.6 The design and access statement is to provide details of the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development and how issues relating to access to the development have been dealt with.
- 4.7 In this application the report states how the layout of the wind farm was considered giving regard to the landform, topography, and environmental/location constraints while meeting the technical siting requirements of wind turbines.

- 4.8 The report demonstrates that the Applicant undertook significant consideration of siting of the wind turbines and ancillary development such as avoiding the AONB and ASSI and maintaining suitable buffers to sensitive receptors. This involved detailed assessment of the site during the EIA process which identified several constraints and led to layout changes to provide an acceptable scheme prior to submission of an application.
- 4.9 It is accepted that due to the inherent design characteristics of wind farms and for health and safety that there will be no requirement for access for members of the public or those with disabilities onto the site.

5.0 PUBLICITY & CONSULTATIONS

External

- 5.1 Five neighbours were identified for notification within the terms of the legislation. The application was advertised on 25th January 2023 in the local papers, again for the Environmental Statement on 8th February 2023. There has been 1 objection to this proposal from a member of the public. The issues raised by the objector included:
- noise;
 - glimmer/reflection from turbines;
 - impact of shadowing on property;
 - visual impact;
 - cumulative impact.
- 5.2 157 letters of support have been submitted. The issues raised in the letters included:
- Reduce reliance on use of fossil fuels;
 - Sustainable, green energy;
 - Investment in area in the form of local jobs, local contracts during construction;
 - Rates income for Causeway Coast and Glens Council;
 - Benefits for local groups and organisations from community benefit fund;
 - Farm diversification;

- Meet Government targets with regard to renewable energy;

These issues are discussed below within the “Considerations and Assessment” section of the report.

Internal

- 5.3 See appendix 1 for details of consultations carried out and the responses provided. All but one of the consultees that responded were content subject to conditions and informatives. DAERA Inland Fisheries did not provide a response. The objection is from NIEA NED Countryside, Coast and Landscapes Team who is of the opinion that the proposal is contrary to the SPPS and Policy RE1 of PPS18.

Proposal of Application Notice

- 5.4 As this application is a major application it must comply with the Proposal of Application Notice and carry out community consultation at least 12 weeks prior to the submission of the application.
- 5.5 A Proposal of Application Notice was submitted on 10th March 2022 under LA01/2022/0284/PAN. The PAN application fell to be considered under The Planning (Development Management) (Temporary Modifications) (Corona Virus) Regulations (NI) 2021 which took effect on 1st April 2021, which temporarily suspended the requirement to hold a public event. The accompanying guidance advised that a public event was no longer required but the other requirements remained.
- 5.6 The applicant advised that they intended to undertake the following forms of consultation:
- Online consultation event/emagazine where public can view all the information that would be available at the public exhibition;
 - Press notice of the public event;
 - Circulation of letter to all properties within 2km of the development site.
- 5.7 The emagazine was to be provided online from the week commencing 23rd May 2022 and made available for 14 days. This was to provide information on the scale, nature and location of the proposed development, the planning context and the works undertaken by the applicant and their design team. Prior to this,

the information letters were to be delivered to all properties within 2km of the proposed development site as well as an email to elected members. Information on how to provide feedback was also to be provided.

Community Consultation Report

- 5.8 The community consultation report was submitted as part of the planning application, received on 19th December 2022 which is more than 12 weeks after the Proposal of Application Notice was received, as required by the legislation.
- 5.9 Copies of the following have been provided in the report:
- press notices;
 - email notification sent to elected members within the Glens DEA and MLAs for North Antrim;
 - letter which was delivered to every property within a 2km radius;
 - emagazine which was provided online;
 - feedback comments.
- 5.10 The report states that formal notices were displayed within Ballymoney Chronicle and Ballymoney Times. The emagazine was uploaded to Clyde Shanks website on 27th May 2022 allowing the public to provide feedback until the 10th June 2022. Overall, sufficient evidence has been provided to show compliance with section 27 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.
- 5.11 With regard to the feedback, written and verbal feedback was received from 2 residents and the Lissanoure Estate. The feedback was taken in to consideration and addressed in the Community Consultation Report. The issues raised included impact on the historic landscape at Lissanoure, the scale of the windfarm, the impact on neighbouring properties, proximity to the AONB and connection to the grid. The applicant appears to have been able to address the issues with the individuals concerned and have not made any amendments to the application to reflect the matters discussed.

6.0 MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Section 45(1) of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 requires that all applications must have regard to the local plan, so far as

material to the application, and all other material considerations. Section 6(4) states that in making any determination where regard is to be had to the local development plan, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

- 6.2 The development plan is the Northern Area Plan 2016 (NAP). The site does not fall within any designations as indicated in the plan but sits immediately to the west of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 6.3 The site straddles both Landscape Character Area (LCA) 56 Dervock Farmland and LCA 118 Moyle Moorlands. The 5 turbines are all located within LCA 118 which has been assessed to have a high – medium landscape sensitivity to impact from wind energy development, while the site access, part of the access track and the temporary site compound are located within LCA 56 which has been assessed as having a medium sensitivity.
- 6.4 The site is not within any European designations. However, it abuts Antrim Hills Special Protection Area (SPA) along the eastern part of the southern boundary and Slieveanora and Croaghan ASSI along the very eastern tip of the site.
- 6.5 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) is a material consideration.
- 6.6 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS) is a material consideration. As set out in the SPPS, until such times as a new local plan strategy is adopted, councils will apply specified retained operational policies.
- 6.7 Due weight should be given to the relevant policies in the development plan.
- 6.8 All material considerations and any policy conflicts are identified in the “Considerations and Assessment” section of the report.

7.0 RELEVANT POLICIES & GUIDANCE

The Northern Area Plan 2016

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS)

Planning Policy Statement 2: Natural Heritage

Planning Policy Statement 3: Access, Movement and Parking

Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning, Archaeology and The Built Heritage

Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy

Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy – Best Practice Guidance

Planning Policy Statement 18: Renewable Energy –
Supplementary Planning Guidance – Wind Energy Developments
in Northern Ireland's Landscapes

Supplementary Guidance

8.0 **CONSIDERATIONS & ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1 The main considerations in the determination of this application relate to: the principle of development, impact on the public, safety, human health, residential amenity, visual amenity, landscape character, biodiversity, nature conservation, and local natural resources.

Principle of development

- 8.2 The SPPS advises that the Council should take account of the proposal's contribution to the wider environmental benefits along with consideration of impact on health, safety and amenity, visual impact, impact on biodiversity and habitat, and future decommissioning.
- 8.3 An assessment (HRA) was carried out by Shared Environmental Services (SES) under Regulation 43 (1) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (NI) 1995 (as amended) as the site has potential hydrological links to Skerries and Causeway Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and is adjacent to the Antrim Hills Special Protection Area (SPA). The Council in its role as the competent Authority under those Regulations, and in accordance with its duty under Regulation 43, has adopted the HRA report, and conclusions therein. The HRA found that the project would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site. SES has advised that mitigation should be controlled through conditions in the event of an approval.
- 8.4 The application was accompanied by a voluntary Environmental Statement because it was accepted that the proposal falls within

Schedule 2, Class 3(j), of The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 and exceeds the threshold of '*more than 2 turbines*'.

- 8.5 The type and quantities of chemicals used for the batteries do not fall within the Schedule listed within the Planning (Hazardous Substances) (No.2) Regulations (NI) 2015 (PHSR). A hazardous substances assessment was carried out by Synergy Engineering and Environment and it concluded that the battery substances under a loss of control scenario in the event of a fire and in the event of firefighting with water is below the PHSR thresholds. Therefore Hazardous Substance Consent is not required.
- 8.6 The Northern Area Plan 2016 is silent on the matter of wind farm development in this area.

SPPS Development in the Countryside and PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside

- 8.7 Planning Policy CTY 1 of PPS 21 allows for renewable energy projects in accordance with PPS 18 which is assessed below.
- 8.8 Policy CTY 13 of PPS 21 states that planning permission will be granted for a building in the countryside where it can be visually integrated into the surrounding landscape and it is of an appropriate design. Also, CTY 14 of PPS 21 states that planning permission will be granted for a building in the countryside where it does not cause a detrimental change to, or further erode the rural character of an area.
- 8.9 The proposal includes one permanent building (substation/control building) which will be located close to the site access. The building will be single storey and have a footprint of approximately 22 metres by 6 metres, with an associated hard standing for access and car parking. The building height will be approximately 6m. The walls will be finished with rough rendering and the roof will be of a pitched design incorporating artificial slate tiles.
- 8.10 The proposal also includes an energy storage area which will site battery storage containers, transformers, switchgear, metering equipment and control equipment. The battery storage area shall be located adjacent to the site substation and will have a footprint of approximately 35.7 metres by 61.5 metres, with associated hard

standing. The area will be enclosed by a 2.4m high galvanised palisade security fence.

- 8.11 The substation and BESS have been sited at an elevation of between 160m and 170m adjacent (to the east of) a small area of forestry which is to be retained. This area of forestry will help to screen the compound when viewed from the west on Coolkeeran Road. Views from the north, east and south are limited due to the surrounding topography and intervening vegetation. These elements of the proposal will have no significant visual impact. The design and materials are considered acceptable and the building will not be a prominent feature in the landscape and will not cause a detrimental change to the rural character of the area.
- 8.12 A temporary construction compound will be erected approximately 636m along the internal access track from the Coolkeeran Road. The compound will include portacabin-type modular buildings to be used as site offices, canteen and welfare facilities; storage areas for tools, small plant, parts and other materials; a bunded fuel storage area; car parking area; and will be bounded by Heras style fencing. The compound is temporary and will be removed following completion of the development, with the lands restored. Therefore, any visual impact will only be temporary.
- 8.13 The SPPS also states that all development in the countryside must integrate into its setting, respect rural character, and be appropriately designed. Given the nature of a windfarm, it is difficult for it to integrate into the countryside. While the buildings which form part of the proposal are considered acceptable, the turbines are considered to have a significant detrimental impact on rural character at this location. This is discussed below under PPS 18.

SPPS Renewable Energy and PPS 18 Renewable Energy

- 8.14 Policy RE1 and paragraph 6.224 of the SPPS requires that all renewable energy development, associated buildings and infrastructure will not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on:

(a) public safety, human health, or residential amenity;

Public safety

- 8.15 Policy RE1 states that supplementary planning guidance '*Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes*' (Best Practice Guidance) will be taken into account in assessing all wind turbine proposals.
- 8.16 With regard to safety, paragraph 1.3.54 of the guidance requires that the turbines should be set back at least fall over distance plus 10% from the "edge of any public road", right of way or railway line. The maximum base to tip height in this proposal is 150m which constitutes the fall over distance. Therefore, the fall over distance plus 10% is 165m. The nearest turbine to a public road is turbine WTG 1 which is at least 1230m from the edge of Coolkeeran Road and therefore complies with policy.
- 8.17 In relation to public safety, paragraph 1.3.52 of the Best Practice Guidance states that '*for wind farm development the best practice separation distance of 10 times rotor diameter to occupied property should comfortably satisfy requirements*'. No minimum distance is specified. While the guidance acknowledges that wind turbines are a safe technology, it still stipulates a separation distance as there is still the potential for failure and injury. In this instance the rotor diameter is 136m which equates to a separation distance of at least 1360m. The proposed 25m micro-siting must also be taken into consideration when determining the separation distances which means the distance required in some directions is 1385m i.e. 1360m +25m.
- 8.18 There are 23 properties within the 1385m safety separation distance of a proposed turbine. The closest dwelling to a turbine is 16 Coolkeeran Road which is 572m from the turbine WTG 2. The applicant states in the ES that 'all turbines are located well beyond the industry recommended clearance distances, which indicate that turbines should have a clearance of 2 x tip height from occupied properties, 300m in this instance (based on maximum worst case scenario). This recommended clearance distance is supported by a recent Study regarding Wind Turbines carried out by the Health and Safety Executive in 2013. Therefore, all dwellings are well beyond the industry recommended clearance distance.

8.19 Although less than the recommended 1385m, these reduced separation distances are considered acceptable. This is in light of a Planning Appeals Commission decision on application LA01/2017/1654/F (appeal ref: 2018/A0199) Armoy windfarm where the PAC accepted a separation distance of 623m when the 10 times rotor diameter separation distance was 998m. In its decision, the PAC concluded that the use of the word ‘comfortably’ in the BPG allows a degree of latitude to be applied to separation distances and that 10 times rotor diameter need not rigidly apply. Further, the BPG describes wind energy developments as safe technology and failure is unlikely. The PAC, therefore, concluded that the proposal wouldn’t present a public safety risk and was satisfied that the appeal proposal would not cause significant harm or result in an unacceptable adverse impact on public safety. Policy RE 1 states “for wind farm development, a separation distance of 10 times rotor diameter to occupied property, with a minimum distance not less than 500m, will generally apply”. In applying the PAC’s logic, the distances in this case exceed 500m and are therefore considered acceptable.

8.20 Regarding the battery storage element of the proposal, the main risk to human health is through a fire or explosion. The applicant has included mitigation measures within the proposal to minimise Thermal Runaway and the risk of fire. The nearest residential dwelling to the BESS is approx. 800m mitigating any risk to local properties or their occupiers as confirmed by the HSENI guidance ‘Hazard Assessment of Battery Energy Storage Systems’.

Human Health

8.21 There is no indication from any consultees or other evidence to suggest that the proposed development will result in any detriment to human health. Environmental Health who is the competent authority on human health, has not raised any objections on these grounds.

Residential Amenity

8.22 Policy RE 1 stipulates that a separation distance of 10 times rotor diameter, with a minimum distance not less than 500m, will generally apply to protect residential amenity from noise. This is reiterated in the Best Practice Guidance at para 1.3.43 specifically in relation to noise. As outlined above there are 23 properties

within the 10 times rotor diameter buffer, but they are all outside the minimum 500m separation distance.

- 8.23 With regard to noise, Environmental Health (EHO) has assessed the proposal and have no objection to the predicted noise levels at any of the receptor locations. They note from the noise assessment provided by the Applicant that noise levels are exceeded at 4 properties. However, these properties are financially involved in the proposal and are subject to higher financially involved noise limits. When these limits are applied at these properties, there are no exceedances. EHO are content with the proposal, subject to conditions being applied in the event of an approval. As evidence has been provided to show that noise will not have a detrimental impact on residential amenity, the separation distances are deemed to be acceptable in terms of noise.
- 8.24 With regard to shadow flicker, the Best Practice Guidance states that at distances greater than 10 rotor diameters from a turbine, the potential for shadow flicker is very low. The guidance also states that for dwellings within 500m, shadow flicker should not exceed 30 hours per year or 30 mins per day. No figure is given for properties outside this distance.
- 8.25 Although 23 dwellings have been identified as being within the 10 times rotor diameter, based on worst-case scenario, only 13 of these could exceed the 30 hour per year limit set out by PPS 18 BPG. However, none of these properties are within 500m of the nearest turbine. As noted above, the 30 hour per year limit only applies to properties within 500m, which is considered the zone of influence for shadow flicker.
- 8.26 The highest exceedance is experienced at 16 Coolkeeran Road, where it is predicted that shadow flicker could occur 115:25 hours per year in the worst-case scenario. It should be noted however, that in reality, the worst-case scenario calculation would not be experienced as it assumes that the sun is always shining; the turbines are always rotating and facing the property in question and the intervening landscape is bare. As such, the ES also provides figures based on real case scenario which better reflect the reality of the situation. This reduces the predicted annual hours of shadow flicker experienced for the property to 19:12 hours per year which is well within the recommended 30-hour limit.

- 8.27 In the “real case scenario”, no properties will experience more than the 30-hour limit per year. If 30 hours of shadow flicker is acceptable at properties within 500m then it would also be acceptable at properties outside the 500m but within the 10 times rotor diameter. As such, any effects of shadow flicker are not considered to be significant.

(b) visual amenity and landscape character;

- 8.28 The SPPS and Policy RE1 of PPS18 both state that renewable energy developments should not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on visual amenity and landscape character. In this case it is considered that there is potential for significant detrimental impact on both visual amenity and landscape character due to its siting within LCA 118 and adjacent to Antrim Coast and Glens AONB, and critical views from the public roads within the vicinity. This is laid out in detail below under “PPS18 Requirements for Wind Development”.
- 8.29 The proposal also includes associated electrical substation/control building, battery energy storage area (BES), temporary construction compound, hardstandings, underground cabling, access tracks and a new access off Coolkeeran Road. The construction compound will be removed once the turbines are operational. These works will not have any significant visual impact. The control building is 6m high with a footprint of 22m by 6m. It will be finished with rough cast render and grey slates. The size, design and finishes are acceptable in the countryside.

(c) biodiversity, nature conservation or built heritage interests;

- 8.30 NIEA Natural Environment Division (NED) has considered the impacts of the proposal on designated sites and other natural heritage interests and they have no concerns, subject to conditions.
- 8.31 The development site is located adjacent to the boundary of the Antrim Hills SPA and the Slieveanorra and Croghan ASSI, both of which are designated for breeding Merlin and breeding Hen Harrier. Bird surveys were submitted as part of the ES and NED is content that with appropriate mitigation, as outlined in the environmental statement, the proposed development is unlikely to have a significant impact on bird populations, including selection

features of the Antrim Hills SPA. NED has also recommended that should approval be granted, in order to reduce the risk of bird mortalities through collision strikes, that prior to construction, one of the turbine blades be painted black. This, while preferable to NED, is not essential given the nature of bird populations affected.

- 8.32 The site contains priority habitat Blanket Bog, Heathland, Upland Flushes, Fens and Swamps, Purple Moor-grass and Rush Pasture and Hedgerows. However, mitigation measures such as micro-siting of turbines, avoidance of areas, use of floating roads, careful siting of spoil and SUDS design, will prevent damage to these areas. Through prevention measures as well as compensation measures, such as the planting of hedgerows, there is expected to be no loss, or extremely low loss, of priority habitat is predicted. NED has advised that provided the prescriptions set out in the HMEP are implemented in full, including the monitoring regime to ensure delivery of the proposed habitat management, then NED has no concerns regarding impact to NIPHS. This can be conditioned in the event of an approval.
- 8.33 There were no badger setts identified within the site boundary. NED has advised that provided a condition is included in any planning approval to ensure the proposed badger mitigation measures are fully implemented, then NED has no concerns regarding badgers.
- 8.34 NED has reviewed the bat surveys which were carried out in accordance with NIEA survey specifications. NED is content that the operation of the proposed wind farm is unlikely to have a significant impact on bats provided a condition is included in any planning approval to ensure that the proposed bat mitigation measures are fully implemented.
- 8.35 NED notes that the survey for red squirrel or Pine Marten activity at the plantation within the site found no evidence of either species in 2022. However, because Pine Martens are mobile, there is the potential for them to visit the plantation. As construction works may require the removal of some trees, there is the potential for disturbance of Pine Martens. Mitigation is proposed in the ES to ensure that any Pine Martens that may be present on site are protected. NED advise that provided a condition is included in any planning approval to ensure that the proposed Pine Marten

mitigation measures are fully implemented, NED has no concerns regarding this species.

- 8.36 Common Lizards were recorded on site. NED is content that no significant adverse impact to Lizards is considered likely because the overall loss of, or change to, Lizard habitat will be small and mitigation/enhancement measures will ensure that there is no net loss of habitat. NED advise that provided a condition is included in any planning approval to ensure that the proposed Common Lizard mitigation measures are fully implemented, NED has no concerns regarding this species.
- 8.37 NED is content that no other priority species was identified within the site, or will likely be impacted by the proposal.
- 8.38 Historic Environment Division has advised that the proposal may be made acceptable to archaeological policy requirements with conditions. It is therefore acceptable with regard to Policy RE 1 of PPS 18. This is discussed further under PPS 6 below.

(d) local natural resources, such as air quality or water quality; and

- 8.39 Water Management Unit (WMU) of NIEA has considered the impacts of the proposal on the surface water environment. They are content with the proposal subject to the site drainage being constructed in accordance with the agreed drainage plan. This would be conditioned in the event of an approval.
- 8.40 Inland Fisheries is satisfied that the proposal is unlikely to impact on fisheries interests provided appropriate mitigation is in place to prevent deleterious materials from entering the watercourse. This can be controlled through condition requiring the submission of a CEMP to be agreed prior to the commencement of development should the application be approved.
- 8.41 Due to the nature of the development there will be limited impact on air quality except for dust suppression upon construction.
- 8.42 Regulation Unit (Land and Groundwater Team) of NIEA considered the information presented for potential impacts of the proposal on the aquatic environment (especially groundwater). They are content with the proposal without conditions.

- 8.43 The site is hydrologically connected to the Runkerry ASSI, Skerries and Causeway SAC, Portballintrae ASSI and Giants Causeway and Dunseverick ASSI which are of international and national importance and are protected by Conservation (Natural Habitats, Etc) Regulations (NI) 1995 (as amended) and The Environment (NI) Order 2002. NED has considered the potential for pollution caused by runoff from the development which may pose a risk to the aquatic environment. NED has outlined a number of concerns which they are content can be dealt with through conditions including the submission of a final CEMP and Decommissioning Management Plan.

(e) public access to the countryside.

- 8.44 The site in question is not publicly owned land and as such public access to the site upon the construction of the proposed development will be no different than before, that is, access to the land will depend on the landowner's consent.

PPS 18 Requirements for Wind Development

- 8.45 In RE1 of PPS 18 applications for wind energy development will also be required to demonstrate all of the following:

(i) that the development will not have an unacceptable impact on visual amenity or landscape character through: the number, scale, size and siting of turbines;

- 8.46 The turbines are located within two distinctive landscape settings. Landscape Character Area (LCA) 118 Moyle Moorlands and Forests and the wider setting of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB.

LCA 118

- 8.47 Supplementary planning guidance (SPG) 'Wind Energy Development in Northern Ireland's Landscapes' describes LCA 118 as 'large scale, sweeping, open, expansive rounded upland rising to approx. 550m AOD and forming a backdrop to the glens'. It goes on to state that LCA 118 has a high to moderate sensitivity to wind development.
- 8.48 The turbines will be located on the upper slopes of Croaghan Hill which forms part of the western edge of the LCA. The SPG states that *'the hills on the outer edges of the LCA form prominent*

skylines for miles around'. It goes on to state that 'the principal tops and summits often have a distinctive form, wide visibility and a strong wild character; they are highly sensitive to wind energy development'.

- 8.49 Croaghan Hill is highly visible in the landscape and can be viewed at distance from the low-lying land to the west. The hill has a wild character and is relatively free from man-made development. It is considered that this particular area of the LCA would be highly sensitive to wind energy development. This means that it is very vulnerable to change and would be adversely affected by wind energy development, which would result in a significant change in landscape and visual characteristics and values which define the LCA.
- 8.50 The SPG advises that care needs to be taken to avoid significant impacts on key views from the lowland landscapes to the west and on the wild character of the area. Due to the location of the turbines on the higher slopes of Croaghan Hill, they will be visually dominant in the landscape, particularly when viewed from the low-lying landscape to the west. From here, the turbines are particularly dominant as they introduce large scale structures into the upper planes of the hillside. These planes were previously untouched and breaking the skyline makes the turbines more obtrusive. The introduction of these man-made structures would have an unacceptable detrimental impact on the unspoilt wild character of the hill. It is therefore considered that the proposal would result in an unacceptable significant change to the character of Croaghan Hill, and this part of the LCA.
- 8.51 While it is acknowledged that there are several existing wind energy developments within the LCA, this part of the LCA is relatively free from wind energy development and retains a wild and unspoilt character. Any existing turbines are considerably smaller at 101m to tip and therefore are not directly comparable. The introduction of turbines to this unspoilt landscape would have a detrimental impact on the LCA.
- 8.52 With regard to the impact on LCA 118, NIEA Countryside, Coast and Landscape Team (NIEA CC&L) advise that the proposal will impact key views from the immediate lowland landscapes to the west onto the elevated transitional slopes and the higher elevations. It is the impact on key views from the west that is

emphasised in the SPG. The western section of LCA 118 already includes Altaveeden, Corkey, and Gruig Wind Farms. This proposal will increase the number of wind farms, further impacting views from the lowlands to the west.

Setting of Antrim Coast and Glens AONB

- 8.53 The proposal is not located within an AONB but is located approx. 1km from the edge of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 8.54 The UK's National Association for Areas of Outstanding Beauty state that "*An Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a designated exceptional landscape whose distinctive character and natural beauty are precious enough to be safeguarded in the national interest.*" The Best Practice Guidance to PPS 18 at paragraph 1.3.23 advocates that a cautious approach is necessary in relation to those landscapes which are of designated significant value, including AONBs. Paragraph 6.223 of the SPPS states "*A cautious approach for renewable energy development proposals will apply within designated landscapes which are of significant value, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site, and their wider settings.*"
- 8.55 The proposal is located in an area that forms a transition between the upland designated landscape of the AONB and the lowlands, this is the "*wider setting*" of the AONB. NIEA CC&L advise that the landscape surrounding an AONB performs an important function by providing context, particularly in views to and from the AONB. They advise that although the proposal is not located within the AONB, having considered the scale and nature of this proposal, and the cumulative impact of wind farms located in this area and the proximity to Antrim Coast & Glens AONB, there would be an unacceptable and significant adverse impact on the landscape character, visual amenity and integrity of the Antrim Coast & Glens AONB and that the proposal is contrary to associated planning policy.
- 8.56 NIEA CC&L highlight viewpoints VP3 and VP5 (discussed below) which are located within the AONB. They state that from VP3 the hubs and blades of 2 turbines are clearly visible and at VP5 all 5 turbines are visible over the ridge line of Croaghan Hill. From

these viewpoints the turbine hubs and blades are prominent and it is difficult to recognise that the turbines are outside the designated AONB boundary. The impact of the rotating blades would have an adverse impact on the tranquility and perception of windless of the AONB, an essential and acknowledged feature of this remote area. The perception and experience of visual receptors within the AONB would be negatively impacted.

8.57 NIEA CC&L also has concerns over the increasing number of turbines along the western fringe of the AONB. This proposal will introduce a further cluster of 5 turbines, at a height of 150m, which is relatively taller than the other turbines, to the existing Altaveeden wind farm, which is inside the AONB boundary, Corkey wind farm, Corkey Extension and Gruig wind farm, which are within proximity of the AONB boundary. The wireline provided for VP4, which is within the AONB, demonstrates how numerous turbines have become on the western fringe of this section of the AONB.

8.58 NIEA CC&L advise that the proposal does not represent a cautious approach to the regional and national importance of the AONB as required by paragraph 6.223 of the SPPS or paragraph 1.3.23 of the PPS 18 BPG.

Critical Viewpoints

8.59 The Applicant has provided visual aids from 16 different viewpoints (Volume 3 of Environmental Statement). The Council considers the critical viewpoints to be VP3, VP8, VP9, VP10, VP12, VP13 and VP14. These are discussed below.

VP3: Moyle Way (nearest turbine 4.68km)

8.60 VP 3 is located on the Moyle Way, an accredited walking route, to the northeast of the site within the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. The main receptors at this point would be walkers. Although views from VP3 will be limited to the hubs and blades of 2 turbines and the blade tips of one, these views are from within the AONB and should therefore be given significant weight. One of the distinctive landscape features of the AONB at this location is '*exposed landscapes with few roads or settlements and scattered farms on the edges of the uplands*'. The introduction of these turbines adjacent to the AONB would encroach on the setting of the AONB by introducing large scale, manmade structures which visually

intrude on the large scale, open and smooth moorlands and interrupt extensive views across open moorland which are identified as the AONB's distinctive landscape features in the AONB Management Plan. Due to their siting above the ridge line, and due to their moving elements, the turbines would distract from, and compete with the open and dramatic moorlands. From this point, the receptor would not distinguish that these turbines are outside the AONB boundary. Therefore, the introduction of the turbines to this area would have a detrimental impact on the scenic quality and rural tranquillity of the AONB from this viewpoint. The proposal would result in an unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area from this view.

VP8: Junction of A44 and Bregagh Road (nearest turbine 3.15km)

- 8.61 VP 8 is located to the west of the site in a low-lying area. The main receptors would be motorists and nearby residents. The A44 is the main road from Belfast to Ballycastle and the views from this point are transient and sustained as one drives towards the village of Armoy. From VP8 Croaghan Hill forms a prominent feature on the skyline. When viewed from this point, all 5 turbines will break the skyline and will be visually prominent and overly dominant due to the turbines size, scale and layout. Even though Croaghan Hill serves to provide a partial backdrop to the turbines, it does not satisfactorily mitigate against the overall visual impact of the proposal given its spatial disposition on the Hill and its scale, which would be exacerbated by the moving components. Though the turbines would occupy a small portion of this broad view, they would dominate Croaghan Hill due to their size and scale. Croaghan Hill, along with the distinctive form of the neighbouring Knocklayd form the characteristic views from this point and the approach to Armoy. The dominance of the proposal on Croaghan Hill would adversely impact on the wider appreciation of this characteristic view.
- 8.62 From VP8 the development will be viewed with Altaveedan Wind Farm. However, there will be no cumulative impact due to the separation distance, scale and setting of Altaveedan Wind Farm. Altaveedan itself is not comparable as it sits lower in the landscape, has smaller turbines of 101.2m compared to 150m and has a backdrop of hills making it much less prominent in the landscape. The proposal would result in an unacceptable adverse

impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area from this view.

VP 9: Friary Road (nearest turbine 3.05km)

- 8.63 From this point the main receptors would be motorists and nearby residents. From here all 5 hubs sit above the ridgeline of Croaghan Hill and the visual impact extends to Knocklayde as one of the turbines interrupts the view of Knocklayde from this point. The turbines will interrupt, and detract from, the visual appreciation of the hill form of both these hills which is a characteristic feature of the view. This will result in the proposal appearing unduly prominent in the landscape. Again, the proposal would be viewed with Altaveedan wind farm. However, Altaveedan is a distant feature from this point and is less prominent in the landscape given its backdrop and the smaller turbines. The proposal would result in an unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area from this view.

VP10: Bregagh Road, South of the Dark Hedges (nearest turbine 5.45km)

- 8.64 VP10 is located in a low lying area to the south east of the Dark Hedges, a recognised key visitor attraction. Receptors at this location would include motorists, tourists and nearby residents. Given its proximity to the Dark Hedges, where the through road is now closed off to traffic, tourists use this area to informally park their vehicles when visiting the tourist site. This view is therefore appreciable to tourists visiting the site. From this viewpoint, all 5 turbines break the skyline, with at least 3 of the hubs sitting above the ridgeline of Croaghan Hill. The turbines would appear unduly prominent from this viewpoint. Between the viewpoint and the proposal there is no natural or man-made screening; therefore, the turbines cannot assimilate into the landscape. Again, Altaveedan is viewed with the proposal from this point, as well as several other single turbines. However, these are a distant feature and do not appear dominant in the landscape. The much larger turbines of the proposal would be more imposing and distracting. The proposal would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area.

VP12: Armoy RFC (nearest turbine 2.02km)

- 8.65 VP 12 is located at the old Armoy Rugby Club. The site is no longer used for rugby. However, it is still open to the public and its

use could recommence in the future. Nonetheless, views of the proposal are still available to traffic passing the VP. Views of the proposal are close range and the turbines would feel overly dominant and imposing from this point. Other wind farms in the distance are set much lower in the landscape and are unimposing, where in comparison, the proposal would be a stark and prominent feature. The view from this public assembly point would be dominated by the turbines. From this viewpoint, the proposal would have an unacceptable adverse impact on the landscape character and visual amenity of the area.

VP13: Coolkeeran Road (nearest turbine 1.33km)

- 8.66 This viewpoint is located on Coolkeeran Road, close to the proposed access point. The main receptors would be traffic and nearby residents. From this point, the hubs of all 5 turbines sit prominent above the Croaghan Hill ridgeline and the view of the landscape would be dominated by the turbines due to their size, scale and layout. Although the guidance states that within distances of two to five kilometres, turbines are expected to be relatively prominent, the overall size, scale and siting of the turbines combined with the lack of intervening vegetation would render them overly dominant. Again, given their size and scale, and the distraction of the moving components, the turbines would detract from the distinctive form of Croaghan Hill which is the dominant landscape feature in this view. The proposal would have an unacceptable adverse impact on visual amenity and the landscape character of the area from this viewpoint.

VP14: Glenshesk Road (nearest turbine 2.1km)

- 8.67 VP14 is located on Glenshesk Road, to the northwest of the site, at Armoy Round Tower, a regionally important monument in State Care, and St Patrick's Church of Ireland, which is a listed building. The main receptors would be motorists, church goers and tourists visiting the Round Tower. Again, given the short distance from the proposal, the turbines would dominate the view from this point. All the turbines, for the most part, sit above the skyline, with very little of their tower benefiting from a backdrop. Turbine WTG4 appears to almost sit on top of the ridgeline. The landscape viewed from this point is characterised by windswept upland, and the turbines, with their moving blades, would become the dominant feature in the landscape, detrimentally impacting on the appreciation of the landscape character of the area. It is accepted

that views of the proposal may be brief in duration for traffic. However, this is a public assembly point where (pedestrian) receptors may linger, and the stark, vertically dominant turbines would adversely impact on their appreciation of the landscape. The proposal would have an unacceptable adverse impact on visual amenity and the wider landscape character of the area.

- 8.68 In conclusion, the turbines fundamentally change the character of the landscape and are incongruous in such an unspoilt part of the countryside. The receiving landscape does not have the ability to adequately absorb the development even with micro-siting. For the reasons outlined above, it is considered that the development would have an unacceptable visual impact and will have a detrimental impact on landscape character through location, size, scale and siting of turbines. It is considered that the negative impact on the landscape and visual amenity for the 35 year lifespan of the proposal, is not outweighed by the socio economic and environmental benefits of the proposal. The proposal is therefore contrary to RE 1 of PPS 18 and the SPPS.

(ii) that the development has taken into consideration the cumulative impact of existing wind turbines, those which have permissions and those that are currently the subject of valid but undetermined applications;

- 8.69 Altaveedan wind farm is located to the south east of the proposal. From certain viewpoints, specifically VP 8, VP 9, VP 10 and VP 12, the cumulative impact on the landscape is evident but not so significant as to warrant a refusal for the proposal on this basis. Other approved wind farms further to the south are not read with the proposal as views are restricted due to topography, vegetation and buildings.

- 8.70 There are several single turbines, existing and approved, which will read with the proposal but as they are not prominent in the landscape the cumulative impact will not be significant. The immediate vicinity of the proposal remains relatively free from wind turbine development.

(iii) that the development will not create a significant risk of landslide or bog burst;

- 8.71 Geological Survey NI has indicated that they are satisfied that the risk of peat slide during the construction and operational phases of

the development is low to negligible. They are satisfied that in areas where peat slide risk is determined to be low, the mitigation measures proposed will reduce the risk of peat slide to an acceptable level.

(iv) that no part of the development will give rise to unacceptable electromagnetic interference to communications installations; radar or air traffic control systems; emergency services communications; or other telecommunication systems;

- 8.72 No consultees have indicated that the development will give rise to unacceptable interference to communication installations, emergency services communications or other telecommunications systems.

(v) that no part of the development will have an unacceptable impact on roads, rail or aviation safety;

- 8.73 The proposal is outside the 30km consultation zone for City of Derry Airport (CDA) and Belfast International Airport (BIA). National Air Traffic Services (NATS) had no objection to the proposal.
- 8.74 DfI Roads has not raised any concerns over the proposal and has suggested conditions in the event of an approval.

(vi) that the development will not cause significant harm to the safety or amenity of any sensitive receptors (including future occupants of committed developments) arising from noise; shadow flicker; ice throw; and reflected light; and

- 8.75 As discussed above, EHO have no objection to the noise levels predicted within the submission and would be content for noise to be managed by condition in the event of any approval, and the impact of shadow flicker is deemed not to be significant.
- 8.76 Paragraph 1.3.79 of the Best Practice Guidance advises that ice throw is unlikely in Northern Ireland and as such limited consideration has been given to this.
- 8.77 The Applicant has advised that the turbine blades can be finished with a semi-matt sheen and pale grey colour so as to minimise light reflection. This would be acceptable and could be conditioned in the event of any approval.

(vii) that above-ground redundant plant (including turbines), buildings and associated infrastructure shall be removed and the site restored to an agreed standard appropriate to its location.

- 8.78 The removal of the turbines and any of the associated infrastructure will be dealt with by condition if approved. Ongoing restoration of the site will be dealt with in the Final Habitat Management Plan which will be submitted if the application is approved.

Development on Active Peatland

- 8.79 There is an area of active peatland within the development site. This is a Northern Ireland priority habitat. However, the layout has been designed so that no development is proposed on active peatland. NIEA has advised that the area of active peat is unlikely to be impacted by the proposed works, provided mitigation is implemented.

Habitat Management Plan

- 8.80 Policy RE1 of PPS 18 specifies that the Habitat Management Plan (HMP) should be submitted and agreed before any permission is granted. Policy NH5 of PPS 2 also states that appropriate mitigation and/or compensatory measure will be required. A Habitat Management and Enhancement Plan (HMEP) has been submitted as part of the Environmental Statement. It is considered to be acceptable and any approval will be conditioned with the requirement for the submission of a full HEMP and its agreement prior to the commencement of the development.

Consideration of wider Environmental, Economic and Social Benefits

- 8.81 Paragraph 4.1 of policy RE1 of PPS18 states that *“the Department would support renewable energy proposal unless they would have unacceptable adverse effects which are not outweighed by the local and wider environmental, economic and social benefits.”* The SPPS also requires material consideration of these benefits. Given the proposal has unacceptable adverse effects, this component of the policy is engaged. In this case, the applicant has listed the possible benefits arising from the approval of the windfarm. They include:

- Power for between 23,499 to 30,029 homes;
- Displacement of between 29,972 to 38,255 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide per annum;
- High wind capacity factor resulting in higher energy production and therefore a greater contribution to policy objectives;
- It will assist with the security of supply in Northern Ireland;
- Total lifetime investment of approx. between £82.8 to £86.2 million, of which between £52.2 to £55.6 million will be retained within the Northern Ireland Economy;
- Circa £2.3 million of construction expenditure and circa £366k to £394k per annum of the operational and maintenance expenditure will be spent within the Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council area;
- Over the 35 year lifecycle of the project, approximately 98.6 FTE job years will be created and sustained in Northern Ireland;
- Direct and indirect local benefits during the construction phase including purchase and supply of materials, construction contracts, civils contracts, accommodation and day-to-day supplies for contractors and transportation of turbine components etc;
- Estimated total (direct and indirect) benefits from the on-going operation of the development will produce an additional GVA in the Northern Ireland supply chain of approximately £3 - £3.8 million over the 35-year project life;
- Generation of annual business rates of between £7.2 - £10m across the 35-year project life of which circa £3.5m to £4.8m would go directly to Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council;
- Creation of a Community Benefit Fund of between £1.6m - £2.2m across the 35-year project life.

8.82 Whilst both policies require consideration of social benefits, the SPPS states at para 5.71 that social benefits in the form of community payments, shared ownership and in-kind benefits cannot be considered material considerations. Therefore, the community fund cannot be taken into consideration in this case. It should also be noted that the majority of letters of support rely heavily on the community fund which cannot be considered, diminishing the weight given to the letters of support in the decision-making process.

8.83 The proposal offers significant benefits, both environmental and economic. Paragraph 6.225 of the SPPS states that the wider

environmental, economic and social benefits of all proposals for renewable energy projects are material considerations that will be given appropriate weight. On balance, it is not considered that these decisively outweigh the adverse impacts on visual amenity and landscape character arising from this proposal. The despoliation of the scenic quality of the area and the AONB, is considered so harmful that they are determining.

SPPS Natural Heritage and PPS 2 Natural Heritage

- 8.84 The SPPS and policies NH1, NH2, NH3, NH4, NH5 and NH6 of PPS 2 require consideration of the impact of the proposal on European and National sites, protected species, sites on nature conservation importance, habitats, species or features of natural heritage importance and AONBs (if located within an AONB).
- 8.85 These issues have all been addressed under the consideration of the SPPS Renewable Energy and PPS 18 Renewable Energy above. The proposal satisfies all policy requirements of the SPPS Natural Heritage and PPS 2.

SPPS Transportation and PPS 3 Access, Movement and Parking

- 8.86 The proposed access to the windfarm is to be located on Coolkeeran Road which is not a Protected Route. It is anticipated that the main transport effects will be associated with the movement of Heavy Goods Vehicles and Abnormal Loads to and from the site during the construction phase of the development. During the operational phase it is anticipated that there will be occasional visits to the site for maintenance / repairs. It is considered that the effect of vehicular movements during this phase of development will be negligible. DfI Roads has assessed the proposal and have no objection to the proposal subject to conditions.

SPPS Archaeology and Built Heritage and PPS 6 Planning, Archaeology and the Built Heritage - BH 1 The Preservation of Archaeological Remains of Regional Importance and their Settings

- 8.87 This policy has a presumption in favour of the physical preservation in situ of archaeological remains of regional significance and their settings, this includes monuments in State Care. The application site is located within an archaeologically

sensitive historic landscape, containing a number of regionally important archaeological sites and monuments including Armoy Round Tower, a regionally important monument in State Care, Clegernagh graveyard, a regionally important Scheduled monument and on St Patrick's Church of Ireland which is a listed building.

- 8.88 In respect of previous application LA01/2017/1654/F, for a similar proposal on the site, Historic Environment Division: Historic Monuments (HED:HM) advised that the proposal adversely impacted on the integrity of the setting of Armoy Round Tower, Clegernagh graveyard and on St Patrick's Church of Ireland.
- 8.89 HED:HM maintains this assessment that a proposal of the present scale and nature at this location, would result in adverse impacts upon these archaeological sites and monuments. HED:HM continue to advise that these impacts are contrary to Policy BH 1 of PPS 6, paragraph 6.8 of the SPPS and to Policy RE 1 of PPS 18. However, HED:HM advise that they are mindful of the PAC decision on LA01/2017/1654/F (PAC ref. 2018/A0199) which, while the proposal was dismissed on the basis of other material considerations, did not uphold HED's position in the appeal decision. HED:HM consequently consider that reasons for refusal based on the impacts noted above, and in previous evidence, are unlikely to be sustainable in this case for such a similar proposal.
- 8.90 Therefore, HED:HM has focussed their considerations on those aspects which are materially different to the previous proposal. The present proposal comprises a reduced number of turbines from 6 to 5 and the addition of a number of new elements including spoil storage areas and a battery storage compound. With regard to the new elements, HED:HM is content that this proposal may be made acceptable to SPPS and PPS 6 archaeological policy requirements subject to conditions for the agreement and implementation of a programme of archaeological works. This is to identify and record any archaeological remains in advance of new construction, or to provide for their preservation in situ, as per Policy BH 4 of PPS 6.
- 8.91 HED:HM also advise that a condition requiring fencing to be erected around the scheduled graveyard and adjacent enclosure site, should be included in any approval to ensure their protection from any damage during construction activity.

8.92 HED:HM is content in the main that issues of the principle of policy compliance with respect to archaeological material considerations as set out in PPS 6 and the SPPS have been addressed, cognisant of the previous appeal decision. HED:HM is content that the proposal may be made acceptable subject to condition.

SPPS Flood Risk and PPS 15 Planning and Flood Risk

8.93 The Strategic Flood Map (NI) indicates that the development does not lie within the 1 in 100 year fluvial flood plain.

8.94 There are no watercourses which are designated under the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 within this site. The site is however affected by numerous undesignated watercourses. Under 6.32 of the policy, 5m maintenance strip is required. The submitted Drainage Assessment (DA) shows a minimum maintenance strip of 10m is to be provided for the various undesignated watercourses highlighted within this site, therefore FLD2 is satisfied.

8.95 Due to the size and nature of the development FLD3 of PPS 15 applies and a DA is required. The submitted DA indicates that flood risk to and from a portion of the development will be managed using a SuDS. DfI Rivers advise that should the application be approved, a condition should be included requiring the submission of a Final Drainage Assessment.

8.96 The DA indicates a total of 7 culverts are to be installed for access. Artificial modification of a watercourse is normally not permitted unless it is necessary to provide access to a development site or for engineering reasons. DfI Rivers are not opposed to the use of culverting and have included an informative if the Council are minded to approve the application. The informative advises the applicant that consent is required from DfI for any modification of a watercourse including culverting. The use of culverting falls to the Council to consider.

8.97 The DA states that culverts will be designed to accommodate track crossings and minimise the length of affected channel in order to comply with Revised PPS15 Policy FLD4. They will be designed in accordance with the requirements provided in DfI's 'Culvert Design and Operation Guide' and guidance set out in 'Guidelines for

Fisheries Protection during Development Works' as published by Loughs Agency.

- 8.98 The DA indicates that there is no particular fishery habitat on the site that would be disrupted by loss of substrate. Therefore, there will be no impact on the loss of productive fish habitat.
- 8.99 The culverts are necessary to access the turbine sites during construction, operation and decommissioning, there are no other options available. It is considered unlikely that culverting of the waterways within the development site will have any impact if the mitigation measures within the ES are adhered to, therefore, FLD 4 is satisfied. The design will be agreed with DfI Rivers prior to commencement, this can be conditioned.

Northern Area Plan, SPPS Tourism and PPS 16 Tourism

- 8.100 Policy TSM 8 of PPS 16 is entitled 'Safeguarding of Tourism Assets' and states that planning permission will not be granted for development that would itself or in combination with existing and approved development in the locality, have an adverse impact on a tourism asset such as to significantly compromise its tourism value. A tourist asset is defined in Appendix 1 of PPS 16 as any feature associated with the built or natural environment which is of intrinsic interest to tourists.
- 8.101 The proposal is located in proximity to Armoy Round Tower, a regionally important monument in State Care, Clegernagh graveyard, a regionally important Scheduled monument and St Patrick's Church of Ireland which is a listed building. No evidence is available to demonstrate that the proposal would make tourists less likely to visit any of these assets or to visit them less frequently. There is no evidence to suggest that the existing windfarms have impacted on tourism in the area. Consequently, it is not considered that any harm to visual amenity and landscape character would be such as to significantly compromise the tourism value of any of these tourism assets.

Issues raised in letters of representation

- 8.102 *Noise/glimmer/shadow flicker/visual impact/cumulative impact* – These issues have all been assessed under PPS 18 above.

8.103 *Economic Benefit* - Some of the economic benefits of the proposal have been discussed above. The letters of representation also state that there will be benefit to the local area through jobs, local contracts and accommodation and food for workers during construction. These are assumptions as the Applicant has not given any details on job creation or how workers will be accommodated. Locals may not benefit from jobs as expertise may be brought in from existing companies who specialise in the construction of windfarms. As for any possible revenue raised through accommodation and food, this will only benefit a few in the area and will only be for a short period of time compared to the lifetime of the wind farm which will be present in the landscape for up to 35 years.

8.104 *Climate change/reduce reliance on fossil fuels/sustainable green energy* - It is accepted that wind energy as an alternative to burning fossil fuels is clean and produces no greenhouse gas emissions during operation which helps to curb climate risks. However, this does not outweigh the impact on visual amenity and landscape character discussed above.

8.105 *Government targets* – The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 sets out Northern Ireland’s legislative framework for tackling climate change and reducing emissions. The Act established that the Department for the Economy must ensure at least 80% electricity consumption from renewable sources by 2030 to supercede the 70% renewable electricity consumption target established in the Energy Strategy (2021). A report published by the Department for the Economy on 6 March 2025 states that for the 12 month period January 2024 to December 2024, 43.5% of total metered electricity consumption in Northern Ireland was generated from metered renewable sources. It is accepted that the proposal would help towards achieving the 80% target. However, it should be noted that other renewable energy projects have been approved, and are yet to be built, within the Borough. These include:

- Dunbeg South windfarm (LA01/2022/0981/F) – 37.8Mw
- Smulgedon windfarm (LA01/2021/0175/F) – 16.45Mw
- Rigged Hill windfarm (LA01/2019/0890/F) – 29Mw
- Corkey windfarm (LA01/2019/0772/F) – 29.9Mw
- Cam Burn windfarm (C/2011/0459/F) – 13.8Mw
- Letterloan solar farm (LA01/2022/0471/F) – 29.9Mw

- 8.106 *Farm Diversification and Education* – These are not policy considerations for renewable energy.
- 8.107 *Benefits for local groups and organisations from community benefit fund* – This is not a planning consideration.
- 8.108 *Rates income for the Council* – It is accepted that the proposal would generate business rates of between £3.5m to £4.8m for Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. However, this does not outweigh the impact on visual amenity and landscape character discussed above.

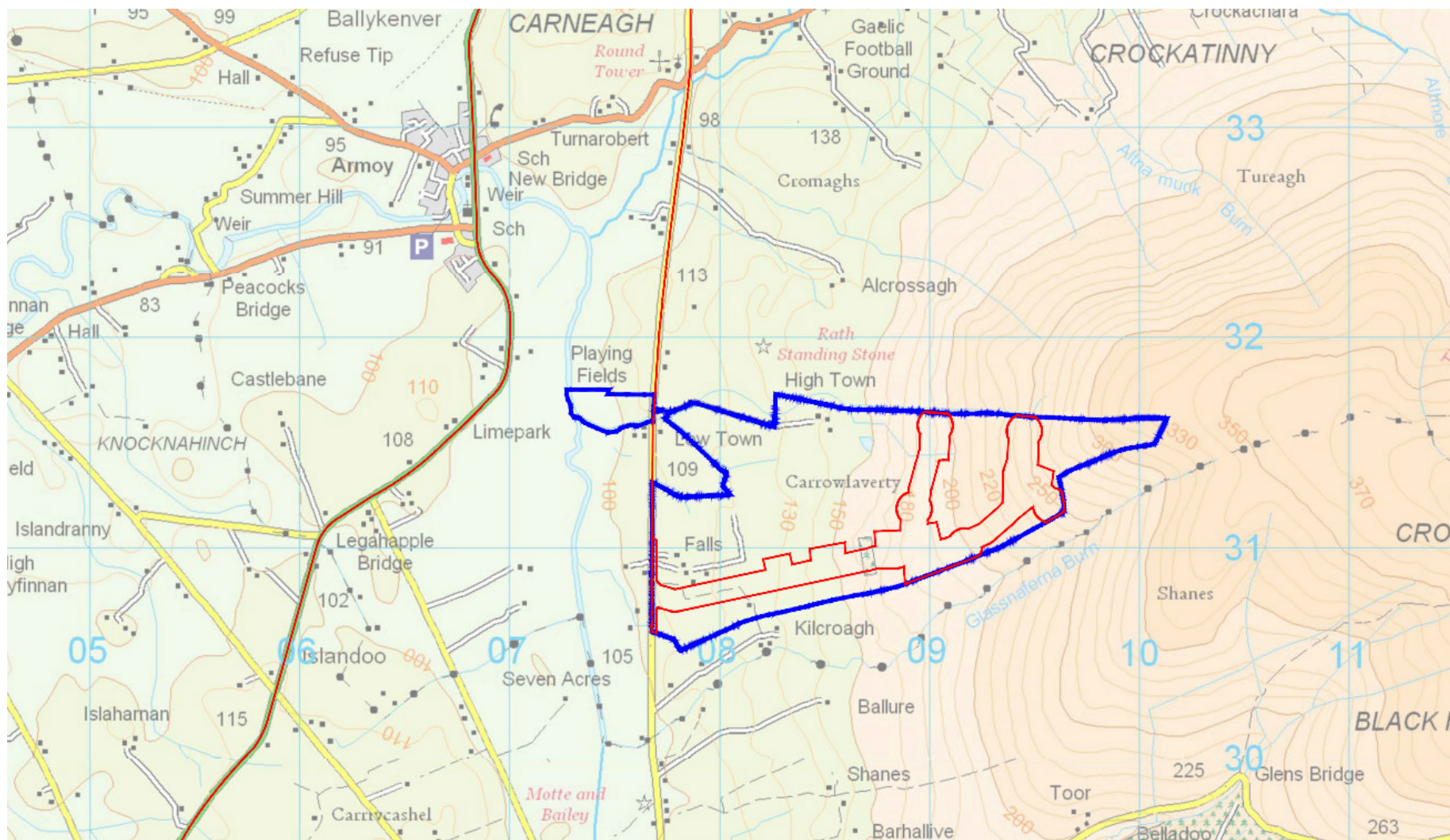
9.0 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 This proposal is considered unacceptable in this location having regard to the Area Plan and other material considerations. By reason of the siting and scale of the turbines relative to the scale and form of the landscape, the proposal would have an unacceptable adverse impact on visual amenity and landscape character. In addition, the proposal would have an unacceptable, adverse impact on the setting and views of the Antrim Coast and Glens AONB. While the wider environmental and economic benefits are recognised, these are decisively outweighed by the harm the proposal would cause. REFUSAL is recommended for the following reason.
- 9.2 The proposal is contrary to Paragraph 6.224 of the SPPS and to Policy RE1 of PPS18 in that it has not been demonstrated that the proposal will not result in an unacceptable adverse impact on visual amenity and landscape character due to the size, scale, and siting of the proposal.

Appendix 1: Consultation Responses

Consultee	Response Date	Responses
Dfl - Rivers Agency	22/03/2023	No Objection – subject to NIEA commenting on SuDS
Environ Health	27/03/2024	No Objection subject to conditions
Historic Environment Division (HED)	19/07/2024	No Objection subject to conditions
Dfl - Roads	07/08/2023	No Objection – subject to conditions
Arqiva Services Limited	17/03/2023	No Objection
NIEA	21/06/2024 18/10/2024 05/11/2024	RU – No Objection WMU – No Objection subject to conditions LT – Object – Contrary to SPSS and PPS 18
SES	22/11/2024	No Objection - subject to condition
UK Crown Bodies - D.I.O. Safeguarding	22/03/2023	No Objection
DfE - Energy Division	03/04/2023	No Objection
Vodafone	14/08/2023	No Objection
British Telecom Radio Network	08/03/2023	No Objection
CAA	22/03/2023	No Objection – subject to lighting
DfE - Geological Survey (NI)	23/03/2023	No Objection
NIE	03/04/2023	No Objection
NI Water - Strategic Applications	01/03/2024	No Objection
National Air Traffic Services	07/03/2023	No Objection
Ulster hand gliding ass.	20/04/2023	No Objection
Joint Radio Company	27/03/2023	No Objection
DAERA – Fisheries Division	N/a	No response
DHSSPS – NI Fire and Rescue	26/02/2024	No Objection

Site Location



Site Layout

