# Response to National Planning Framework 4 Position Statement

GreenPower is an independent originator, developer, owner and operator of renewable energy assets in onshore wind, hydro and solar, founded in 2000, based in Alloa in central Scotland and has a specialist team leading development, construction, acquisitions and operation of renewable energy projects. GreenPower has consented over 270MW of renewable assets and currently has projects in development of over 200MW with further ambitious growth targets.

GreenPower's objective is to play its part in tackling the climate emergency by developing and operating projects that directly reduce carbon emissions and deliver economic and social benefits to local communities and the wider Scottish economy.

GreenPower welcomes the opportunity to comment on the National Planning Framework position statement.

As stated in our response to the initial call for ideas, it is disappointing that planning reform has been delayed to adoption by mid-2022. Given the requirement under the 2019 Climate Act to reduce emissions by 75% by 2030 and the declaration of a Climate Emergency by the First Minister in April 2019, we would suggest there is a very strong case for interim measures which can support an earlier rebalancing of the planning system in favour of climate mitigation ahead of final NPF4 adoption.

**Consultation Questions**

**1. Do you agree with our current thinking on planning for net-zero emissions?**

The Minister Kevin Stewart's stated intention: *"…to rebalance the planning system so that climate change is a guiding principle for all plans and decisions."* is very welcome.

There may be confusion that *"net-zero emissions by 2045 or 2050"* is the core objective of NPF4. 2045 is the ultimate goal of course, but the core objective of the NPF4 should be to deliver on 2030 targets as required by legislation. It is a document for a ten year lifespan, we are in a global emergency where action between now and 2030 will determine success by any measure. It may also be appropriate to consider the NPF having its 'imperative' as tackling the climate emergency to 2030 rather than simply a 'guiding principle' which could perhaps be considered too vague and aspirational.

Whilst there is a welcome reference on page 8, "*To achieve … interim emissions reduction targets of 75% by 2030*" this does not appear to then flow clearly to other sections or to early specific actions required for readily available technologies such as

onshore wind and solar. The very welcome recognition that: *"an urgent and radical shift in our spatial plan and policies is required"* creates high expectations, but this does not appear to flow on to support many specific urgent and substantive action in these technology areas recommended by the renewable sector during the call for ideas.

**Solar**

There is a significant omission in the position statement with regards to the potential for solar energy, given its readiness for deployment, low cost and its ability to work well with wind, storage and local energy systems. It merits no mention at all which is perplexing. The removal of key barriers could see Scotland well placed to grow solar energy deployment to at least 4GW by 2030, and see Scotland achieve its fair UK share in line with the analysis of the Climate Change Committee and Solar Energy UK's overarching UK target of 40GW by 2030. GreenPower broadly supports the submission made by the Solar Energy Scotland of which it is a member company.

**Onshore wind**

The references to onshore wind appear to be general and not specific to new development as an opportunity. For example 'Opportunity 8' states "*supporting renewable energy developments, including the re-powering and extension of existing wind farms"* could be much bolder in promoting **new** onshore wind development – as well as solar as a specific technology.

The stated intention to add more weight to climate mitigation as a material consideration in the planning balance is welcome. However, substantial intervention will be needed to overcome the range of barriers to deployment. For example, we have seen some decisions since the climate emergency was declared, where the decision-maker has apparently added climate mitigation weight, yet this was deemed insufficient to outweigh highly subjective local constraints such as landscape capacity studies as part of Local Development Plans.

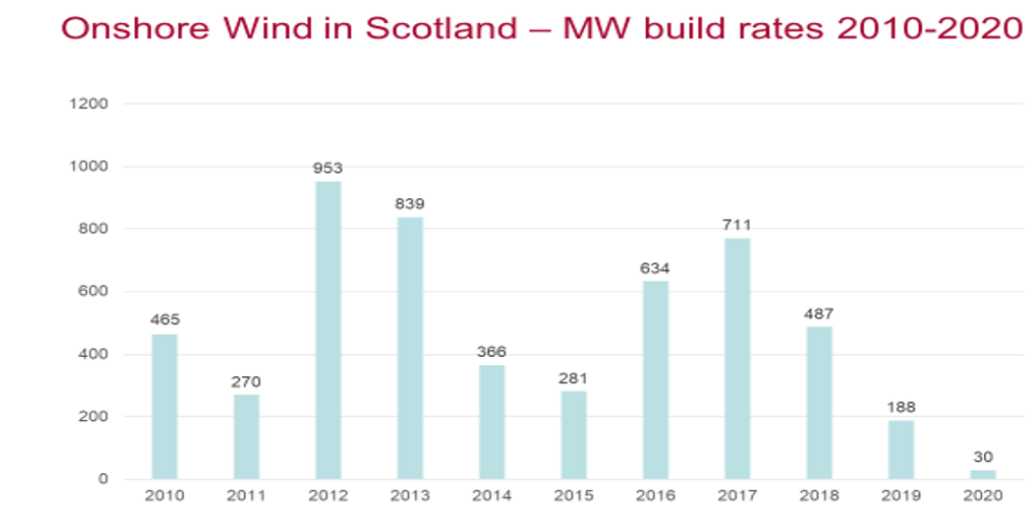
The thinking in other words, needs to perhaps consider that simply adding more material weight to climate mitigation may not be enough on its own if we are to see the kind of step change needed, especially in the delivery of substantial new volumes of onshore wind by 2030.

**Making delivery happen at scale and volume**

The following chart and tables may be useful to review. Industry considers that there is a significant volume of onshore wind required to deliver on 2030 reduction targets, where electricity is needed to make substantial inroads into heat, transport and industrial consumption of fossil fuels. According to the Climate Change Committee as much as 25-30GW of onshore wind will be required in all scenarios and it is not an unreasonable assumption that Scotland could double its capacity and deliver at least an additional 8GW by 2030.

Given delays in offshore deployment alongside very long lead in times, expected CFD mechanism volumes and competition with the rest of the UK offshore sector - 8GW of

new onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 should be considered an essential part of the mix. This equates to around 1GW build out per year plus repowering in greater volumes from 2028 onwards. However, the chart below shows a significant drop off in build out rates in recent years. In a subsidy free environment, it is the sites with the most modern standard (larger, fewer) turbines in good wind areas that will compete and be viable. Therefore, it is the planning system that is at the heart of the 'route to market' for onshore wind.




*These two tables may also be instructive (courtesy of Pinsent Masons):*

## Where Does the Balance Currently Lie?

| Onshore Windfarm Planning Appeals since Climate Emergency Declared | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Date of decision** | Outcome | Was Climate Emergency a material consideration? |
| **May 2019** | Refused | No |
| **August 2019** | Granted | No |
| **September 2019** | Granted | No |
| **October 2019** | Refused | No |
| **November 2019** | Refused | No |
| **December 2019** | Granted | No |
| **December 2019** | Refused | No |
| **February 2020** | Refused | No |
| **April 2020** | Refused | Yes |
| **October 2020** | Refused | No |
| **October 2020** | Refused | No |

| **Total no. of Decisions** | **Granted** | **Refused** |
|---|---|---|
| 11 | **27%** | **73%** |

## Where Does the Balance Currently Lie?

| S.36 Consent Decisions following Public Local Inquiries since Climate Emergency Declared | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Date of decision** | Outcome | Climate Emergency a material consideration? |
| **May 2019** | Refused | No |
| **May 2019** | Refused | No |
| **June2019** | Granted | No |
| **June 2019** | Refused | No |
| **September 2019** | Granted | No |
| **September 2019** | Refused | No |
| **December 2019** | Refused | No |
| **June 2020** | Refused | No |
| **December 2020** | Granted | Yes |
| **January 2021** | Refused | Yes |

| Total no. of Decisions | Granted | Refused |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | 30% | 70% |

These arguably show that decision-makers have largely not been taking the climate emergency into account, and when they do, its effect is not pronounced. The emerging picture is that even though there are significant volumes of projects in the consented and pre-determination pipeline, many will need to be reconsidered for application of modern standard turbines - and given the severe limitations imposed by 'landscape studies' as currently balanced in the decision making process, a very high proportion of projects entering the planning system are heading for high attrition rates following the appeal and inquiry route for determination.

**A shift away from business as usual on change in the landscape**

This statement is very welcome: "*Updating the current spatial framework for onshore wind to continue to protect National Parks and National Scenic Areas, whilst allowing development outwith these areas where they are demonstrated to be acceptable on".*

This however, clearly begs some key questions: how will acceptability be determined? What changes to the current 'spatial' approach for group 2 and 3 areas in Table 1 of SPP are required? Is a spatial plan for modern standard turbines workable, or is a criteria based and much more flexible and proportionate approach more pragmatic?

We would recommend a shift away from trying to map for onshore wind, towards a criteria based project by project approach, and an acceptance that subjective issues are of substantially lower weight than the climate emergency and green recovery.

Nowhere in the document is there any specific proposal to reduce the effects of landscape protection policy on decisions other than a potential review of Wild Land Areas. There appears to be an adherence to the rhetoric of 'right projects in the right places' which arguably hands a trump card to local subjective landscape protectionism, rather than seeking to effect a compromise which can deliver greater volumes of onshore wind technology as a national priority.

Planning for 2030 through an emergency response of using onshore wind (and solar), requires an acceptance that change in the environment is required, and should be enabled much more positively. Maintaining a planning system predicated on minimising or preventing any change to the physical environment, manifested in highly negative subjective constraint mapping in Local Development Plans, is not radical, nor could it be considered a credible emergency response. This is where we suggest the thinking has to change. The NPF needs to tackle the imbalance between protection and need for change, and actively shift away from the 'preservationist' and 'do minimum' thinking.

The renewable industry is not looking for a trump card over all landscape effects, but clearly if the Scottish Government wants volumes of new onshore wind (or to be able to in time replace what we have already built through repowering) then some reduction in material weight in the way landscape is considered is going to be required.

**Landscape capacity and sensitivity studies need a reality check**

As outlined in previous submissions, the main tools used to determine landscape acceptability are landscape capacity and sensitivity studies, typically produced in effect to create another layer of Group 1 'no-go' areas for modern turbines. If these continue to be used as part of Local Development or National Development Plans, then business-as-usual will most likely prevail, where an increasing proportion of projects are being delayed or rejected. If a decision is made to review and replace these over time, with existing mapping studies allowed to be retained in the meantime (as recommended by NatureScot in its recently revised landscape sensitivity report) then this will maintain business as usual indefinitely and is not an emergency response.

We would recommend that Ministers quash Landscape Capacity Studies and rely instead on high level information such as more objective and available landscape character studies, to assist the development assessment process through identifying relative sensitivities within the landscape through the EIA process. GreenPower would advise caution in accepting any proposal that 'Sensitivity' studies automatically replace 'Capacity' studies without very clear government direction, to avoid any risk that these could continue a 'business-as-usual' approach and maintain a highly negative position towards any landscape change.

Government should more explicitly recognise that onshore wind is able to play a huge role in early green recovery, where the vast majority of people support them, and that maintaining the current and NatureScot proposed approach to landscape studies risks unreasonably and unjustifiably blocking development. The approach should be less 'right projects in the right places' – and more 'as many projects in as many places as we need to tackle the emergency.'

**Additional options for interim and NPF4 measures**

It may be appropriate to consider addressing the generational mindset where effects that last for a generation are seen as permanent when climate change is going to have multi-generational consequences. The reversibility of onshore renewable generation

projects could be made a stronger material consideration (especially when consent is sought for a time limited period, and even when consent is granted in perpetuity in principle there is still a requirement to be subject to appropriate re-assessment when being repowered, or renewed).

There could be more emphasis on 'direct harm' rather than on subjective perception. For example, where proposed commercial scale renewables developments are not located within National Parks or National Scenic areas, there could be a presumption in favour of consent being granted unless climate change and sustainable development benefits are demonstrably outweighed by any likely significant harmful environmental effects. There could be a requirement for decision makers to demonstrate why such effects outweigh the climate/sustainability benefits of a development and this should be limited to the consideration of effects that would result **in unacceptable Direct Harm to nature and wildlife,** with substantially less weight afforded to more subjective indirect issues such as setting.

**2. Do you agree with our current thinking on planning for resilient communities?**
Whilst GreenPower supports the thinking on resilient communities, we would recommend more explicit policy support to enable widespread renewable energy development of all technologies to help achieve this objective. There is a significant opportunity for renewable energy development and associated infrastructure of all kinds to enable resilient, long-term economic opportunities in both urban and rural settings. In rural areas particularly, where most solar, wind and hydro resources are located, there is also a great opportunity to align with the objective set out in the Position Statement of encouraging repopulation of rural areas.

Rethinking the approach to Wild Land is also well overdue in this regard. Such areas, particularly where they are outside National Parks and National Scenic Areas, are considered 'wild' largely because of a subjective perception of 'wildness' – yet from an ecological and historical perspective they are often areas that are shadows of their former condition and of what they could be. We would recommend that there should be less focus on protectionism, and more focus on creating positive 'living landscapes' that are ecologically healthy, that can benefit and support people and the environment through a combination of renewable energy development and habitat restoration, or 'rewilding'. There is great opportunity here, but first Government must discard the notion that a perception of 'wildness' is something of static and absolute value when compared to the value in many of these areas of much more meaningful reinvigoration.

**3. Do you agree with our current thinking on planning for a wellbeing economy?**
Yes, the energy system is central to such aspiration, but this has to be driven in the short term to 2030 with emergency measures to tackle climate change through more rapid deployment of renewable energy.

**4. Do you agree with our current thinking on planning for better, greener places?**
We would broadly support the thinking here, but as outlined in answers to other questions, particularly in answer to question 1, a degree of compromise is needed so

that subjective matters are diluted in the planning balance if we are serious about delivering on 2030 targets.

The Position Statement sets out that *"shifting future development away from greenfield land including by actively enabling the redevelopment* ***of vacant and derelict land****"* but we would be concerned if this placed a barrier or an inappropriate hierarchy on preferred siting for the development of new onshore wind and solar sites in rural and countryside settings where the bulk of the space and resource is located. Renewable development on greenfield sites will be required to meet net-zero targets and we would therefore ask that this be clarified.

GreenPower supports the need to carefully manage Scotland's **carbon-rich soils** and extensive peatlands but the wording could be interpreted to prevent any *"…development on peatland*" which could disproportionately affect the opportunity for appropriate and well designed renewable energy development where carbon benefits can be demonstrated.

Onshore wind farm developers have shown that through sensitive construction practices and habitat management plans, very rapid payback times for any short-term carbon effects of development can be achieved.

We would recommend that the Scottish Government recognises that solar energy systems can assimilate very well into most host landscapes, and any **update to green belt policy** should include solar as an appropriate development type within the multifunctional natural infrastructure that green belt provides**.**

Ground mounted solar also has great potential to create better, greener places through the **utilisation of derelict land**. Government planning policy should favour solar development in derelict land which can also promote biodiversity and increase the natural capital value of these sites.

Onshore wind and solar can deliver and promote **nature-based solutions** to climate change, not just through harnessing the wind and sun as natural resources, but also through the natural capital and ecosystem benefits that solar parks and wind farms can create and enhance. The remainder of a field utilised for solar park development is still accessible for plant growth and potentially for wildlife enhancements and complementary agricultural activities such as conservation grazing of sheep or for the planting of wildland meadow to encourage greater biodiversity. And by the same token habitat improvements and agricultural activities can be created around wind turbines.

GreenPower would recommend a review of the Solar Energy UK and Scotland report and case studies. Natural Capital Value of Solar

Onshore wind development is also a valuable source of private investment for peatland restoration. https://www.scottishrenewables.com/publications/739-wind-power-and-peatland-enhancing-unique-habitats

**5. Do you have further suggestions on how we can deliver our strategy?**
We broadly agree with the vision and strategy for 2050 set out in the Scottish Government's Position Statement but repeat the point here that this NPF should be much more focused on actions to deliver on 2030 targets.

We strongly support the industry calls for interim measures given the delay to 2022, including as a first priority:

- Clear direction from Ministers, by advice and through s36 and planning appeal decisions, that the planning balance requires an immediate substantial shift in favour of the Climate Emergency. Moreover, that such 'special regard' or significant weighting should be matched by addressing any constraints, especially subjective matters such as setting, that would make such a measure less effective.

**6. Do you have any comments on the Integrated Impact Assessment Update Report, published alongside this position statement?**
No comment other than a need to ensure measures make an immediate impact given the scale of the climate emergency challenge.

**7. Do you have any other comments on the content of the Position Statement?**

**Building a Scottish Supply Chain**

Doubling of onshore wind capacity and achieving a fair share of UK solar capacity can help to realise the ambition shared across industry and government for a bigger and better domestic supply chain. Planning is at the root of this. The need for a more positive approach to planning policy is also illustrated by the onshore wind repowering opportunity for Scotland. With around 8GW of existing projects coming to end of life over the next ten years or so, a policy which strongly presumes repowering of those sites on a commercially viable, zero subsidy basis, would create huge momentum across the supply chain and the development community. Thinking strategically and focussing on making viable development happen is what is needed. Taking a landscape/spatial plan-led approach will not achieve this.

**Upgrade the carbon calculator**

The position statement does not acknowledge the need to revise the carbon calculator used to assess projects so that the 'whole energy grid' carbon intensity is considered as part of the equation. This means including the volumes of carbon created by sectors such as transport and heating, where electrification will result in substantial carbon savings assessed against any short-term losses from the construction process.

**Aviation lighting**

Aviation lighting has emerged as a disproportionate barrier to development of modern standard turbines. NatureScot has created a substantial workstream aiming to inform the development process, but we are also beginning to see objections to wind farms on the basis of night time aviation lighting being unacceptable if visible for example, from Wild Land Areas in the middle of the night. In the face of a climate emergency this issue should be considered in proportion to the environmental threat from climate change. Objections to wind farms on aviation lighting should not be considered reasonable under NPF4, and this matter could simply be screened out of the assessment process unless a proposed development is within a designated Dark Sky area.