

### Background on VisitScotland

VisitScotland, as Scotland's National Tourism Organisation, has a strategic role to grow and develop the sustainable economic benefit of tourism to Scotland's economy. It exists to market Scotland as a quality destination, provide information for visitors, deliver quality assurance for the industry, and attract and support national and international events.

Tourism is crucial to Scotland's cultural and economic well-being and sustains a great diversity of businesses throughout the country. According to a recent independent report by Deloitte, the industry generates £11.6 billion for the Scottish economy in direct and indirect spend, and employs over 200,000 – 9% of the Scottish workforce. Overall, tourism provides jobs in the private and public sectors and stimulates the regeneration of urban and rural areas.

Growing tourism revenues and positioning Scotland as one of the world's foremost tourism destinations is a key ambition for VisitScotland and the Scottish Government.

### Background on Onshore Wind Farms

- The siting of onshore wind farms is a planning matter. Planning authorities are required to safeguard the character of landscape and wild land areas in their local development plans, and to prepare spatial frameworks to guide the future development of wind farms.
- Granting consent for wind farm developments is therefore, in the first instance, for planning authorities for those developments which have a capacity of less than 50 megawatts and for Scottish Ministers where the capacity is 50 megawatts or more.
- The Scottish Government owns, with stakeholders, its National Planning Framework (Scotland's spatial strategy) and Scottish Planning Policy, which sets out policies for planning authorities on a range of subjects including onshore renewable energy and landscape. They recognise that there are concerns about the impact wind farms are having on the landscape and tourism industry and the importance of correctly balancing different Government objectives.
- The Scottish Government held a consultation to develop Scotland's first National Marine Plan (Scotland's marine spatial strategy) which sets out policies for marine planning on a range of subjects including offshore renewable energy and landscape and seascape issues. Responses to the consultation can be found at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/12/2681/0>
- In addition, the Scottish Government has developed Sectoral Marine Plans for Offshore Wind, Wave and Tidal Energy. The pre-consultation draft analysis report can be found at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0042/00423960.pdf>

- At the project level, each offshore wind farm application is subject to a comprehensive stakeholder and public consultation. Landscape and seascape impacts are important issues which are subject to full and thorough consideration during the determination process. Consents will not be granted by Scottish Ministers where the visual impact is deemed to be unacceptable.
- The Government agency responsible for promoting care for and improvement of the natural heritage, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), has a well-developed policy and a dedicated team responsible for dealing with all renewable energy related matters.

#### VisitScotland's Position

- VisitScotland is not a statutory consultee for wind farm developments, unlike other public sector agencies such as Scottish Natural Heritage, whose role it is to care for and improve Scotland's natural environment.
- VisitScotland understands and supports the drive for renewable energy and recognises the economic potential of Scotland's vast resource, including the opportunities for wind farm development.
- VisitScotland is aware that some groups are concerned by the potential impact of wind farm developments on tourism; however research suggests that wind farms have a limited impact on visitors' decisions to holiday in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament's Energy Committee also found no evidence that wind farms have a negative effect on the tourism industry.
- Renewable energy brings visitors to Scotland in its own right and encourages them to spend money in our tourism businesses. There are already strong examples of the potential to increase the benefits of sustainable tourism in an area through partnership working with the renewables sector itself. Whitelee Wind Farm is a successful visitor attraction in its own right, welcoming almost 200,000 visitors to its Visitor Centre since it opened in September 2009.
- There is a mutually supportive relationship between renewable energy developments and sustainable tourism.
- VisitScotland will respond to specific development proposals through the formal planning process and Electricity Act consent process, encouraging any developments to be sited sensitively and drawing attention to any potential impacts on local attractions for visitors and tourism infrastructure. These responses include feedback from the organisation's Regional Directors, who are encouraged to seek a wider tourism perspective on specific developments, taking on board the views of their Area Tourism Partnerships (which comprise a wide cross section of local private and public sector tourism interests) and local industry groups.

- Landscape and natural heritage are important to Scotland's appeal as a tourist destination. Around 20% of the land area of Scotland is covered by protected areas with a specific landscape focus - National Scenic Areas and National Parks - and we welcome the fact that no large-scale wind farm development is permitted in these areas.
- VisitScotland is keen to work together with SNH to develop a robust and integrated approach to wind turbine developments and VisitScotland will welcome [SNH's new guidance](#) on addressing the cumulative effect of wind farms. VisitScotland is keen that this guidance, alongside local planning authority spatial frameworks for wind farms over 20 megawatts generating capacity will guide wind farm development to appropriate locations, protecting Scotland's distinct landscapes which are enjoyed by so many visitors.
- VisitScotland also suggests prospective developers and relevant planning authorities take full consideration of the Scottish Government's 2008 research on the impact of wind farms on tourism. This report makes a number of recommendations for planning authorities which could help to minimise any negative effects of wind farms on the tourism industry including reference to:
  - o The number of tourists travelling past en route elsewhere
  - o The views from accommodation in the area
  - o The relative scale of tourism impact i.e. local and national
  - o The potential positives associated with the development
  - o The views of tourist organisations, i.e. local tourist businesses or VisitScotland
- The full study can be found at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/03/07113507/1](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/03/07113507/1)
- A regularly-updated list of wind farm developments commented on by VisitScotland can be found here: [http://www.visitscotland.org/about\\_us/our\\_focus/consultations/position\\_statement\\_s.aspx](http://www.visitscotland.org/about_us/our_focus/consultations/position_statement_s.aspx)
- As part of its advisory role to Ministers, VisitScotland will continue to monitor the impact of wind farm development from both a tourism business and consumer perspective.

### Latest VisitScotland research

2012 research by VisitScotland investigates the latest consumer attitudes to wind farms and their effect on tourism.

Some key findings of this research are as follows:

- 91% of Scotland respondents (86% of UK) agreed that scenery and landscape were important factors when taking holidays or short breaks.
- 83% of Scotland respondents (80% of UK) stated their decision to holiday in the UK would not be affected by the presence of a wind farm.
- 80% of Scotland respondents (81% of UK) either disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed, that wind farms spoil the look of the Scottish countryside.
- 83% of Scotland respondents (82% of UK) either disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed, that they would tend to avoid an area of the countryside if there were a wind farm present.
- 46% of Scotland respondents (40% of UK) stated an interest in visiting a wind farm development if it included a visitor centre.
- The research suggests that, at the current time, the overwhelming majority of consumers do not feel wind farms spoil the look of the countryside.

The full study can be found at:

<http://www.visitscotland.org/pdf/Revised%20Oct%2012%20%20Insights%20Wind%20Farm%20Topic%20Paper.pdf>