



nature's voice

RSPB SCOTLAND

Ms Marian Deeney
The Scottish Government Energy Directorate
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19 November 2010

Dear Ms Deeney

Addendum to the application under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to construct and operate a wind farm at the mainland of Shetland (Central Grid Reference HU410610) by the Viking Energy Partnership

Thank you for consulting RSPB Scotland on this application.

RSPB Scotland supports the development of renewable energy, including wind energy, as a vital component for dealing with the challenge of climate change – the greatest long-term threat to birds, other wildlife and people. However, developments must be located and designed to avoid harming our most important places for wildlife.

Although the application area is not designated for its bird interest, the site is of very high conservation value due to its important populations of a wide range of breeding species. These include whooper swan, red-throated diver, merlin, lapwing, golden plover, dunlin, whimbrel, Arctic skua, Arctic tern and skylark. We outline the legal and conservation status of these species in Annex 1.

A large part of the site is blanket bog, much of which is active i.e. still peat-forming. This habitat is afforded a very high degree of legal protection, which we also consider in greater depth in Annex 1. Consequently, any proposals to develop this site must not result in significant harm to its species and habitats.

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The Addendum covers the revised application which involves the deletion of 23 turbines such that the proposed development now consists of 127 turbines. There are also a number of other changes to the proposal.

We recognise that the reduction in turbine number to 127 has involved some effort to reduce losses of birds through turbine removal. However, further turbine removal is required to reduce the predicted adverse effects of the proposed development. The Habitat Mitigation Plan (HMP) is welcome, but there remains too much uncertainty about its ability to offset bird losses arising from the development and thus cannot be regarded as mitigation or compensation for birds killed or displaced by the T127 array. Deletion of additional turbines, from locations with the highest densities of key species, would be the only way to ensure that bird impacts through collision and displacement/disturbance would be reduced to such a level that the conservation status of several important species would not be put at risk.

We remain concerned about the way in which excavated peat would be reused as this may cause unnecessary release of carbon and additional damage to blanket bog. The method by which carbon payback times have been calculated also remains a concern. It is assumed, without justification, that the considerable volumes of excavated peat proposed for long-term storage (25 years) would not release carbon, whilst the untested benefits of the HMP have been included as an integral part of these calculations, with no proof that they can either be carried out or that they would be effective.

Therefore, on examination of the Addendum, we have unfortunately been forced to conclude that insufficient changes have been made to the proposed development to allow us to withdraw our objection. Consequently, RSPB Scotland **objects** to this application as currently proposed, for the following reasons:

- The development would cause unacceptable damage to regional and, in some cases, UK populations of a number of bird species.
- The development would cause unacceptable damage to active blanket bog.
- The carbon balance remains uncertain and may be insufficient to outweigh other, significant, adverse environmental effects of the development
- The development would be contrary to the development plan and national planning policy.

In Annexes 1 and 2 we give further detail of our reasons for objection and also outline a number of measures, which may contribute towards reducing the impact of the proposed development.

Planning policy context

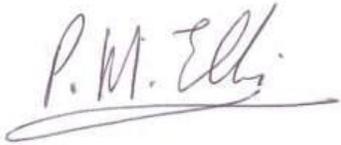
RSPB Scotland considers that to consent this application would be contrary to Government advice as set out in Scottish Planning Policy. The proposed development is contrary to policies in the adopted Shetland Structure Plan and the approved Shetland Local Plan. We provide further comment in Annex 1.

Conclusion

RSPB Scotland objects to this application, which we consider would seriously harm important bird populations and blanket bog habitat. We do not accept that it has been shown that a significant CO₂ reduction would result from this proposal, nor that the reduction would justify damage to birds and bogs. Moreover, the method of disposal of such a large volume of excavated peat is likely to further damage blanket bog and may not prevent release of its stored carbon. We do not consider that the application conforms to important Government and Development Plan policies and consequently the proposal should not be approved in its current form.

RSPB Scotland still believes that proposals on a more modest scale may be acceptable on this site. We would be happy to discuss any matters raised in this letter in more detail and would be prepared to review our position should these matters be adequately addressed.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. M. Ellis', with a horizontal line underneath.

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