12 TOURISM, SOCIO-ECONOMICS AND LAND-USE

INTRODUCTION

12.1. This chapter provides an overview of the tourism, socio-economic and land-use issues in the area with comments on where these are likely to be affected by the proposed development. The chapter firstly outlines the methodology used in examining baseline conditions and assessing effects, secondly baseline descriptions are presented and thirdly, the potential effects are identified.

12.2. Detailed analysis of the visual impact of the wind farm on visitors to the area and issues of noise and water quality are examined in other chapters, along with suggestions for mitigation of associated effects.

METHODOLOGY

12.3. The methodology used in providing this overview has included the following elements:

- Consultations;
- Site visits; and
- Review of information.

Consultation

12.4. As part of the scoping exercise a number of national and local groups were contacted, as listed in Chapter 3. In relation to tourism and recreation issues these were:

- The Highland Council;
- The Ramblers Association;
- Scottish Natural Heritage;
- Sustrans;
- The Caithness District Salmon Fishery Board;
- Garden History Society; and
- Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society.

12.5. The main issues raised were the impact on the landscape setting of ancient monuments in the area (dealt with in Chapter 9 Cultural Heritage), and the potential for impact on angling (dealt with in Chapter 8 Geology, Hydrogeology and Hydrology).

Baseline

12.6. Reference has been made to the following sources of information:

- Highland Council (www.highland.gov.uk);
- Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board (visithighlands.com);
- Caithness Community (www.caithness.org);
- Sustrans (www.sustrans.org.uk);
- Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (www.scotways.co.uk);
- Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE) (www.hie.co.uk/case/;
- Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) (www.scotland.gov.uk);
- Scottish Census Results Online (www.scrol.gov.uk); and
- Various information leaflets provided by Thurso Tourist Information.

12.7. In addition land use information has been sourced from visits to the site and surrounding area, and from an examination of Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 scale Landranger Maps 11 and 12, the 1:25 000 scale Explorer ™ Map 451 and the Soil Survey of Scotland Thurso and Wick 1: 50 000 Land Capability for Agriculture Sheet 12.

12.8. Reference has also been made to "*Scottish Hill Tracks*" published in 1999 by the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

Assessment of Effects

12.9. The criteria employed to assess the significance of effects on recreation and tourism at the site is in line with SNH guidance[1]. Significant impacts are those that would lead to permanent or long-term effects on facilities provided under statutory powers, or where the proposals affect recreational resources that have more than local use or importance.

12.10. The potential impact of the proposal on tourism and recreation is closely related to public attitudes towards wind turbines in the landscape and a number of studies have been conducted. The relevant conclusions from the most recent of these are discussed below.

12.11. In terms of socio-economic factors, effects would be significant if the wind farm proposal, during either construction or operation, resulted in any fundamental or material changes in population, structure of the local community, local service or employment.

12.12. The physical impact of the proposal on existing land-use is assessed within the context of the extent of similar land, in this case improved grassland and commercial forestry, in the local area.

BASELINE DESCRIPTION

Tourism & Recreation

12.13. Tourism is an important industry in the Highlands accounting for some 12,000 full-time jobs, approximately 16% of all employment (Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE)). The 2001 Census Profile published on the Highland Council website demonstrates that tourism is similarly important in Caithness, providing approximately 13% of jobs in the region[2].

12.14. The Highland Visitor Survey 2002/2003 published by CASE shows that those visiting Caithness stay for relatively short breaks averaging 2.8 nights. The survey shows general sightseeing, in particular visits to museums and galleries, castles, monuments and archaeological sites as the most popular activities. Other activities will involve sports including fishing, horse riding, shooting and quad biking.

12.15. There are few tourism and recreation resources on site however these include:

- Prehistoric remains located within the site in the form or a broch at Spittal Farm approximately 2.5 m in height; and
- Small scale fossil collecting at Spittal Quarry

12.16. In the vicinity of the windfarm there are a range of formal and informal resources which include:

[1] Scottish Natural Heritage – A Handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment 2nd Edition (Appendix 5 – Outdoor Access Impact Assessment), 2005

[2] Tourism figures include the Hotels/Catering and Transport/storage/communication sectors.

- A horse riding holiday centre at North Achalone, north east of the site boundary[3];
- The River Thurso some 5 km to the west, Loch Watten 1.5 km to the east and Loch Toftingall 1 km to the south which are both popular destinations for anglers throughout the UK and Europe; and
- Thrumster Estate which provides facilities for fishing, falconry and stalking.

12.17. In addition to these formal resources, informal recreation includes surfing, walking and sightseeing in the local area.

12.18. In the wider context, the Caithness landscape consists of rugged coastland and some fine beaches for example at Dunnet and Reiss. Inland are open peatlands known as the Flow Country consisting of miles of interlaced pools & lochs. Suggested to be the largest, most intact blanket bog in the world, the Flow Country is nationally (SSSI) and internationally (SPA) designated and a proposed World Heritage Site. Essentially unchanged for over 4000 years it is home to a wide range of breeding peatland birds and this can be experienced at Forsinard Peatland Reserve.

12.19. Caithness hosts some of the most important European Neolithic sites, with possibly 4000 sites from Prehistoric times in total, for example the Grey Cairns of Camster and monuments at the Loch of Yarrows near Wick.

Socio-economic

12.20. The 2001 Census reports Caithness as having a population of approximately 25,000 representing 0.5% of Scotland's population. The main towns are Wick (~8,500 inhabitants) & Thurso (~9000 inhabitants) 16 km from the Dounreay UK Atomic Energy Authority site and approximately 6 km north east of the wind farm site.

12.21. 63.7% of the population is of working age (16-64), similar to Scotland as a whole (64.9%). The economic activity rate of (16-74 year olds) was 67.6%, slightly higher than the overall level for Scotland of 65%.

12.22. Today the main industries in the area are manufacturing, nuclear engineering, fishing, tourism, agriculture, call centres and telecommunications (Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (CASE)). The 2001 Census reveals that public sector employment[4] accounts for 22.3% of employment, with 'real estate, renting and business' as the single largest category of employment at 13.7%, possibly reflecting the proximity to Dounreay. The flagstone industry, once exporting all over the world, is making a comeback and old quarries have been re-opened in recent years to meet renewed demand.

12.23. Since the early sixties the nuclear power station at Dounreay has underpinned the economy of Caithness. It has been a significant source of local employment and is likely to remain so as the plant is decommissioned over the next 50 years, with the value of this work to the local economy estimated as approximately £75 million a year (CASE).

12.24. Other factors important for the local economy include the harbours at Wick & Srabster, 2 miles from Thurso, with excellent port and dockside facilities. Srabster is the roll-on, roll-off ferry terminal for Stromness in Orkney. The port's fish related quayside facilities have been considerably extended and modernised.

12.25. Wick airport runs regular services with Aberdeen, Edinburgh & Lerwick.

[3] British Horse Riding Society (www.bhs.org.uk)
[4] Made up from the following sectors: Public administration/defence, education, health/social work

Land Use

12.26. The wind farm site occupies approximately 980ha of largely improved pasture at between 70 – 176m above mean sea level with the turbines being sited on ground between 60 and 135 m above mean sea level. It is proposed that the turbines will be located on the eastern flank of Spittal Hill and predominantly in the southwestern part of the site.

12.27. The site is currently used for sheep and cattle grazing and predominantly comprises a mixture of grassland and heath with areas of coniferous and mixed plantation (Figure 6.1).

12.28. The closest classified roads are the A882, which runs in an south east- north west direction approximately 1km north of the site and the B870 which runs in a south west to north east direction and is adjacent to parts of the southern boundary of the site. The closest settlement is Spittal approximately 1.2 km from the nearest turbine.

12.29. There are several properties in and around the site at Banniskirk Mains, Toftingall and Dunn. Several properties lie outwith but close to the site boundary including Lower Toftingall, Banniskirk House and Upper Larel.

12.30. The wider landscape of Caithness consists primarily of open, rolling farmland, moorland and scattered settlements. Away from the coast it is mainly open moorland & blanket bog, divided up along the river valleys by extensive flat more fertile farm and croft land. Land management has mainly been of low intensity, consisting of crofting, farming and sporting activities.

SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL EFFECTS

Tourism and Recreation

12.31. There have been a number of surveys that have tested attitudes towards wind farms. For example, the Scottish Executive's Scottish Climate Change Programme, 2000 (AIR 141) refers (paragraph 28, page 17) to a survey undertaken by System 3 in the summer of 2000 on public attitudes towards wind farms in Scotland. That survey found that fears held by those living around four operating wind farms prior to them being built were allayed once they were up and running: 40% of survey respondents anticipated problems prior to development but only 9% felt that they had experienced problems.

12.32. Two separate surveys have looked at the effect of wind farms on tourism in Scotland. A MORI poll commissioned by the Scottish Renewables Forum and the British Wind Energy Association in 2002 found that over 90% of visitors would return to Scotland for a holiday whether or not there were wind farms in the area. 80% said they would go to a wind farm visitor or information centre during their stay.[5]

12.33. A second survey by the Visit Scotland tourism agency recorded that 75% of visitors were either positive or neutral towards wind farm development in general, although less positive about specific visual impact. The attitude of those who had actually seen a wind farm tended to be more positive than those who had not. 63% said it would make no difference to their decision to holiday in Scotland if the number[6] of wind farms increased.

12.34. In November 2005, a report by University of St. Andrews and The Macaulay Institute was published[7].

[5] Source: "Tourist Attitudes Towards Wind Farms", MORI Scotland, 2002, Sample: 307 Tourists
[6] Source: "Investigation into the Potential Impact of Wind Farms on Tourism in Scotland", VisitScotland, 2002, Sample: 180 Visitors
[7] Journal of Environmental Planning and Management

12.35. The report used case studies in the Republic of Ireland and in the Scottish Borders to test these hypotheses. In the Scottish Borders the report found that 24% of residents, near to Dun Law Windfarm, had changed their attitudes towards the wind farm after its construction; only one of these respondents developed a negative attitude. Of those who changed their attitude, 8% did so because they thought the site could become a tourist attraction.

12.36. The study also showed that residents living within 5km of the wind farm were more positive about it than those who lived 5-10 km away; 91% of residents less than 5km from the wind farm supported it, compared to 86% of residents living 5-10km away. For the proposed wind farm at Black Hill; 58% of close residents support the wind farm compared with 69% living 5-10 km away.

12.37. In South West Ireland the report found that of those who supported wind power nationally, only 66% supported it locally, 73% of residents found that their fears about wind farms were not realised after construction as there had been no problems.

12.38. Residents in close proximity were more positive about wind farms in Cork and Kerry, with 40% of respondents living less than 5km away having a positive attitude, compared with 33% and 27% of residents between 5-10 km and 10-20 km respectively.

12.39. Overall the report found that people are not opposed to wind power, rather to individual sites. Objections to individual wind farms tended to be primarily because of the visual effects, emphasising the importance of 'sensitive siting' and highlighting the lack of strategic planning in wind farm development. However, the report found that people became more positive about wind farms after their construction.

12.40. The report showed that in both case studies, residents closest to an operational wind farm were more in favour than those living slightly further away.

12.41. Access to the site, via the permanent tracks, will be available for walking, cycling and horse riding.

Socio-economic

12.42. The capital cost of Spittal Wind Farm is estimated to be in the region of £75m. There will be opportunities and benefits for local business created during the construction, operational and decommissioning phases, including:

- Creation of short-term construction jobs;
- An estimated £30-35m spent on construction and infrastructure;
- On-going maintenance jobs; and
- Possible tourist/interpretative facilities.

12.43. Construction of the wind farm will not result in any fundamental or long-term changes in population, structure of the local community, local services or employment.

12.44. Developers are actively exploring with the local community the most appropriate and effective form for the community involvement in the scheme. As a minimum this might be a specified amount of money per megawatt per annum paid into a locally controlled fund. The purpose of the fund would be decided by the community.

12.45. Community benefit might involve turbine ownership if there is sufficient interest in the area.

Land Use

12.46. Construction will directly impact on the agricultural and forestry uses of the site, resulting in long-term loss of approximately 7.8 ha of improved and semi-improved grassland currently in agricultural use for rough grazing. Approximately 86% of this will be for access roads, which are likely to be retained for use in land management following decommissioning. The loss of agricultural land on the proposed site is assessed as insignificant in the context of the available agricultural land locally and on a wider scale. In a broader context, the Scottish Agricultural Survey carried out in 2002 for the Scottish Executive, showed that a total of approximately 160 000 ha of land in the Highlands region was classified as grassland[8]

12.47. None of the nationally valuable features of the Caithness landscape will be lost or impacted on by the construction and operation of the proposed wind farm development.

[8] Scottish Agricultural Census by Geographic Area - June 2002. A Scottish Executive National Statistics Publication