

EARRAGHAIL RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

Appendix 7.9 Residential Visual Amenity Assessment

Prepared for ScottishPower Renewables

Appendix 7.9: Residential Visual Amenity

A.1 Introduction

Background

A.1.1 This Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) has been prepared by Stephenson Halliday on behalf of ScottishPower Renewables in accordance with Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 2/19: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (15 March 2019). The Technical Guidance Note (TGN) identifies that:

“The purpose of carrying out a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) is to form a judgement, to assist decision makers, on whether a proposed development is likely to change the visual amenity of a residential property to such an extent that it becomes a matter of ‘Residential Amenity’.”

A.1.2 It further notes that:

“Changes in views and visual amenity are considered in the planning process. In respect of private views and visual amenity, it is widely known that, no one has ‘a right to a view.’ ...

It is not uncommon for significant adverse effects on views and visual amenity to be experienced by people at their place of residence as a result of introducing a new development into the landscape. In itself this does not necessarily cause particular planning concern. However, there are situations where the effect on the outlook / visual amenity of a residential property is so great that it is not generally considered to be in the public interest to permit such conditions to occur where they did not exist before.”

A.1.3 This assessment considers only what the resident may see from a property. Views or ‘visual amenity’ are just one component of residential amenity and the two should not be confused. The latter is a planning matter and may also include aspects such as noise, air quality, traffic, etc., in addition to residential visual amenity. RVAA does not consider or provide information on other aspects of residential amenity and it is for decision makers to weigh all these aspects, and documents/assessments relating to them, in determining the acceptability of a proposal.

This assessment, and the process of RVAA, seeks to identify where effects on residential visual amenity are of such a nature or magnitude that they may need to be considered in the overall balance of ‘Residential Amenity’ or ‘Living Conditions’. The point at which this happens is referred to as the Residential Visual Amenity (RVA) threshold. This threshold is reached by informed professional judgement which takes into account planning precedent.

A.2 Approach

A.2.1 TGN 2/19 advocates a four-step process to RVAA with the first three falling broadly within the scope of Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) where the magnitude and significance of visual effects is assessed.

- A.2.2 The fourth step involves a further assessment of the change to visual amenity of individual properties identified as “*having the greatest magnitude of change*” and identifying whether the RVA threshold is reached.

Methodology

Study Area and Initial Assessment

- A.2.3 There are no standard criteria for defining the RVAA Study Area and this is determined on a case by case basis. The guidance note identifies that for large structures, such as wind turbines, a preliminary Study Area of 1.5–2 km radius may be appropriate to begin identifying properties for inclusion within RVAA, but for other developments the Study Area would be much reduced in proportion to their size. In this case, a Study Area of 2 km has been agreed with Argyll and Bute Council during Scoping.

- A.2.4 Within the RVAA Study Area all residential properties are identified. An initial appraisal is undertaken to identify those properties likely to experience the greatest effects from the proposed Development, therefore requiring further detailed assessment, and those where effects would be less and unlikely to approach the RVA threshold. This process may draw on the findings of the LVIA as a starting point and is supplemented by other tools including ZTV maps, wireframes and field work.

Further Detailed Assessment

- A.2.5 For those properties that have been identified at the initial stage as requiring further detailed assessment the process follows the following key stages:

- Evaluation of baseline visual amenity;
- Assessment of likely change to the visual amenity of properties; and
- Forming the RVAA judgement.

- A.2.6 Properties are usually assessed individually but may be considered in groups where their outlook or views are essentially the same; for example, a row of houses that all share an open outlook towards the Site. Where properties are grouped for assessment this will be clearly identified and reasons for grouping described.

Baseline Visual Amenity

- A.2.7 The existing baseline visual amenity is described for each property and is informed by desk study and field work. *[Site visits to all individual properties included within the detailed assessment are undertaken where access can be agreed with property owners. Where access is not possible this step is informed by visits to nearby publicly accessible areas.]* Visual amenity is described ‘in the round’ and considers both views from the dwelling itself, the domestic curtilage and views experienced when arriving or leaving the property.
- A.2.8 It has been noted if the owners of a dwelling have a financial involvement in the project, however all properties have been treated equally in terms of the potential effects upon residential visual amenity.

Likely Change to Visual Amenity

A.2.9 The change to baseline views and visual amenity as a result of the proposed Development is described for each property and a judgement on the magnitude of effects likely to be experienced is provided. This may involve consideration of the following factors:

- Distance between the property and proposed Development and their relative locations (e.g. up/down hill);
- Nature of available views (e.g. panoramic, enclosed) and the effect of daily or seasonal variations;
- Direction of view or aspect of property affected;
- Extent to which the proposed Development may be visible from various parts of the property (e.g. dwelling, rooms, access, garden);
- Scale of change to views, including the proportion of view occupied by the proposed Development;
- Compositional changes (e.g. loss/addition of landscape features such as woodland);
- Contrast or integration of new features with the existing views.
- Duration and nature of changes (e.g. temporary/permanent, intermittent/continuous);

Mitigation opportunities

A.2.10 This stage may be supported by a range of visual aids as required including maps, ZTV studies, photography and visualisations. The choice of visual aids is determined on a case by case basis and may be informed by consultation. In line with best practice guidance, the type of visualisation should be proportionate to the nature of the proposed Development and assessment stage.

RVAA Judgement

A.2.11 This final stage is concerned with identifying "*whether the predicted effects on visual amenity and views at the property are such that it has reached the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold, therefore potentially becoming a matter of Residential Amenity*". This is the key concern of RVAA and judgements on the RVA threshold are set out clearly and unambiguously.

Cumulative

A.2.12 RVAA is undertaken against the baseline, as described in the accompanying LVIA. As stated in the TGN, future cumulative visual effects are not assessed within the RVAA, as the focus of the RVAA is on the existing visual amenity.

A.2.13 In this case, the assessment also considers the effects of felling as part of the ongoing cycle of commercial forestry.

Distances/Directions

- A.2.14 Where distances and directions are given within the assessment, these are distances between the nearest part of the property (including the domestic curtilage) and the nearest proposed turbine, unless explicitly stated otherwise. Distances given are rounded to the nearest 10 m to account for the level of accuracy available in techniques used to measure (usually based on aerial photography within a GIS).
- A.2.15 Proposed turbine micro-siting allowances, in this case up to 50 m, are discussed where relevant within this assessment.

A.3 Assessment

Introduction

A.3.1 Figure 1 illustrates the 2 km RVAA Study Area on the blade tip zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) and identifies residential properties. In total there are currently 3 residential properties located within or on the edge of the RVAA Study Area.

A.3.2 Five other properties identified by mapping and/or address data within or close to the Study Area are observed to be uninhabitable and are not considered within this assessment, they are as follows:

- Glenskible;
- Old Shielings;
- Altagalvash;
- Lagganroaig; and
- Seanlagan.

Initial Assessment

A.3.3 An initial assessment has been undertaken in order to identify those properties with the highest magnitude of change where there is potential for the RVA threshold to be reached. This is supported by the ZTV in Figure 1 in this Technical Appendix and the wireline visualisations located within **Volume 3c**, and site visits undertaken to assess views from individual properties. Where it is identified that effects at properties have the potential to reach the RVA threshold this is identified and further detailed assessment is provided on individual property assessment sheets in the following section. The initial assessment is provided in **Table A3.1**.

Table A3.1 Initial Assessment

Ref	Property	Comments	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect
P1	Pier House	<p>This dwelling is situated on the coast around 2.5 km north of Skipness point on the Kintyre headland. The entrance and conservatory of the house is situated on the southeastern façade, which takes advantage of the focal views across the water towards the Isle of Bute, and southwards toward the distinctive peaks of the Isle of Arran. To the north and west the house is closely surrounded by woodland and intervening topography, which would screen all visibility to the proposed Development from the property itself, as demonstrated in the wireline. There would be some visibility of the proposed Development on the track accessing this property, similar to that illustrated for P2.</p> <p>The effect on views from this property would not approach the residential visual amenity threshold.</p>	Slight/ Negligible	Minor (Not significant)
P2	Culindrach	<p>This farmhouse is orientated to face south with a few windows on the western gable end which faces the site. As illustrated in the wirelines for P2, turbine 3 would be visible 1.9 km away on the horizon, mainly from the western elevation. Main views south across to Arran would not be affected. There would be similar views from the access track.</p> <p>The effect on views from this property would not approach the residential visual amenity threshold.</p>	Slight	Moderate (Not significant)

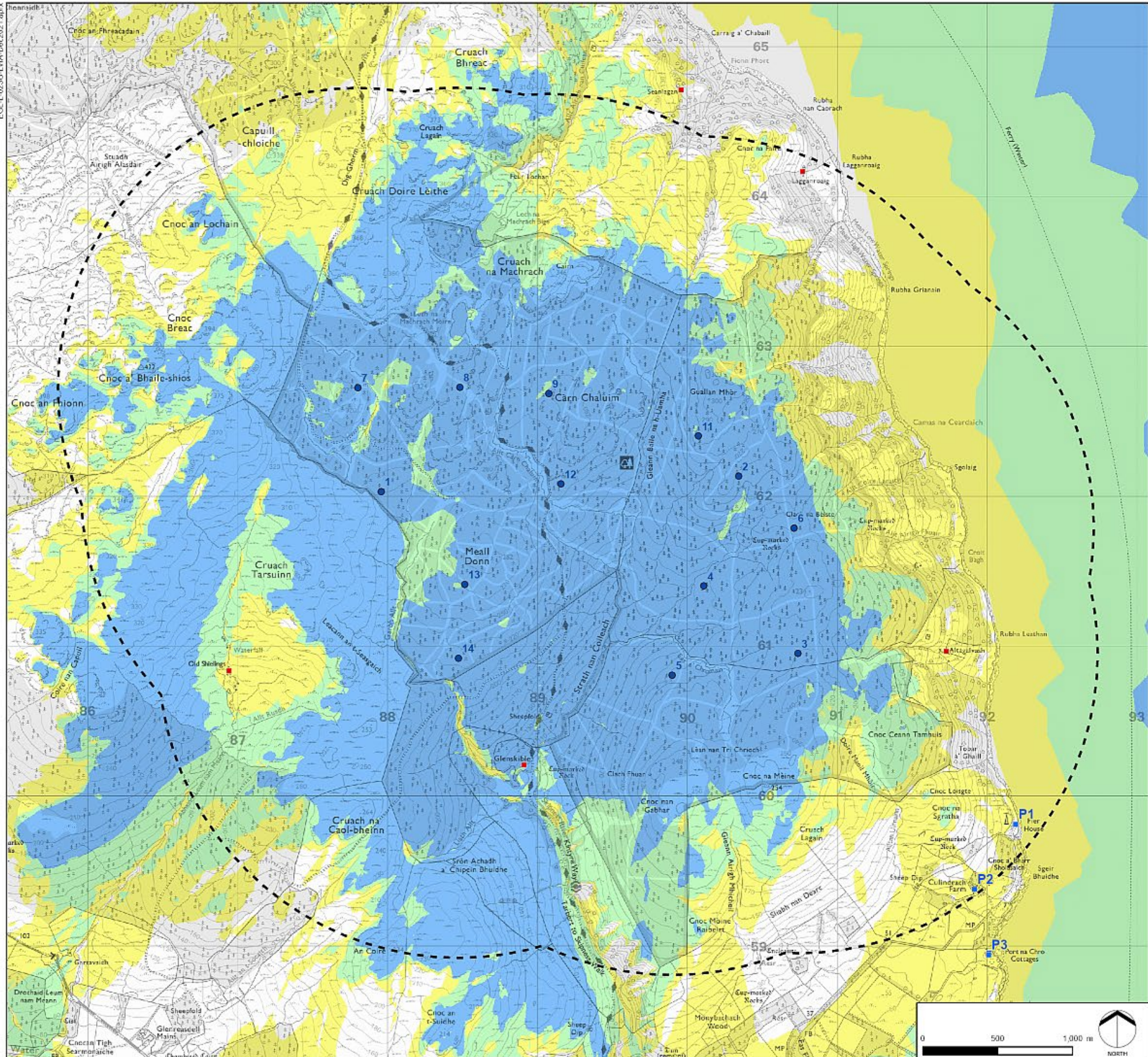
Ref	Property	Comments	Magnitude of Change	Level of Effect
P3	Port na Cro Cottages	This is a pair of two storey semi-detached holiday cottages situated on the coast approximately 1.6 km north of Skipness point. The properties face west with main views east to Bute. The cottages are set down into localised landform protected from southwesterly winds, but which screens any views to the north. Therefore the views north would not appear as indicated by the more generalised landform illustrated in the wirelines. It would be unlikely to gain views of the turbines above this localised landform and forestry/tree cover would likely screen those views.	Negligible as a result of localised screening.	Minor (Not significant)

A.3.4 Due to the extent of screening by landform, and further by tree cover and forestry, none of these three properties would experience impacts at the highest levels of magnitude and significant effects were not identified on any of these properties. The predicted effects on visual amenity and views at the properties are such, that it in no case have any of these properties approached or reached the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold.

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RVAA FIGURE 1

Residential Location Plan



KEY

- Proposed Earraghail Wind Turbines
- ⬜ 2km Distance Radius from Outermost Turbine
- Residential Locations**
- Uninhabitable
- Residential Receptor
- Zone of Theoretical Visibility to Blade Tip (180m)**
- 1 - 4 turbines may be visible
- 5 - 9 turbines may be visible
- 10 - 13 turbines may be visible

FIGURE DATA:

This figure has been based on the following data:

Layout file: EAR_obsvsBladeTipT5_MP_231221.shp
 Terrain data: EAR_T5_DTM_MP_300921.asc
 Viewer's eye height: 2m above ground level
 Calculation grid size: 5m

NOTES:

This drawing is based upon computer generated Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) studies produced using the Viewshed routine in the Visibility Analysis plugin for GIS.

The areas shown are the maximum theoretical visibility, taking topography into account.

This visibility map is based on a 'bare earth' model of the landform and does not show any effects of screening from obstacles such as buildings and vegetation.

The ZTV includes an adjustment that allows for Earth's curvature and light refraction. It is based on a DTM and has a 5m² resolution.

Projected Coordinate System: British National Grid

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