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By email – localplan@scotborders.gov.uk

Our Ref: NF/1291/PL/CR

28th February 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Scottish Borders Proposed Local Development Plan Consultation

I refer to the above mentioned consultation and write to set out the comments of West Coast Energy Ltd (WCE) on the proposed plan.

There is a need for positive planning policy and guidance for wind energy development in order for the South Borders Council to continue to play its part in meeting the commitments of the Scottish Climate Change Programme.

There is therefore a need for the emerging LDP policies to compliment the national policy context. However, whilst the policy is welcomed I would question whether it is inline with the current national policy stance which advocates a positive policy approach to wind energy generation.

The detailed comments of West Coast Energy are set out on the attached sheet and I would be grateful if you would take these into account in finalising the proposed plan.

Yours faithfully,



Neil Foxall BA (Hons) MCD MRTPI
Planning and Development Manager
West Coast Energy Ltd



CERTIFICATE NO. 3179

Scottish Borders Local Development Plan 2016

Comments of West Coast Energy Ltd on Proposed Local Development Plan Consultation

1. Introduction

1.1 West Coast Energy (WCE) is pleased to submit a response to Scottish Borders Council on the Proposed Local Development Plan. WCE has over the last 15 years been involved in the development of renewable energy resources across the UK and has been successful in the identification, design, planning and development of wind energy projects through to construction and operation.

1.2 Given the Scottish Governments commitment to renewable energy generation to drive economic development and to mitigate climate change, WCE has over the last 10 years made a significant financial investment in the development of renewable energy resources in Scotland and has been successful in delivering the environmental, social and economic benefits of these natural resources. The company has achieved notable success across Scotland particularly in partnership with Falck Renewables and is currently operating two wind farms in Scotland in South Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway in partnership with GDF Suez.

1.3 WCE has aspirations for investment in Scottish Borders whilst working in partnership with communities to ensure maximum economic and social benefit. Any investment decisions do however need to have due account of the development plan and WCE therefore welcomes this opportunity to comment on emerging policy which will inform the content of the finalised Local Development Plan.

2. Economic Development (ED), Policy ED9, Renewable Energy Development

2.1 WCE comments on the Proposed LDP relate solely to the renewable energy development policy and guidance contained within Policy ED9.

2.2 WCE does not accept that the proposed spatial framework and landscape capacity study for wind energy development provides an acceptable framework for making decisions on future wind energy development. It is accepted that a spatial framework and landscape capacity is the right approach to guide the development of onshore wind, indeed it is a requirement of national policy, however WCE has some serious reservations and concerns which are outlined below.

2.4 The groupings and list of constraints as set out in Draft SPP2013 are still under review by the Scottish Government and the finalised SPP will not be published until June 2014. There could therefore be significant changes to these constraints which could have a major bearing on the overall spatial framework.

2.5 It is acknowledged that the landscape capacity and figures ED9b-e have been used from the work undertaken by Ironside Farrar commissioned jointly by Scottish Borders Council and SNH. This work is very comprehensive and methodological and sets out which areas of Scottish Border's landscape can potentially accept future wind farm development. The report has however only been reported to the Council directly and, so far as WCE is aware, has not been the subject of a formal public consultation. Given the importance placed on the Ironside Farrar report in the proposed LDP we consider it essential that the Ironside Farrar

report is subject to specific public consultation. This report will therefore need revisiting following a public consultation process.

- 2.6 WCE does however have a more fundamental concern about the reliance on the conclusions of the spatial framework and the landscape assessment study. In the opinion of WCE the spatial framework and the landscape capacity study does not match the ambition and aspiration of the Scottish Government to be a truly low carbon country and a place where the generation of renewable energy will drive investment and growth in the economy over the coming years. Our view is that the overall guidance from the spatial framework and landscape capacity study does not therefore achieve the right balance between supporting onshore wind development and protecting the natural environment and managing visual impacts on communities.
- 2.7 Given this view, WCE has concerns about the current wording of Policy ED9 Renewable Energy Development as set out in the Proposed LDP. Our specific concerns relate to how the policy is linked to the spatial framework and landscape capacity study via the wording within sub heading 'Wind Turbine Proposals' which states;

"If turbines are proposed which exceed the turbine heights identified within Figures ED9b-e the onus would be on the applicant to demonstrate how the impacts of the proposal on key constraint's and any significant adverse effects can be mitigated in an effect to show a proposal can be supported".

In our opinion this policy does not meet the aspirations of Government Policy and lacks flexibility particularly by having a strict adherence to the findings of the landscape assessment. WCE therefore objects to this policy wording and would welcome further discussions and consultations as this policy develops, see below.

- 2.8 WCE is also concerned that the current SPG is retained alongside this proposed policy and the Spatial Strategy (Fig 9a) in the SPG is not adequately integrated with the Ironside Farrar outputs (Figs 9b-e). The Spatial Strategy and the Ironside Farrar figures appear to conflict with one another across much of the Borders area. For instance the area to the centre north of the Borders is identified as an Area of Significant Constraint in the Spatial Strategy but appears in the Ironside Farrar figures as having some of the highest capacity for large turbine development. Similarly the central west part of the Borders is identified in the Spatial Strategy as an Area of Significant Constraint but appears in the Ironside Farrar figures as having some of the highest capacity for large turbine development.
- 2.9 WCE understands that the Spatial Strategy had not attempted to consider landscape character and cumulative effects in the detailed way that the Ironside Farrar work has, but it results in a confusing message for developers and the public. WCE recommends that as part of the LDP drafting process a combined Spatial Plan figure is produced that aims to fuse the fairly simple GIS approach of the existing Spatial Strategy with the more subjective landscape based approach from Ironside Farrar. There is little point in the landscape driven work of Ironside Farrar identifying development potential across, for instance, a Natura designation without the Spatial Plan aiming to rationalise such contradictions.
- 2.10 The aim should be to deliver what is sought in SPP i.e. clear spatial plans to guide development. WCE would also recommend that the aim of such a new overall Spatial Plan should be that realistic development opportunities are identified, in keeping with SPP ambitions for all local authorities to contribute to renewable energy generation targets.

- 2.11 If SBC consider they cannot prepare a composite Spatial Plan as part of the LDP process then WCE recommends the linkage to the Ironside Farrar figures is removed in the policy as the implications of trying to combine the existing (unsatisfactory) Spatial Strategy with the Ironside Farrar work has not been adequately considered, i.e. remove the "General" section from the policy altogether and retain only the existing Spatial Strategy. Revised SPG would then be a priority piece of work to better consider the integration of the various pieces of work that the Council and their consultants have prepared in recent years.
- 2.12 We would also hope that the Council will have due regard to the conclusions in the background paper by Research Resource on attitudes to wind development in the Scottish Borders. The sizeable majority who found the look of wind turbines acceptable and who considered the benefits outweighed disadvantages can be taken as endorsement for a new Spatial Plan that has clear aspiration for further wind developments of appropriate scales in appropriate locations.