

## Position statement – Wind Farms

### Summary of VisitScotland's Position

- Tourism is crucial to Scotland's economic and cultural well-being. It generates £4.2bn for the economy and employs 200,000 – 9% of the Scottish workforce. As such, VisitScotland has a key role in maximising the economic benefit of tourism across the country and delivering the Scottish Government's goal of sustainable economic growth.
- VisitScotland understands and supports the drive for renewable energy but recognises the need to balance this with concerns for the potentially significant impact of wind farm developments on the tourism industry – particularly those proposals in areas of high scenic value.
- In cases where it is clear that in VisitScotland's opinion tourism will be affected in a negative manner, representations will be made through the formal planning process. We may also seek a wider tourism perspective through, for example, Area Tourism Partnerships (which comprise a wide cross section of local private and public sector tourism interests) and contact the appropriate body to raise any tourism concerns.
- Ultimately, however, we recognise that it is for the local planning authority (or in extreme cases referred to the Scottish Executive Minister) to make the final decision as to whether or not a development proposal is approved. This process, controlled as it is by locally elected councillors, should reflect both local needs and aspirations and take into account those concerns of nature conservation and tourism interests.
- VisitScotland welcomes the recommendations for planning authorities in the Scottish Government's 2007 research<sup>1</sup>, which could help to minimise any negative effects of wind farms on the tourism industry.
- We would also welcome a more strategic approach to wind farm development and siting, e.g., identifying and categorising areas for development in a way that protects sensitive areas and considers tourism interests. We believe this would be a significant improvement on the current process of development, which is reactive and piecemeal.

### Top Line

- Scenery and the natural environment have become the most important factors for visitors when choosing Scotland as a holiday destination. VisitScotland's 2007 research showed that 92% of visitors considered

<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Government, Economic Impact of Wind Farms, published March 2008

'Scenery' the most important factor in choosing Scotland (72% view scenery as Very Important, with an additional 20% stating 'Important')<sup>2</sup>.

- Tourism is one of Scotland's most important industries. VisitScotland is committed to growing tourism sustainably and has a vital role in supporting it to ensure we maximise the economic benefit of the industry across the whole country.
- Previously, research on wind farms—carried out by an independent consultancy—was inconclusive and reflected a split in visitor opinion between those strongly against wind farm development of any kind and those who said in some areas it actually enhanced what was otherwise a bleak and unattractive landscape.
- In June 2007, the Scottish Government commissioned Glasgow Caledonian University to assess whether Government priorities for wind farms in Scotland are likely to have an economic impact—either positive or negative—on Scottish tourism. The results, published in March 2008, concluded that wind farm developments have a minimal impact on tourism, provided they are not visible from important tourism corridors, with 97% of those surveyed saying wind farms would have no impact on their decision to visit Scotland again. The report also makes recommendations for planning authorities which could help minimise any negative impacts of wind farms on the tourism industry.

## Background

- The Scottish Government's targets are to generate 50 per cent of Scotland's electricity demand from renewables by 2020.
- In light of the tourism industry and the Scottish Government's shared ambition to grow tourism revenues by 50 per cent in the 10 years to 2015, it is vital that the potential impact of wind farms on tourism is accurately assessed, to allow informed, appropriate decisions to be made on their suitability and location.
- Any proposal to construct, extend or operate a wind farm with a generation capacity in excess of 50 Megawatt (MW) requires the consent of Scottish Ministers under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. Proposals under 50 MW are dealt with by councils under planning legislation.
- The number and quality of published studies of actual measured effects of wind farms on the environment. The evidence that exists from the UK suggests there is often strong hostility to developments at the planning stage on the grounds of the scenic impact and the perceived knock-on effect on tourism. Because developments in the most sensitive or scenic

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<sup>2</sup> VisitScotland's 'Visitor Experience Survey', February 2007

locations do not appear to have been given approval, however, it has been difficult to measure actual negative impact on tourism

- There is, however, evidence that—on balance—individuals (tourists or otherwise) place a higher value on the landscape when a wind farm is not included in the view than when it is. What is less clear though is whether this change in value affects a tourist's decision to visit that location (i.e. whether there is a resultant impact on tourism). Over time hostility to wind farms appears to lessen and they become an accepted even valued part of the scenery, particularly by those closest to them. In some countries an established wind farm appears to be able to act as a tourist attraction in the same way as a hydro-electric power station. Overall, there does not appear to be any robust evidence to suggest a serious negative economic impact of wind farms on tourism.
- In terms of economic impact, the Scottish Government's 2007 research concludes that: 'The potential effect on tourism expenditure associated with meeting the renewables target, via substantial wind farm development, will mean that by 2015 there will be £4.7 million less Gross Value Added in the Scottish economy than there would have been in the absence of any wind farms (at 2007 prices). This effect will be offset or reinforced by other economic or environmental impacts of wind farms and a part of the adjustment may have already occurred'.
- The Government report also makes recommendations for the planning authorities which could help to minimise any negative effects of wind farms on the tourism industry. It notes that planning consideration would be greatly assisted if the developers produced a brief Tourist Impact Statement as part of the Environmental Impact Analysis, and that planning authorities may wish to consider the following factors to ensure that any adverse local impacts on tourism are minimised:
  - The number of tourists travelling past en route to elsewhere
  - The views from accommodation in the area
  - The relative scale of tourism impact i.e. local and national
  - The potential positives associated with the development
  - The views of tourist organisations i.e. local tourist businesses or VisitScotland.
- Not all groups have agreed with the Government's findings, which contrast with other studies carried out in the past 2 years by two of Scotland's leading tourism industry bodies. A study carried out in April 2006 by Wild Scotland, the association of wildlife tour operators, showed that 61% of operators in Scotland felt the impact of wind farms on Scottish Tourism would be negative.
- A further survey in the same month by Activity Scotland, the association of activity holiday operators, revealed that 88% of operators similarly believed the likely impact to be negative.
- Wilderness Scotland, environmentally-focused tour operators, conducted a survey among their clients in July 2005. This showed that

91% would not return to the Highlands of Scotland if wind farms are developed in a significant way.

### VisitScotland Position

- VisitScotland understands and supports the drive for renewable energy and recognises the potential of Scotland's vast resource. As a consequence, VisitScotland is not against the principle of wind farm development.
- However, wind farms can impact significantly on the landscape and VisitScotland is concerned over the proliferation of speculative development proposals, some of them in areas of high landscape or scenic value or in locations which directly impact on tourism operations or activity.
- Our local area network offices, located throughout Scotland across six regions, are aware of this concern and are keeping a close eye on development proposals affecting their local areas.
- VisitScotland is not a lobbying body and we do not get involved in open public debate in the media prior to applications being formally submitted.
- In cases which may be particularly contentious, Regional Directors have been encouraged to seek a wider tourism perspective. Here, they are able to take on board the views of their Area Tourism Partnership (which comprise a wide cross section of local private and public sector tourism interests) and then contact the appropriate body to raise any tourism concerns.
- Ultimately, it is for the local planning authority (or in extreme cases referred to the Scottish Executive Minister) to make the final decision as to whether or not a development proposal is approved. This process, controlled as it is by locally elected councillors, should reflect both local needs and aspirations and take into account those concerns of nature conservation and tourism interests
- VisitScotland welcomes the fact that the Government's 2007 research makes recommendations for the planning authorities, which could help to minimise any negative effects of wind farms on the tourism industry.
- We believe that the Scottish Government targets for both tourism and the renewables industry are not incompatible and that, sensitively developed and sited, wind farms should not have a significant negative impact on tourism growth.
- We would also welcome a more strategic approach to wind farm development and siting, e.g., identifying and categorising areas for development in a way that protects sensitive areas and considers

tourism interests. We believe this would be a significant improvement on the current process of development, which is reactive and piecemeal.

#### Additional information / links

- The results of VisitScotland's 2007 Visitor Experience Survey can be found at:

[http://www.visitscotland.org/research\\_and\\_statistics/leisure\\_visitors/visitorexperience.htm](http://www.visitscotland.org/research_and_statistics/leisure_visitors/visitorexperience.htm)

- The full findings, objectives and methodology of the Scottish Government's 2007 research can be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/03/07113507/1>

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