

Environmental Impact Assessment

Sandy Knowe Wind Farm Extension

Chapter 1: Introduction

ERG UK Holding Ltd



July 2022



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List of Technical Appendices

None

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
The Applicant	ERG UK Holding Limited
The Agent	Atmos Consulting Limited
Environmental Impact Assessment	Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a means of carrying out, in a systematic way, an assessment of the likely significant environmental effects from a development.
Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations	The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (EIA Regulations)
Environmental Impact Assessment Report	A document reporting the findings of the EIA and produced in accordance with the EIA Regulations
The Proposed Development	The Sandy Knowe Wind Farm Extension
The Proposed Development Footprint	The area within which the Proposed Development will be located
The Proposed Development Site	The full application boundary including Sandy Knowe Wind Farm and Sandy Knowe Wind Farm Extension

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment Report
NTS	Non-Technical Summary
ECU	Energy Consents Unit

1 Introduction

ERG UK Holding Ltd (ERG) or 'the Applicant' is seeking consent and deemed planning permission under Section 36 of the Electricity Act (Scotland) 1989 (as amended) for the construction and operation of a generating station known as Sandy Knowe Wind Farm Extension (the 'Proposed Development'). Should consent be granted it is requested that deemed planning permission under Section 57 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (the '1997 Act') also be deemed to be granted.

The Proposed Development lies adjacent to the Sandy Knowe Wind Farm which was consented in July 2020 by Scottish Ministers (ECU Ref: ECU00000660) and consists of 24 wind turbines (at 125m tip height) and associated infrastructure. The anticipated output of the Sandy Knowe Wind Farm is around 81.6MW and the project is currently under construction.

The Proposed Development will have an indicative output of approximately 21.6MW and an indicative battery storage capacity of 28.4MW. The combined export capacity will not exceed 50MW. The wind farm will be known as Sandy Knowe Wind Farm Extension.

The area within which the Proposed Development will be located is defined as the 'Proposed Development Footprint' which encompasses the Proposed Development infrastructure which includes any land used for turbines, hardstanding, site access or where construction work is carried out. It also includes areas of the consented Sandy Knowe Wind Farm such as consented / constructed tracks, temporary construction compounds, a borrow pit, and substation.

The Application Boundary, hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development Site' includes the Sandy Knowe Wind Farm and the Proposed Development Footprint.

The Proposed Development Site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) (approximate) NS 68631 10692 and is illustrated in Figure 1-1. The Proposed Development Footprint is centred on (NGR) (approximate) NS 69292 10825 and illustrated in Figure 1-2.

The Proposed Development will require consent by Scottish Ministers under Section 36 of the Electricity Act (Scotland) 1989 (as amended) given that the Proposed Development is viewed as an 'extension' to the Sandy Knowe Wind Farm.

This Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report has been prepared in accordance with the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (the 'EIA regulations') and accompanies an application to Scottish Ministers under Section 36 of the Electricity Act (Scotland) 1989 (as amended).

1.1 The Applicant

ERG Holding UK Ltd is a subsidiary of the ERG Group. The Proposed Development is an extension of the under construction Sandy Knowe Wind Farm. Sandy Knowe Wind Farm is owned by Sandy Knowe Wind Farm Limited (SKWFL). SKWFL is 100% owned by ERG UK Holding Ltd.

ERG Group is a European renewable power producer, with an office in Edinburgh, which has been operating successfully in the energy sector for 80 years.

In recent years ERG has transformed itself from one of Italy's leading oil and refining companies to one focussed wholly on green power. ERG is active in eight countries — in the UK, France, Germany, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Sweden and Italy, where it is now the leading wind energy operator owning and operating wind farms with a total installed capacity of approximately 2GW.

ERG is constructing wind farms in Scotland and owns and operates wind farms in Northern Ireland.

The Applicant is committed to investing in Dumfries and Galloway through renewable energy projects, with the community benefits and additional outcomes that renewable energy development can bring (including construction and post construction employment).

1.2 Proposed Development Footprint and Setting

1.2.1 Land use and context

The Proposed Development Footprint is located within the Dumfries and Galloway Council area, on the hills south of the A76 to the south-west of Kirkconnel. With a total area of approximately 300 hectares (ha), it is located on the northern fringes of the Southern Uplands, to the south of the undulating upland hills and plateaux area that extends towards the Clyde Valley to the north.

The Proposed Development Footprint is focused to the south of the Nithsdale on the lower-lying northern slopes of hills which include High Cairn (553m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD)) and White Hill (418m AOD). The surrounding area is largely characterised by moorland landcover with blocks of coniferous forest cover. Sandy Knowe Wind Farm, which strongly influences the surrounding landscape character is located to the immediate south-east of the Proposed Development Footprint.

Site access will be provided along the existing site access to Sandy Knowe Wind Farm, which joins the A76 to the north of the Proposed Development Footprint.

A number of small upland watercourses pass through the Proposed Development Footprint, including the Polhote Burn within the western part of the site. These are tributaries that flow north across the Proposed Development Footprint into the River Nith, which flows south-east and joins the Solway Firth to the south of Dumfries.

The closest settlement is Kirkconnel, located approximately 2.5km to the north-east; the larger settlement of New Cumnock is located approximately 6km to the north-west. There are also several individual properties located within close proximity, located off the A76 to the north.

The closest properties, High Cairn Cottage and Crockroy Cottage, are located approximately 900m north of the nearest turbines. These properties are financially involved in the Proposed Development. The nearest non-involved property (Polneul) is approximately 1.2km north of the nearest turbine.

There are a number of core paths within 5km of the Proposed Development Footprint. These includes a Core Path along the footpath to Libry Moor, to the east of the Proposed Development Footprint. The long-distance route, Southern Upland Way, is approximately 7km to the south east from the Proposed Development Footprint.

The turbines of the consented Sandy Knowe Wind Farm will sit to the east and south of the turbines of the Proposed Development Footprint.

1.2.2 Statutory Designations

There is one environmental designation contained within the Proposed Development Footprint, Polhote and Polneul Burns Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This earth sciences site is designated for the Upper Carboniferous (Namurian (part)-Westphalian) stratigraphy which provides important information on the early development of the Upper Sanquhar Coalfield.

Within 10 km of the Proposed Development the following designated sites are present:

- Fountainhead SSSI (1.9 km west) – Earth sciences – mineralogy of a disused antimony mine;
- Largrae Burn SSSI (2.5 km north) – Earth sciences – stratigraphy of Upper Carboniferous (Namurian (part)-Westphalian);
- Muirkirk and North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area (SPA) (4.6 km north) – breeding populations of Hen harrier *Circus cyaneus*, Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Peregrine *Falco peregrinus*, Short-eared owl *Asio flammeus* and Golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* and non-breeding populations of Hen harrier;
- North Lowther Uplands SSSI (4.6 km north) Biological – designated for breeding populations of Hen harrier and upland breeding bird assemblage;
- Back Wood SSSI (7.4 km east) Biological – Upland oak woodland; and
- Nith Bridge SSSI (9.4 km west) – Earth sciences – Quarternary of Scotland.

Figure 1-3 shows the context of the Proposed Development setting, illustrating environmental designations within 10km.

1.3 Purpose of the EIA Report

This EIA Report presents the findings of the EIA process by describing the Proposed Development, the current conditions at the Proposed Development Site and the likely environmental effects which may result from the construction and operation of the Proposed Development.

Where appropriate, mitigation measures designed to avoid, reduce or offset potentially significant effects are proposed and residual effects (those effects that are expected to remain following implementation of mitigation measures) are presented.

As required by the EIA Regulations, the findings and conclusions of the EIA are summarised in a standalone, easily accessible, Non-Technical Summary (NTS). This enables anyone with an interest in the Proposed Development to understand and access information on its potential environmental effects.

The scope of the EIA was determined through a Scoping Opinion from the Energy Consents Unit (ECU) on behalf of the Scottish Ministers in October 2021 (Ref: ECU00003274) as outlined in Chapter 2.

1.4 Structure of the EIA Report

The EIA Report is structured as follows:

- Volume 1: EIA Main Text;
- Volume 2: Technical Appendices;
- Volume 3: Figures;
- Volume 4: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Figures and Visualisations;
- Volume 5: Confidential Annex; and
- Volume 6: Non-Technical Summary.

The EIA Report is structured around the following chapter headings:

- Chapter 1: Introduction;
- Chapter 2: EIA Approach & Methodology;
- Chapter 3: Description of Development and Design Evolution;
- Chapter 4: Planning and Energy Policy;
- Chapter 5: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Chapter 6: Ecology;
- Chapter 7: Ornithology;
- Chapter 8: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Soils;
- Chapter 9: Transport and Access;
- Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage;
- Chapter 11: Noise;
- Chapter 12: Socio-economics, Tourism and Recreation;
- Chapter 13: Other Considerations; and
- Chapter 14: Schedule of Mitigation and Residual Effects.

1.5 The EIA Team

The EIA was undertaken by Atmos Consulting with assistance from specialist consultants listed in Table 1-1. All are suitably qualified and competent experts in their field, as is required under the EIA Regulations.

Table 1-1: EIA Team

EIA Subject	Company	Statement of Competency
Planning Ecology Ornithology Other Issues Socio-economics	Atmos Consulting	Atmos has a proven track record in the onshore wind sector built up over 15 years of experience working in the industry and leading EIA projects. All in the team are appropriately qualified and assessments are overseen by experts with at least ten years experience in their field.
Landscape and Visual	Land Use Consultants (LUC)	LUC has a track record of over 50 years in the planning and environmental sector. They are experienced at undertaking robust and defensible landscape and visual impact assessments, working alongside the development team to embed mitigation into design wherever possible.

EIA Subject	Company	Statement of Competency
Cultural Heritage	AOC Archaeology	AOC is a Registered Organisation of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists. AOC is ISO 9001:2015 accredited. The staff are qualified professional archaeologists and members of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) with extensive experience of the preparation of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Impact Assessments for large scale rural and urban developments.
Hydrology, Geology and Hydrogeology	John Ferry	Ferry Hydro through John Ferry, a Chartered hydrogeologist, has provided hydrology, hydrogeology, hydro-ecology and geology advice on over 65 wind farms at the pre-consent, planning and post planning construction stage.
Peat	East Point Geo	With over twenty years' experience in understanding ground conditions, East Point Geo provide practical application of geology, geophysics, geomorphology, geotechnics and GIS for engineering projects.
Traffic and Transport	Systra	Systra's team has assisted both Transport Scotland and Highways England in the preparation of guidelines for assessing the impacts of wind farm developments and over 14 years' experience working on EIA transport Chapters for onshore wind in Scotland. The team hold the appropriate qualifications and Charterships.
Noise	Hayes McKenzie	Hayes McKenzie Partnership Ltd has been involved with over 1000 onshore wind projects in the UK and overseas at the planning, post-planning and operational stages of development as well at public inquiry. Hayes McKenzie is a member of the UK Association of Noise Consultants (ANC). All work is carried out in line with recognised industry standards, and best practice of the IOA and ANC.
Tourism and recreation	Mark Kummerer (MKA Economics)	Mark Kummerer is a member of the Economic Development Association Scotland (EDAS), former Board Director with Forth Valley Social Enterprise (FVSE) and a current Planning Aid Scotland (PAS) Volunteer, has 23 years post qualifying economic development consultancy experience and through his various consultancy roles he brings high level experience in economic development and regeneration projects.

1.6 Additional Documents

1.6.1 Planning Statement

The Planning Statement is a key document which enables the Applicant to demonstrate the benefits of the proposed development and assess it against policy background and policy requirements including the relevant policy provisions of the statutory Development Plan and any Supplementary Guidance relevant to Onshore Wind.

In contrast to the Planning Policy EIA Report Chapter which summarises the policy which has informed the design of the Proposed Development, the Planning Statement assesses the Proposed Development against adopted and emerging planning policies and other material considerations, setting out the arguments for the need for the Proposed Development and concluding with recommendations about the overall acceptability of the proposal in relation to the planning context.

1.6.2 Design and Access Statement

Although a Design and Access Statement is required with planning applications for Major Developments, it is good practice to include a Design and Access Statement for applications under Section 36 of the Electricity Act.

The Design and Access Statement explains the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the Proposed Development and demonstrates the evolution of the design and how the context of the development has influenced the design.

It sets out how the Proposed Development is considered a suitable development for the site and its setting and aims to demonstrate that the Proposed Development can be adequately accessed by its prospective users.

1.6.3 Pre-Application Consultation Report

The purpose of the Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) exercise is to engage with local communities, so they are better informed about major and national development proposals and have an opportunity to contribute their views before the planning application is submitted to the planning authority.

The PAC seeks to improve the quality of planning applications, mitigate negative effects where possible, address misunderstandings, and air and deal with any community issues that can be tackled.

A Pre-Application Consultation Report (PACR) is submitted alongside this EIA Report as a supporting document to the planning application for the Proposed Development. The PACR demonstrates the scope of consultation undertaken with the community and how feedback has been considered, in accordance with legislation and requirements.

1.7 Viewing the EIA Report

The Electricity Works (Miscellaneous Temporary Modifications) (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 notes temporary amendments to the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017. During the Emergency Period there is a temporary relaxation to the requirement that copies of the EIA Report are available for inspection at a place or address.

The Emergency Period means the period beginning on 24 April 2020 and ending on the date on which Part 1 of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 expires in accordance with section 12 of that Act; currently on 30 September 2022.

Consequently, due to COVID-19 restrictions hard copies will not be available at this time however electronic copies of the EIAR can be found on the Energy Consents Unit's website at www.energyconsents.scot and on the Applicant's website at <https://sandyknowewindfarm.com/>

1.8 Purchasing a Copy of the EIA Report

The EIA Report can also be purchased from the Applicant (telephone: +44 141 212 7222 / email: Jennifer.peltier@invictapa.co.uk), either in digital or hard copy. Charges for copies are:

- £900 for a paper hard copy (Full EIA and Supporting Documents, including Non-Technical Summary);
- £15 a paper hard copy of the Non-Technical Summary; or
- £10 for a CD/USB with all documents.

1.9 References

European Council (EC) (1985). *Directive on Environmental Assessment (85/337/EEC) as amended by Directive 97/11/EC and Directive 2014/52/EU*. European Union, Brussels.

Scottish Government (2017). Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) Regulations [online] 2017 OQPS, available at; <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/102/contents/made> [accessed 20/12/2021]

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Scottish Government, (2006). *The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006*. [Online] OQPS, available at; <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2006/17/contents> [accessed 20/12/2021]

