

# Position Statement – National Planning Framework 4

## *Supplementary Paper – Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind*

This document sets out Scottish Renewables members' views on what will need to be included in National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) to deliver the level of renewable energy technology deployment needed to meet Scotland's Climate Change commitments and achieve net-zero by 2045.

Scottish Renewables believes that allowing developers to ensure that the most efficient and suitable sites are chosen for onshore wind development through well-established criteria will be much more successful than a spatial planning approach in meeting our targets.

This paper should be read with the SR NPF4 Supplementary Position Paper on Landscape Capacity/Sensitivity Studies.

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### **Introduction**

For onshore wind, spatial planning is, in practical terms, the way that public policy seeks to influence the geographical distribution of, and likely scales of, new or repowering developments.

Every jurisdiction in the UK promotes a renewable energy spatial policy approach supplemented by criteria-based policies. For example, in Scotland, the SPP approaches the spatial framework by highlighting areas where wind farms (only) should not, as a matter of policy, be developed or which are more sensitive to wind farm development. The Welsh spatial approach, set out in Technical Advice Note 8 (TAN8), issued in 2005, sought to identify areas of search for wind developments of more than 25MW (then 25 turbines or more). The TAN8 approach of identifying areas of search was problematic as it relied on incomplete data and high-level studies. It has failed to deliver credible results. There have been other attempts to create TAN 8 type regimes, for example by West Devon Council in England in the early 1990s. These efforts have all failed for reasons which still apply, and which are outlined below.

### **Spatial Planning v Spatial Frameworks**

There is a half-way stage between a fully criteria-based approach and that of TAN 8's areas of search approach. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) divides the country into three categories of land area. These are the Groups 1, 2 and 3 zones advised on in SPP 161 and Table 1. A case can be made for development in any location, but an application for permission is very likely to fail in Group 1 areas (a National Scenic Area (NSA) or National Park). Development is possible in Group 2 areas (such as Wild Land areas, or WLAs) if a

development management test is passed (subject to the application of the needs case and the planning balance). In Group 3 areas wind projects are welcomed in principle, but project-specific information will still need to be considered and decisions should be made on detailed consideration of that information (and the planning balance).

Scottish Renewables recommends that NPF4 should retain the current SPP spatial framework. This general approach has succeeded in directing developers to Group 3 and (to a lesser extent) Group 2 areas, and so can be counted as a success in terms of avoiding project-level conflicts in NSAs and National Parks. It is also noted that SNH supported the approach set out in SPP in its 2015 Guidance “Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – natural heritage considerations”. SPP advises in paragraph 163 that development plans should not seek to apply additional constraints to those set out in Table 1 but leave the examination of such additional matters to “a more detailed and exacting development management process”.

Scottish Renewables would strongly argue against any proposals to change the current SPP Group 1, 2 and 3 spatial framework for onshore wind by the addition of areas of search deemed to be suitable for development. Such an approach would, in our view, undermine rather than enhance renewables deployment in Scotland.

### **The outcomes of the TAN 8 Approach**

TAN 8 was issued in 2005, following a consultancy being commissioned in 2001 by the national authority to carry out countrywide landscape capacity studies, followed by vastly detailed reports based on seven proposed Strategic Search Areas (SSAs) for developments of more than 25 MW.

When TAN 8 was issued those seven areas were expected to produce 800 MW of onshore wind by 2010 against a capacity target of 1120 MW. A further 200 MW was expected from “windfall” sites outside the SSAs by 2010. The 2010 target was not remotely met. There is no figure immediately available for the performance of the SSAs in delivering operational capacity between 2005 and 2010, but the best estimate is that this would be no more than 200 MW. By April 2018, only 565 MW had been delivered by TAN 8 SSAs since 2005.

The target for a further 200 MW to come from outside SSAs from developments of between 5 MW and 25 MW was also comprehensively missed, and each submitted scheme in this category went to a planning appeal. Councils were asked to identify land in their areas suitable for developments of this scale. Almost all the Councils decided that there was no capacity for such projects.

The targets were revised upwards in 2010 to 2000 MW to be achieved by 2015/17 (in Energy Policy Statement 2010). Of the SSA projects that did proceed, almost all were consented following local refusals or objections to Section 36 applications based on local impacts. While SSAs A (in north Wales) and E, F and G (south Wales) saw some development, mainly after 2010, SSAs B – D (mid-Wales) saw almost none.

In March 2019, Arup published a report to the Welsh Government in which SSAs were proposed to be replaced by Areas of Most, Varying and Least Opportunities. These areas are fragmented across Wales, responding to identified constraints, rather than attempting to create blocks of land. The Welsh

Government intends to proceed based on this advice. The new approach has similarities to the Scottish SPP approach and is a significant departure from the more rigid spatial planning principles of TAN 8.

### **Issues with TAN 8**

The issues with TAN 8 are mainly generic to any spatial planning approach to onshore wind and are not particular to Wales.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a necessary precursor to spatial planning. This is not a barrier but can be time consuming if the exercise is carried out through consultant reports.

Establishing a TAN 8-style plan is extremely complex and time-consuming. Local communities and Planning Authorities in areas identified for development invariably object to being selected. These objections create political complexities for the Government and lead to delays.

In the case of TAN 8, the fact that a project was in an SSA did not avoid it having to pursue planning by appeal in almost every case. There were also dismissals of appeals in SSAs based on local impacts, despite the work of Arup and the expectation explicitly stated in TAN 8 that landscape change was to be expected in SSAs.

These delays can also bring about an effective moratorium on development as Planning Authorities argue prematurely pending the issue of the plan. That concern might receive support at appeal since there is a case law to support such an approach if the grant of a permission might prejudice the objectives of the plan.

The resource estimates of Government consultants are likely to lack accuracy in the absence of detailed and effectively measured site-specific wind speeds. This may well mean that development in some of the identified areas might not be viable, particularly if financial support is unavailable or minimal.

The underpinning studies for TAN 8 naturally focused on landscape and visual effects. It is very difficult to construct studies of bird populations or habitats which can achieve any useful accuracy at a site level. Therefore, the conclusions and recommendations of TAN 8 were no more than landscape capacity studies, with all the faults we have seen in Scotland (Scottish Renewables has prepared a separate NPF4 Supplementary Position Paper on this issue).

Concentrating onshore wind in relative few areas also raises issues of cumulative effect. Communities in Wales have reported feeling surrounded, with one appeal in a TAN 8 area failing at appeal based on community impacts. A TAN 8 approach could lead to an overconcentration of development which Scotland has so far not seen.

TAN 8 and the approach in West Devon were promoted at a time when the pattern of onshore wind development was still emerging. The replacement of the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) by the Scottish Renewable Obligation (SRO) and ultimately the Renewables Obligation (RO) altered the pattern of emerging development as a result of changing economics.

## **Conclusion**

Under the advice in SPP 2010 and 2014 onshore wind developers have led site selection in Scotland, acknowledging the need to protect the nation's best landscapes with important protections provided by the National Parks and NSA designations. The robust planning system in Scotland has delivered a successful onshore wind industry with high levels of public support.<sup>1</sup> The existing system ensures that, financial support mechanisms aside, the most viable schemes are those that come forward for permission. We believe SNH agrees that, overall, the projects consented to date have been successes in planning and environmental terms.

Scottish Renewables proposes that NPF4 should continue to allow developers to ensure that the most efficient and suitable sites are chosen for repowering and new onshore wind development through well-established criteria. Experience in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK has proven that the existing SPP framework will be much more successful than a spatial planning approach in meeting Scotland's climate change commitments and net-zero targets.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scottishrenewables.com/news/381-first-poll-of-rural-scotland-shows-two-thirds-back-wind-energy>