

Scottish Environment LINK Landscape Task Force

Landscape and Energy Statement

Landscape

1. Landscape is about the relationship between people and place. It's based on scenery, but covers all aspects of our experience of land, water, vegetation and culture. It includes both our personal memories and our shared experience – it's about what we value in our surroundings.
2. Scotland's heritage of natural and cultural landscapes is renowned throughout the world. They are one of the main reasons why people visit Scotland, and so form the essential basis of our tourism industry and provide great opportunities for outdoor recreation.
3. All landscapes are of value, but some are particularly sensitive to change, and others are recognised as being of particular significance and worth protecting.
4. Our landscapes enhance our quality of life and our well-being; they give us inspiration, refreshment and enjoyment. They contain the record of the achievements and failures of those who went before us; they form a key part of our national, regional and local identity.
5. That is why our thousands of members care so passionately about Scotland's rural landscapes.

Energy

6. Scotland needs to generate less of its energy from fossil fuels (mainly coal, gas and oil) for two reasons:
 - To reduce carbon emissions and the damaging climate change associated with them
 - To conserve finite fossil fuel resources for priority uses which cannot be substituted by renewable alternatives
7. Any replacement energy sources need to:
 - Significantly reduce carbon emissions
 - Provide a cost-effective and secure energy supply
 - Minimise landscape and other environmental impacts
8. Any proposed renewable energy developments need to be assessed against these criteria.
9. The best framework for achieving these aims is a sustainable energy hierarchy which prioritises actions in the following order:
 - Demand reduction – using less energy in the first place
 - Energy conservation – particularly through insulation and efficient appliances
 - Energy efficiency – including combined heat and power

- Renewable micro-generation – genuinely domestic-scale heatpumps, solar, hydro and wind, for both heat and electricity
 - Small-scale community renewables – with income reinvested locally in projects further up the hierarchy, for both heat and electricity
 - Large-scale commercial renewables – tidal, biomass, wave and wind, avoiding damage to valued landscapes, habitats and species
10. Most effort and funding should go into the higher levels of the hierarchy, to be most effective at reducing emissions and tackling fuel poverty.
 11. All energy generation and use must be sustainable, ie it must not harm either society or the environment, including landscape and biodiversity; all subsidies and developments must be assessed for all impacts.
 12. Any public subsidy used to support policy change should benefit the environment and society and avoid damaging important environmental assets, particularly our highly-valued landscapes and seascapes.
 13. Energy is not the same thing as electricity; we currently mostly use:
 - Gas to heat our homes and commercial buildings – the heat sector
 - Oil (petrol and diesel) to run our cars and lorries – the transport sector
 - Coal, nuclear, wind and hydro power to generate electricity – the electricity sector
 14. We need to use less energy, use it more efficiently and generate more of it from renewable sources in all three of these sectors.

The Issues

15. Several problems result from our current over-reliance on large wind farms:
 - Industrialisation of our rural landscapes by tall steel structures, large concrete hardstandings and wide roads
 - Increasingly large visual impact, due to the sheer size of the wind turbines now proposed for most wind farms
 - Erosion of our particularly precious resource of wild land
 - Damage to our internationally-important peatland carbon storage
 - Cumulative impact of many individual turbines, encouraged by current subsidy regime but out of scale for individual domestic use
 - Bitter battles between communities, developers and planning authorities across Scotland
16. The extent of Scotland unaffected by visual impact from built development declined from 41% in 2002 to 28% by 2009 (SNH data¹), largely due to wind farm development.
17. The current subsidy and planning regime gives too much support to developments lower down the sustainable energy hierarchy – particularly to large-scale onshore wind farms over other forms of renewable generation – and

¹ Natural Heritage Indicator N3 Visual influence of built development and land use change *Scottish Natural Heritage, 2010* <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/B551051.pdf>

too little to those higher up the hierarchy.

18. Large-scale wind farms have a place in this strategy, as long as they can cost-effectively deliver reductions in carbon emissions, security of energy supply and environmental protection.
19. However they are only one means to the ends of tackling climate change and reducing use of finite resources – renewables targets are not the same as CO₂ targets.
20. We share the Scottish Government's vision of a low-carbon future; we do not share its vision of installing an unlimited number of turbines and exporting surplus electricity to the UK and Europe, due to the landscape and other impacts of the turbines and pylons this would require.
21. Any new large-scale electricity transmission should be by subsea cable.
22. Public subsidy should be directed more towards emerging renewable technologies, such as tidal power, with the potential to be more predictable and less obtrusive, whilst taking great care to minimise damage to our precious marine environment; wave and solar generation also offer significant potential.
23. There is some scope to expand genuinely offshore wind energy around Scotland, as long as this does not harm important marine habitats and species; however some proposals are so close to the coast that their landscape impacts are as great as if they were onshore.

The Solutions

24. We therefore call on:
 - both UK and Scottish Governments to explicitly embrace the energy hierarchy as the key framework for meeting our future energy needs
 - the UK Government to shift the current level of subsidies away from onshore wind and further up the energy hierarchy
 - the Scottish Government to produce a sustainable, evidence-based national energy strategy which addresses the heat, transport and electricity sectors, reduces carbon emissions cost-effectively and minimises landscape and other environmental impacts
 - the Scottish Government to exclude large-scale wind farms from our National Parks, National Scenic Areas and Search Areas for Wild Land and substantial buffer zones around them
 - the Scottish Government to exclude large-scale wind farms from other valued landscapes where scale is a particular issue

This statement is supported by:

The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland
John Muir Trust
North East Mountain Trust
Ramblers Scotland
Scottish Campaign for National Parks
Scottish Wild Land Group