

## 8 Residential visual amenity assessment

### 8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 The purpose of the residential visual amenity assessment is to consider how the change in view resulting from the presence of the Consented Development would impact upon the visual component of the residential amenity of nearby properties and whether the identified impacts would unacceptably affect living conditions. A review has been undertaken in May 2022 to identify any residences within the Study Area that have been granted planning permission since the original EIA. No additional properties have been identified and so the findings of the original assessment (as reproduced below) remain valid.
- 8.1.2 This assessment focuses on visual issues and does not consider other potential residential amenity considerations, such as noise (Chapter 16) or shadow flicker (Chapter 19), which may affect the amenity of properties.

### 8.2 Legislative framework & guidance

- 8.2.1 There is no published guidance that sets out criteria against which the impact of wind turbines upon living condition should be assessed. However, the issue has been considered at a number of public inquiries and which has established how the effects on private viewpoints should be addressed by decision makers.
- 8.2.2 In his report on the Baillie Wind Farm Section 36 application (IEC/3/105/3) (August 2009), the Reporter, concluded that:
- 8.2.3 *'Given that I have found that this wind farm, because of its visual prominence and proximity, would have a significant detrimental impact on the visual amenity of some of the people living nearby, and as the impact would be long term, that interpretation would appear to preclude the granting of consent for this application. However, the guidance also confirms that proposals are to be considered on a case by case basis, and I consider that this inevitably requires a judgement to be reached on the acceptability of the impacts identified';* and that:
- 8.2.4 *'In reaching that judgement here, I find that the issue to be addressed is whether the adverse impacts which would be experienced by some of the residents of the 60 or so houses which are within two kilometres of the nearest turbines is sufficient to outweigh the wider public benefits which the development is designed to achieve. In my judgement, on the merits of this case, I find that these adverse impacts are not so great as to be unacceptable, due to: the relatively small number of houses involved; the support expressed by some of these residents, whether through financial involvement or otherwise; the separation distances from the turbines; the compact layout of the wind farm and its position within an open landscape; and the capacity of the landscape to accommodate the wind farm'.*
- 8.2.5 In the decision for the St John's Hill Wind Farm (P/PPA/110/634) (26 November 2007) where 106 properties were located within 1km of the nearest turbine, the Reporter, concluded that:
- 8.2.6 *'Because views from within the site and from outside it tends to be of a panoramic nature, the windfarm, even though it spreads over a length of some 3km, would occupy only a restricted part of those views and not dominate them';*

- 8.2.7 With regard to visual impacts from residential properties, the Reporter stated that:
- 8.2.8 *'I have looked carefully at the visual impact of the scheme from individual properties in the vicinity and I am not persuaded that it is unacceptable due to the factors which I have already outlined'.*
- 8.2.9 In the Achany Wind Farm decision (PPA/270/438) (22 July 2008), the Reporter, stated that, although a significant impact on the visual amenity of residential properties may be experienced:
- 8.2.10 *'Deciding whether these impacts are significantly detrimental is a matter of judgement'*; and she went on to state that, although the properties in question were located within 3km of the Consented development:
- 8.2.11 *'the turbines would be far enough away from houses not to be overbearing or dominant'*; concluding that:
- 8.2.12 *'the appeal proposal would have a significant impact on some views from some properties. However, significant impacts are not necessarily unacceptable and I conclude that its impacts on residential amenity overall would not be significantly detrimental'.*
- 8.2.13 The Appeal Decisions cited below are also pertinent in respect of the visual aspects of residential amenity. Whilst these decisions relate to developments in England, issues of residential amenity have occurred as major issues in that country due to its more densely settled nature, and as such, it has been necessary to devise detailed ways of assessing the acceptability or otherwise of effects on residential amenity. As such, their conclusions are considered relevant to consideration of the Consented Development.
- 8.2.14 The Inspector's Decision in respect of the North Tawton Wind Farm (Den Brook) development (Appeal Ref: APP/Q/153/A/08/2017162) (7 April 2009) states the following:
- 8.2.15 *'...it may be the case that development is proposed of such a scale and design or proximity that it would be so visually intrusive as to turn an otherwise satisfactory dwelling into one that is an unsatisfactory place to live... From the standpoint of those affected, this is a different test than simply judging whether the view would be significantly affected or not, because (as with non-visual impacts, such as noise and un-neighbourliness in general) it is the resulting adequacy of living conditions within dwellings and their gardens that is determinative, not the view itself. In essence, being able to see the turbines is one thing but not, in itself, sufficient to demonstrate unacceptable harm in a land use planning context. Indeed, to adopt visibility alone as the decisive criterion would potentially represent an arbitrary and unduly stringent restraint on development of many kinds in many locations'.* [emphasis added]
- 8.2.16 The Inspector's Decision in respect of the proposed Enifer Downs Wind Farm development (Appeal Ref: APP/X2220/A/08/2071880) (16 March 2009) states that:
- 8.2.17 *'...In most cases, the outlook from a private property is a private interest, not a public one, and the public at large may attach very different value judgements to the visual and other qualities of wind turbines than those who face living close to them. Equally, people pass through a diverse variety of environments when going about their daily lives, whether by car or when using the local rights of way network, and I find nothing generally objectionable in turbines being part of that wider experience. However, when turbines are present in such number, size and proximity that they represent an unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidable presence in main views from a house or garden, there is every likelihood that the property concerned would come to be widely regarded as an unattractive and*

*thus unsatisfactory (but not necessarily uninhabitable) place in which to live. It is not in the public interest to create such living conditions where they did not exist before'* [emphasis added]

- 8.2.18 In considering these and other appeal decisions, the visual impact of the wind farm has to be commonly described as '*unacceptably overbearing*', '*over powering*', '*oppressive*' or '*unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidably present in main views*' for there to be a potentially unacceptable adverse impact on living conditions and such impacts should also '*...outweigh the wider public benefits which the development is designed to achieve*'.
- 8.2.19 In light of the decisions above, the assessment is concerned not simply with whether the turbines would be visible, but with whether they would constitute an unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidable presence upon living conditions at nearby properties, which would constitute a material consideration to be weighed in the planning balance.

## **8.3 Methodology**

### **Study Area**

- 8.3.1 The Study Area for the assessment covers a 2km radius from the proposed turbines as set out in the scoping study. However, it should be noted that the various appeal decisions quoted earlier which have dealt with this issue seldom find unacceptable impacts on the visual component of residential amenity at any property at distances of more than about 800-900m from the wind farm being considered.
- 8.3.2 The main elements of the Consented Development that could give rise to significant effects on residential amenity are the wind turbines themselves due to their movement and large scale. Other elements of the Consented Development would not have the potential to be '*unacceptably overbearing*' due to their smaller scale. Given the disposition of properties within the Study Area, and the separation distance between the properties and turbines the assessment has been undertaken in two stages.
- 8.3.3 The assessment does not take into account the possible subdivision of larger buildings into a series of dwellings and in some cases groups properties together where the visual effects would be very similar. As such, the assessment does not necessarily provide a comprehensive list of every individual household within the 2km study area.

## **8.4 Stage 1 assessment**

- 8.4.1 Firstly, the ZTVs were reviewed to scope out properties that would not have views of the proposed turbines due to the screening effects of topography. Following this exercise a series of representative wireframes were generated to show theoretical visibility from properties, or clusters of properties (where properties are located close together). This enabled a broad understanding of likely visibility and the potential for changes in view to give rise to effects upon residential visual amenity to be ascertained. Subsequent to this, a field visit was undertaken to ascertain the disposition of each property and the potential for residential visual amenity to be affected by the presence of the proposed turbines.
- 8.4.2 This process enabled an initial judgement to be made as to whether the change in view was likely to affect the residential visual amenity of any property group (or particular properties within any group), and therefore, whether a more detailed assessment of effects was required as part of the Stage 2 of the assessment.
- 8.4.3 The conclusions of Stage 1 of the assessment are set out in Appendix 8.1.

## **8.5 Stage 2 assessment**

8.5.1 Based on the output from the first part of the assessment a more detailed assessment was undertaken in respect of individual properties/property groups. This enabled a conclusion to be made as to the effects of the proposed turbines to determine:

- the change in view that would result at each receptor due to the proposed turbines; and
- whether such change would result in the turbines being an unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidable presence upon living conditions at the property in question.

8.5.2 For each residential property/group of properties an assessment sheet was completed and these are provided at Appendix 8.2.

8.5.3 The field visit – which formed the initial part of this assessment – allowed the assessor to ascertain the disposition of each receptor and nature of the view from each property towards the Consented Development, including: presence/absence of screening features; orientation of windows; and the presence/absence of external areas such as gardens and driveways where views of the turbines could be different from views experienced from the main property. All properties were viewed from publicly accessible locations.

8.5.4 The subsequent part of the Stage 2 assessment involved an analysis of whether the change in view experienced at a property would result in an unpleasantly overwhelming and unavoidable presence upon living conditions at that property (in line with the various Appeal Decisions referenced above). This is not determined by the visibility of the turbines alone, but also takes into account factors including:

- the orientation and principal aspect(s) of the property;
- whether visibility is from a house or its curtilage (and sometimes from where specifically in either of these);
- the composition of existing features within the view;
- the nature and extent of views available, for example whether they are panoramic or narrow; unimpeded or partially/wholly obstructed; short-, medium- or long-range; and
- how the turbines would relate to any or all of the above, which may be influenced by factors including:
  - the number of turbines visible;
  - whether clear views are available, or whether the turbines are wholly or partially obscured by other features;
  - the apparent vertical scale of the turbines (in relation to other visible features), and the vertical proportion of the view that they occupy;
  - the horizontal proportion of the view occupied by the turbines;
  - the distance between the turbines and the property(ies).

## **8.6 Baseline**

8.6.1 One hundred and one properties/property groups were identified initially within the 2km Study Area. Of these 101 properties only 7 would be within 1km of the proposed turbines and these would be located

at distances in excess of 890m. Property locations are indicated on Figure 8.1a and Figure 8.1b. The majority of properties are oriented with their principal elevations facing towards the coast, i.e. away from the Consented Development. However, some would have views towards the proposed turbines from rear or gable windows, from garden areas or from driveways. A smaller number of properties would have more direct views from main windows towards the Site.

- 8.6.2 The majority of properties are located due south of the Site at Burravoe, with smaller numbers at Gossabrough to the northeast and at Houlland and Hamnavoe to the southwest.
- 8.6.3 The landform of the settled parts of the study area is such that the majority of properties are located on slopes facing towards the coast, or on the narrow coastal plain itself. Typically, there is a rising landform to the rear of properties that currently forms the principal component of inland views.
- 8.6.4 As such, in the case of most properties within the Study Area, their visual amenity relates chiefly to views outwards towards the coast and out to sea.

## **8.7 Assessment of impacts**

- 8.7.1 The Stage 1 Assessment, undertaken in order to consider which if any properties require detailed assessment is set out in Appendix 8-1. The main output of this assessment was the identification of a total of 34 locations to be carried forward for further detailed consideration as to potential effects on their residential amenity. These properties were all considered likely to experience some significant visual effects as a result of the proposed turbines from within the property and/or its immediate curtilage. This was confirmed by the Stage 2 Assessment which identified 33 properties which would experience significant visual effects from some locations at the property.
- 8.7.2 The assessment sheets setting out the detailed Stage 2 Assessment, for each of the above locations are provided in Appendix 8.2 and associated wireframes for each property/group are provided in Appendix 8.3.
- 8.7.3 Photographs of the receptors were taken from public vantage points, and these are included on the assessment sheet. These are intended to give an indication of the disposition of the property in question, including insofar as possible the size/number of storeys, orientation of main windows and the presence/absence of screening features around the property. The photographs do not indicate the views from the property to the Consented Development and some have been cropped to focus on the property in question.
- 8.7.4 Aerial photography for each receptor is also included to provide assistance in determining the context of the receptor including presence/absence of screening vegetation and buildings. The angle of view that would be occupied by the theoretically visible turbines is indicated on the aerial photography.
- 8.7.5 Wireframes provided at Appendix 8.3 illustrate the theoretical visibility of the proposed turbines from each receptor included in the assessment. These wireframes represent a worst-case scenario of visibility, which does not take account of the presence/absence of windows that face towards the proposed turbines, of intervening buildings and structures, vegetation cover, or other screening features.

## **8.8 Residual effects**

- 8.8.1 The residential assessment identified a total of 101 receptors located within approximately 2km of the proposed turbines. Following the first stage of the assessment, 34 were carried forward for a more detailed consideration of potential effects on their residential amenity.
- 8.8.2 Given the height, rotor movement and prominence of turbines within 2km of the residential properties considered it is not surprising that visual effects would be significant from most locations. However, residential amenity is not just about whether turbines are visible or not or even if the visual effects would be significant in one aspect of views from a property.
- 8.8.3 The majority of properties considered are oriented with their principal views looking away from the Consented Development toward the coast and out to sea. Typically, views of the turbines would be available from rear or gable end windows, parking areas or from locations within property gardens/curtilage.
- 8.8.4 Whilst significant changes in view would be likely to occur from 33 of the 101 locations considered, it is concluded that the visual effects would not be unpleasantly overwhelming or unavoidable due to:
- the nature of the intervening landform that often reduces the visibility of the turbines in respect of vertical scale and horizontal extent;
  - the angle of views available that would be occupied the Consented Development;
  - the separation distances between the turbines and properties, in all but 7 cases in excess of 1km; and
  - the location of the turbines outside the main views available from each property.

## **8.9 Cumulative impacts**

- 8.9.1 Due to the distance between each property included in the assessment and any of the cumulative schemes identified in Chapter 7, it is considered that there would be no cumulative effects upon residential visual amenity. Where visible from properties, cumulative sites would be seen in succession with the proposed turbines at distances in excess of 16km for Garth to the north, 17km for Energy Isles to the north and 19km for Viking to the south. As such the cumulative sites would be very minor elements on distant skylines in the views available from properties. There would be no sense of the properties being enclosed by wind farms in combination with the Consented Development and as such cumulative visual effects on residential amenity are not considered significant.

## **8.10 Summary and conclusions**

- 8.10.1 Whilst the Consented Development would give rise to significant visual effects at 33 of the 101 properties considered in the residential assessment, these effects would not give rise to unpleasantly overwhelming or unavoidable impacts on residential amenity. Most of the 101 properties within the Study Area are oriented to take advantage of coastal and sea views away from the Consented Development and/or would have views towards the Site limited to secondary windows or areas within the curtilage of each property. Approximately, 10 of these properties are orientated to take advantage of views in the general direction of the Site. Of the 101 properties considered only 7 would be located at distances less than 1km from the nearest proposed turbine. Of these all would be located at distances

in excess of 890m from the nearest proposed turbine. This would limit the vertical scale of turbines in combination with rising topography.

- 8.10.2 As set out in the Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) Report there is considerable local support for the Consented Development with 88% of those attending the second public exhibition strongly in support of the Consented Development. The vast majority of attendees lived locally on the Island of Yell.
- 8.10.3 Further assessment in respect of residential amenity is provided in Chapters 16 and 19 for Noise and Shadow Flicker respectively and these should be read in conjunction with this chapter when considering the overall effects on residential amenity as a result of the Consented Development.