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Renewable Energy - Onshore Wind

Client: RWE Renewables UK

Location: Sutherland, Highlands

Project Overview

Atmos has worked with RWE Renewables UK (previously E.ON) since 2011 to design and secure planning consent for Strathy Wood Wind Farm.

In 2013 an application was made for 26 turbines, 145m tip height, with a maximum rated output of 78MW.

In response to consultee comments, largely in relation to potential impacts on visual receptors and ornithology, the project was revised so that it was wholly situated out with the Caithness and Sutherland, Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area, and reduced to 18 turbines, with a total output of 59.4MW.

Following a hiatus, due to changing marketing conditions and uncertainty a further revision was submitted in 2019, for 13 turbines, 180m tip. 62.4MW. Owing to sustained objections from the Highland Council (THC) a Public Inquiry (PI) was held consisting of two inquiry and two hearing sessions in April 2021.

Key Challenges

The duration of the project over such a long period meant significant changes in legislation, policy and guidance. Changes in the market and available technology meant significant changes in the scope and scale of the scheme with each iteration.

The sensitivity of the site and cumulative effects with neighbouring schemes, (Strathy North and South), meant ongoing consultation and a need to provide coherence and consistency to a complex changing scheme sufficient to withstand significant scrutiny through the PI.

Our Solutions

Atmos' consistent approach to project management allowed clarity and coherency despite changes in project staff over time. Similarly, our engagement strategy allowed stakeholder concerns to be addressed despite significant changes in the project design.

A methodical approach to identification and mitigation of key project issues allowed those issues to be addressed in advance of the final PI, allowing the focus to be narrowed to a small number of issues.

Key to that agreement was the development of bespoke Habitat Management that sought to return the site to a more natural state, including; native woodland planting, blanket bog restoration, short sward management and an allocated hen harrier habitat area. This approach integrated with the forestry management, maximised biodiversity and protected the ecology of the site.

The Successful Outcome

Scottish Ministers granted consent subject to conditions in December 2021.

The successful consent was obtained in the face a standing objection from THC on visual and cumulative impact and significant scrutiny through the inquiry process.

Atmos is now involved discharging planning conditions and in undertaking preconstruction monitoring.