

Hill of Fare Wind Farm Proposal

Report on feedback



Image: Minor road near The Neuk

June 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of this report

RES has considerable experience in developing onshore wind projects throughout the UK and believes in the importance of community consultation to identify issues and concerns, as well as benefits and opportunities, which can be considered when developing and designing a project.

The purpose of this report is to summarise the written feedback received from the community during the October 2022 public exhibitions and subsequent consultation period regarding the design of the proposed development and highlight any changes that have been made to the proposal since. Each section focuses on a key topic area and summarises the key themes within the feedback, followed by RES' response.

1.2 October 2022 exhibitions and consultation

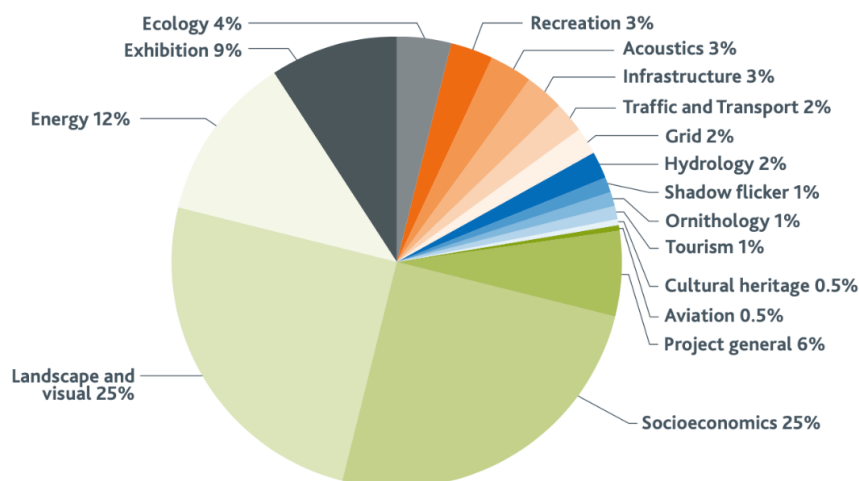
RES held four public exhibition events in the local area (Crathes, Echt, Midmar and Torphins) in October 2022 as part of its pre-application consultation on the proposed Hill of Fare Wind Farm. These events provided people with the opportunity to learn more about the project, discuss the proposal with the project team, and provide written feedback to RES on the initial early stage (scoping) design.

A range of information was made available, including visualisations prepared to NatureScot guidance which helped to give an impression of what the site could look like from different viewpoints in the area. RES staff were on hand to discuss the proposal and answer any questions. A four-week consultation period followed the exhibitions for people to submit written feedback to RES on the proposal and early stage design. More than 370 people attended the events and over 380 comments forms were received by the time that the consultation period closed - providing almost 3,000 comments across a variety of topics.

1.3 Topical breakdown of comments

The graph below shows the balance of topical comments received, with the following of most interest:

- **Socioeconomics** (community benefit, supply chain)
- **Landscape and visual** (turbine height, site location)
- **Energy** (onshore wind, other technologies)
- **Exhibition** (format, staff, communications)
- **Ecology** (wildlife and species, habitat)
- **Recreation** (access, activities and use of hill)
- **Acoustics** (predicted sound levels)
- **Infrastructure** (battery storage, substation, tracks)



RES also included a multiple-choice question on the comments form that asked if the wind farm went ahead as currently designed (scoping layout), what people thought about the turbine and infrastructure layout. The breakdown of responses is as follows: 71% responded that they had concerns about the proposed layout; 8% responded that they didn't like wind farms in general; 8% responded that they were neutral to the proposed layout; 8% responded that they were happy with the proposed layout; and, 5% didn't answer the question.

The consultation feedback submitted to RES has been considered by the project team as part of the design development, in addition to feedback from key consultees and the findings from the detailed technical and environmental studies that have been undertaken. We are grateful to everyone who took the time to engage with us on the proposal.

2. SOCIOECONOMIC feedback

2.1 Key themes

Approximately 25% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 745 topical comments) focused on socioeconomics in relation to the proposal. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Community benefit ideas** (approximately 47% of socioeconomic feedback): improved walking and cycling paths on the hill and local area; LEDS (Local Electricity Discount Scheme); home eco measures (insulation, solar panels); funding for schools, education initiatives, renewables education; improved parking for hill access; funding for village halls; electric vehicle charging facilities within community; funding towards installation of electric vehicle charge points; biodiversity initiatives (peatland, trees, flowers); social welfare support, senior citizen support, hardship funds; upgraded or new sports facilities; skills and employment initiatives; shared ownership; improved broadband; improved transport.
- **Community benefit - general** (approximately 25% of socioeconomic feedback): no ideas or no comment; don't want wind farm; community benefit doesn't offset impacts; would like more information on community benefit; don't believe there will be any community benefit.
- **Community benefit area** (approximately 22% of socioeconomic feedback): areas closest to proposal should benefit; all areas impacted should benefit; disagree that areas closest to proposal should benefit; would like more information on eligible areas; wider consultation on area of benefit.
- **Supply chain** (approximately 6% of socioeconomic feedback): majority of skilled workers will not be local; must use local companies and materials; limited opportunities for inward investment; would like more information on jobs and supply chain opportunities.

2.2 RES response to socioeconomic feedback

Should the project be consented, a community benefit package will be established to support the communities who host, and are closest to, the project.

We take a tailored approach and consult with the local community, both pre-planning and post-consent (should the project be granted planning permission), to gain an understanding of the local priorities and to seek suggestions for projects that will help to secure long-term economic, social and environmental benefits for the area. This approach ensures the community benefits package that is delivered is aligned with the priorities of the local community. For instance, the package could include RES' Local Electricity Discount Scheme (LEDS) or provide funding for projects that sit outside the parameters of a traditional application-based fund.

Should the project receive consent, the area of benefit for Hill of Fare Wind Farm will be determined in consultation with locally elected representatives from the closest communities.

The landowner has confirmed agreement in principle to car-parking facilities at the site entrance. We continue to explore other potential opportunities to support access and recreation across the site. We are also investigating the potential for renovating the old shooting lodge on the site for use as a place of shelter and visitor information.

RES is also committed to ensuring that, wherever reasonably practicable, local contractors and employees are used in all aspects of wind farm development. Based on the updated design, the Hill of Fare Wind Farm proposal is predicted to deliver approximately £4.4 million of inward investment to the area in the form of jobs, employment, and use of local services during the development, construction and first year of operation.

3. LANDSCAPE and VISUAL feedback

3.1 Key themes

Approximately 25% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 740 topical comments) focused on the landscape and visual aspect of the proposal. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Turbine height** (approximately 27% of landscape and visual feedback): turbines too big; turbines tallest in Scotland or the UK and were ‘untested’; turbines too big for a hill; smaller turbines would be better; turbine height contradicts Aberdeenshire Council’s 2014 Strategic Landscape Capacity Assessment for Wind in Aberdeenshire.
- **General comments** (approximately 24% of landscape and visual feedback): too visible over wide area; will spoil views; general concerns about visual impact; proposal was out of proportion; would like wirelines from property.
- **Site location** (approximately 15% of landscape and visual feedback): Hill of Fare, specifically, was not a suitable location; Aberdeenshire Council’s 2014 Landscape Assessment confirmed Hill of Fare wasn’t suitable.
- **Residential amenity** (approximately 12% of landscape and visual feedback): site is too close to populated areas; site will be visible from local properties; residential amenity will be affected.
- **Exhibition visualisations** (approximately 8% of landscape and visual feedback): visualisations were unrealistic or misleading; visualisations were not to scale; more viewpoints should have been included.
- **Aviation lighting** (approximately 5% of landscape and visual feedback): concerned about aviation lighting; aviation lighting will cause light pollution.
- **Turbine numbers** (approximately 4% of landscape and visual feedback): visual impact from too many turbines; less turbines would be more acceptable.
- **Infrastructure** (approximately 2% of landscape and visual feedback): would like visualisations of grid connection; battery storage and substation must be screened; would like visualisations of tracks.
- **Turbine layout** (approximately 2% of landscape and visual feedback): impact from turbine layout must be minimised.
- **Cumulative impact** (approximately 1% of landscape and visual feedback): already enough wind farms.

3.2 RES response to landscape and visual feedback

During the initial feasibility and site assessment work we considered that the site had the potential for 17 x 250m high turbines. This was the baseline that we started with to maximise the potential generation capability of the site. Having since considered the consultation feedback received from key consultees and the local community, tip heights have been reduced to a mix of 180m and 200m tip heights.

Wind farms are quite often sited on hills or areas of higher ground in Scotland as the wind regime tends to be better in these locations - with smoother and less interrupted wind. However, hills tend to create more visible sites and so the turbine height needs to be assessed accordingly from a landscape and visual perspective to understand if the proposal may be appropriate from a planning perspective.

The Scottish Government’s Onshore Wind Policy Statement, published in December 2022, states in paragraph 3.6.1 that *“Meeting our climate targets will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society. This means ensuring the right development happens in the right place. Meeting the ambition of a minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 will require taller and more efficient turbines. This will change the landscape.”* In this regard, elements of the Aberdeenshire Council 2014 assessment may be considered to be out of date. Nonetheless, it is recognised that the assessment remains a useful starting point in considering the nature and characteristics of the landscape, which can be used as part of a site specific appraisal of potential effects, such as that which is being undertaken as part of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for the project.

The Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) is an important component of the wider Landscape and Visual Assessment which is undertaken as part of the EIA. Following feedback through the Scoping process and public consultations we have been working carefully with the design to minimise potential impacts of the site on residential amenity by increasing the separation distance from settlements and residential properties and exploring changes to the turbine height. At Scoping, it was confirmed that all properties within 2km of a proposed turbine in the final development area would be included within a standalone Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) that would accompany the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. This RVAA will be undertaken shortly, once the design is fully finalised, and properties within 2km will be contacted directly to request access to help inform the findings of the RVAA.

Our landscape architects have undertaken extensive assessment work to inform the design development and turbine layout. Each turbine location has moved to varying degrees to refine the design and minimise impacts wherever possible. We are looking to achieve a design that strikes an acceptable balance between the visibility of the proposal and its ability to generate significant amounts of renewable energy. Ultimately, the acceptability of this design will be assessed by the determining authority in relation to current energy policy and planning requirements having considered feedback from consultees as well as representations by members of the community and wider public.

At our October 2022 public exhibition events we provided six visualisation boards showing how the proposal may look based on the early scoping design and layout from six viewpoints within the local area. All visualisations were and will continue to be produced to well established and recognised standards set by NatureScot. In the case of the October 2022 public exhibition events, the visualisations were presented illustrating a 90-degree horizontal view which helps provide wider landscape context. At this final suite of public exhibition events we have provided some narrower 53.5 degree horizontal views within the visualisations. Both replicate the style of visualisations that will be included within the application submission.

Aviation lighting on turbines at or above 150m is set at 2,000 candela on the nacelles. In some circumstances, not all turbines within a wind farm are required to be lit. Furthermore, the aviation lighting is designed to focus the light across and upwards for the attention of aircraft rather than downward to those at ground level. The light intensity varies in response to weather conditions and visibility (via an atmospheric conditions and visibility sensor on the turbine) - with lighting dimmed to 10% of their intensity in good visibility (typically greater than 5km) but maximised in cloudy or foggy weather (where visibility is typically less than 5km). We will be consulting with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to agree a lighting strategy with them. The proposed lighting strategy will be presented in the planning application which will also include a night-time assessment and visualisations.

4. ENERGY feedback

4.1 Key themes

Approximately 12% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 360 topical comments) focused on various themes around types of energy generation and the needs case for onshore wind. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Offshore wind** (approximately 35% of energy feedback): prefer offshore wind to onshore; offshore wind is more efficient; offshore wind has less visual impact; these size of turbines should be offshore.
- **Cost of electricity** (approximately 18% of energy feedback): energy prices continue to rise/no reduction in electricity prices; there has been no change in electricity price; require reform to energy pricing policy; would like further information.
- **Other technologies** (approximately 16% of energy feedback): prefer other technologies (hydro, marine, solar, nuclear); would prefer to see small scale generation.
- **General comments** (approximately 12% of energy feedback): benefits of onshore wind have to outweigh impacts.
- **Onshore wind needs case** (approximately 9% of energy feedback): there are enough wind farms; energy policy needs re-evaluated; need more onshore wind farms.
- **Carbon payback** (approximately 7% of energy feedback): would like more information on carbon payback; not convinced about carbon payback from proposal.
- **Onshore wind reliability** (approximately 3% of energy feedback): onshore wind farms are unreliable and intermittent; wind farms need back-up for when they're not generating; would like more information on equivalent number of homes powered figure.

4.2 RES response to energy feedback

We are in a climate emergency, cost of living crisis and face issues with security of energy supply. Onshore wind can address all of these. This is recognised by the Scottish Government's National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) which was published in February 2023.

Onshore wind plays an important part in creating a balanced energy mix and is required alongside other technologies, all of which have their merits in relation to cost, efficiency, environmental or social benefits. In response to the climate emergency the focus on developing more onshore wind within Scotland has only strengthened - with national targets now set for installing 20GW of onshore wind across Scotland by 2030 to help towards meeting Net Zero carbon emissions by 2045.

Onshore wind, alongside other renewable energy technologies, can generate the cheapest form of new electricity generation. With the rising cost of living and climate change emergency, it is imperative that we deliver electricity efficiently and at lowest cost to the consumer.

Typically, wind farms pay back the carbon within 1-3 years and operate carbon free thereafter. A carbon balance assessment will be provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report which will accompany the planning application.

The Hill of Fare Wind Farm proposal includes a battery Energy Storage System (BESS) which is anticipated to have a storage capacity akin to the wind farm i.e., a power output capacity of 100MW and a storage energy capacity of around 200MWh (megawatt hours). The BESS would help maximise generation capacity and efficiency of the site.

5. ECOLOGY feedback

5.1 Key themes

Approximately 4% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 120 topical comments) focused on ecology. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Wildlife** (approximately 43% of ecology feedback): concerns about potential impact on wildlife and specific species (squirrels, deer, bats, bees, moths, butterflies, pine martens, amphibians).
- **General comments** (approximately 35% of ecology feedback): general concerns about impact on environment and hill land; concerns that survey work inadequate.
- **Habitat** (approximately 22% of ecology feedback): concerns about impact on habitat.

5.2 RES response to ecology feedback

Protecting and minimising any potential direct or indirect impacts on local wildlife and their habitats is of utmost importance and we take this responsibility seriously. We look to mitigate any potential effects of the development during construction and operation on the habitats and protected species that are found to be present or active within the Site.

A wide range of detailed ecological surveys have been undertaken by qualified ecologists as part of the non-avian Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA). The non-avian Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) survey and assessment work is an extensive undertaking, and the findings will be written up in the coming months as part of a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), which accompanies the planning application, that Scottish ministers will take into account when deciding whether or not to grant consent for the project. The planning application and associated documents such as the EclA and survey data (excluding any confidential annexes) will become available for public viewing and comment as part of the formal consultation period which will be run by the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit once the planning application is submitted.

We have also been in consultation with relevant consultees, including Aberdeenshire Council, NatureScot, RSPB Scotland, North East Raptor Study Group, and the Dee District Salmon Fishery Board with regard to designated sites, protected areas and protected species.

As part of the project design we are developing a Habitat Restoration and Management Plan which will set out the measures being proposed for the site, including a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan which will focus on improving the biodiversity already found on the site beyond offsetting any potential loss of biodiversity from the development. Although any enhancement measures proposed will look to offset potential impacts of the project, primarily they will seek to complement the existing conditions for flora and fauna while expanding their effective reach as much as is practicable.

6. RECREATION (ACCESS) feedback

6.1 Key themes

Approximately 3% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 100 topical comments) focused on recreation in relation to access. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Access plans** (approximately 41% of recreation feedback): concerns about potential impact on access to the site for recreation during construction and operations; would like information on access plans.
- **Hill activities** (approximately 35% of recreation feedback): concerns about impact on walking, cycling running and skiing.
- **General comments** (approximately 24% of recreation feedback): Hill of Fare is an important hill for recreation and an important amenity for the local community.

6.2 RES response to recreation (access) feedback

We recognise that the Hill of Fare is a popular hill for recreation in the area, particularly the eastern portion of the site which lies away from the wind turbine development area but will provide the main access onto the site from the B977 public road. As such, the design has considered opportunities to enhance the current recreational access facilities on the site to ensure that public access is maintained where possible.

During construction of any infrastructure project, the developer has a responsibility to ensure that the public is kept safe from any construction activity on the site. This inevitably means that access to some parts of the wind farm site will be restricted in the interests of public safety during construction of the project. There is an eroded path from the site entrance to the top of Meikle Tap which may serve as a diversionary route away from the forest road during construction. There may be potential for upgrading this path as a result.

Any temporary restrictions required during construction for health and safety requirements will be managed by an Access Management Plan, which would be developed pre-construction, and temporary diversions of any known routes will be put in place with agreement from Aberdeenshire Council.

Once the wind farm is operational, the statutory Scottish 'right to roam' (Land Reform [Scotland] Act 2003) will apply and the public will have full access to the site via non-vehicular means.

7. ACOUSTICS feedback

7.1 Key themes

Approximately 3% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 98 topical comments) focused on acoustics. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Acoustic impact** (approximately 40% of acoustic feedback): concerns about potential acoustic impact.
- **Predicted levels** (approximately 30% of acoustic feedback): seeking information on potential acoustic impact and predicted levels.
- **General** (approximately 19% of acoustic feedback): a range of concerns such as construction acoustic, acoustic mapping, acoustic effect on wildlife.
- **Residential amenity** (approximately 11% of acoustic feedback): specific concerns about potential acoustic impact on amenity.

7.2 RES response to acoustic feedback

The acoustic profile of the turbines is one of many important considerations that has been assessed and carefully managed as part of the site design. The design process will ensure that the project doesn't exceed the strict acoustic limits which will be set within the planning conditions should consent be granted. These limits correspond to existing background acoustic levels typical in the local area, which will control the wind farm acoustics in relation to nearby residential properties.

Operation and construction acoustic assessments and prediction are undertaken in accordance with the relevant standards, current assessment methodologies and best practice as determined by the regulatory bodies, which include Aberdeenshire Council, the Scottish Government and the UK Institute of Acoustics.

In consultation with Aberdeenshire Council, we have undertaken a background sound survey at a number of locations around the site to measure the existing background sound levels. The results of the background sound survey are being analysed by our acoustics team and will inform the setting of the sound immission limits for the operation of the wind farm. These limits will be agreed with the regulatory authority, and the site will be required to comply with these strict noise limits set within planning conditions.

The acoustic impact of the wind farm will be modelled and the output of this modelled work will be presented in the acoustic chapter of the extensive Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) which will accompany the planning application.

8. INFRASTRUCTURE feedback

8.1 Key themes

Approximately 3% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 82 topical comments) focused on the site infrastructure. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Battery storage** (approximately 50% of infrastructure feedback): would like more information on battery storage location and battery storage generally; concerns about safety - specifically fire risk.
- **Substation** (approximately 21% of infrastructure feedback): would like more information on substation location.
- **Access tracks** (approximately 12% of infrastructure feedback): would like more information on access tracks - width, location.
- **Turbine infrastructure** (approximately 10% of infrastructure feedback): would like more information on turbine foundations, depths and footprint; concerns about safety - toppling over, fire risk; would like more information on turbine model.
- **General comments** (approximately 7% of infrastructure feedback): general comments about area covered by infrastructure and requirement for more information.

8.2 RES response to infrastructure feedback

The site boundary has been extended (since the scoping design) to include an area to the south of the site for the location of the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and substation - both of which can be seen on the Infrastructure map on the 'Infrastructure and constraints maps' exhibition board.

The risk of fire at a BESS is low but will be considered and mitigated in the design of the storage general arrangement and consideration of the monitoring and fire suppression system. The BESS is optimised with appropriate container spacing to minimise the risk of propagation across the facility in the unlikely event of a fire. Additionally, fire breaks or spacing from forestry is designed again to minimise fire propagation. A battery management system is also implemented for continuous monitoring of the BESS through its lifetime. The containers housing the batteries typically include dry aerosol fire suppression solutions, favoured over water suppression, as they are successful at reaching all areas within containers and don't require a dedicated water supply.

The site boundary has been extended to include the access route from the east of the site. One of the key benefits of the Hill of Fare site is its extensive network of existing tracks which will be utilised within the design wherever possible. Whilst there will be a need to widen and re-grade some of the existing tracks, this will significantly reduce the extent of new tracks required. In areas where new ground requires to be broken, best practice will be followed to minimise and mitigate any potential impacts - and reinstatement work undertaken in a way that helps encourage disturbed ground to recover well.

Further information regarding the turbine infrastructure will be provided within the planning application submission.

9. TRAFFIC and TRANSPORT feedback

9.1 Key themes

Approximately 2% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 61 topical comments) focused on traffic and transport. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Potential disruption** (approximately 41% of traffic and transport feedback): concerns about potential disruption from construction traffic.
- **Turbine deliveries** (approximately 23% of traffic and transport feedback): concerns about potential disruption from turbine deliveries; concerns about turbine delivery route.
- **General comments** (approximately 18% of traffic and transport feedback): general concerns about volume of construction traffic; potential road damage.
- **Safety** (approximately 10% of traffic and transport feedback): concerns about safety of pedestrians and road users with increased traffic volumes during construction.
- **Site access** (approximately 8% of traffic and transport feedback): would like more information on site access point.

9.2 RES response to traffic and transport feedback

RES has commissioned surveys to understand traffic flows and volumes on local roads and assess any potential impacts of construction traffic on the local area. This has enabled RES to identify potential pinch points, bottle-necks, areas which will require road improvements, and areas which may require traffic management and will help in developing mitigation strategies. The data collected from the traffic surveys will be presented in the Traffic and Transport chapter of the extensive Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) that will accompany the planning application.

Should the project be consented, a detailed Traffic Management Plan would be developed and agreed with Aberdeenshire Council in consultation with Police Scotland, setting out the steps that RES would take to help mitigate any potential impacts on local traffic and road users and ensure road safety. Some examples of measures that have been taken by RES on other construction projects include: introducing a reducing speed limit for project construction traffic along certain stretches of road; avoiding turbine deliveries between school-drop off and pick-up and/or rush-hours; delivering turbine components at night-time; and, agreeing certain 'routes to site' for daily construction traffic.

As part of the traffic assessment and data-gathering process RES has also commissioned turbine delivery-specific surveys - including swept path analysis along the proposed turbine delivery route as well as detailed assessment of the site access point with regard to visibility splays and safety requirements.

The abnormal load vehicles which deliver the longer turbine components (primarily blades and towers) are specialised multi-axle vehicles, some of which can raise their load height to clear walls and bridges) that are driven by experienced operators. These vehicles have a considerable ability to precisely navigate and manoeuvre along a wide range of roads. Should the project be consented, further detailed survey work and drive-throughs along the route will be undertaken by RES and the turbine haulier to assess any more challenging stretches of the delivery route and ensure that they can be safely navigated.

RES often establishes local Community Liaison Groups (CLGs) during the construction phase of a wind farm to support regular engagement with the local Community Councils and wider public - in addition to project communications and updates via local newsletters and the project website. This approach ensures that questions and concerns or opportunities can be raised to RES and encourages a constructive dialogue to ensure that the project is delivered with consideration to the local community.

RES' construction team has a wealth of experience in managing construction traffic, having built many wind farms within Scotland and across the UK and Ireland, and works closely with the local community to minimise disruption wherever possible. RES also has a strong track record for safety on its projects and within the company's culture. In fact, RES recently won Health and Safety Team of the Year at the 2022 Safety and Health Excellence (SHE) Awards.

10. GRID CONNECTION feedback

10.1 Key themes

Approximately 2% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 56 topical comments) focused on the grid connection. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Grid route** (approximately 43% of grid connection feedback): would like more information on the grid route.
- **General comments** (approximately 23% of grid connection feedback): general comments regarding more information on connection plans; comments about grid application process and how residents will be informed.
- **Grid connection method** (approximately 21% of grid connection feedback): would like more information on the grid connection method; connection should be routed underground; concerns about potential pylons.
- **Grid capacity** (approximately 13% of grid connection feedback): concerns about whether enough capacity on the grid to prevent constraints.

10.2 RES response to grid connection feedback

RES has been advised by the Transmission Owner (TO) that the proposed wind farm will connect to the National Grid via a 132kV trident overhead wood pole line into Fetteresso substation to the south east of the site.

The grid network operators are currently upgrading the grid infrastructure in the country and RES will be required to pay transmission connection charges to National Grid during operation of the wind farm for the grid connection. We are currently considering a grid offer and consulting with the TO, in this case Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) Transmission.

SSEN, as the TO, is responsible for maintaining and investing in the grid in the north of Scotland. This includes designing connections for transmission grid applications, such as that for the Hill of Fare proposal, and submitting the grid route planning applications for these connections. As such, the grid route is subject to a separate planning application from the wind farm - and will be submitted as a separate Section 37 planning application under the Electricity Act by the TO once they have finalised their design.

Once the planning application for the grid route is submitted, there will be a consultation period undertaken by the TO during which details of the route and method will be available for the public to provide comment to the TO as part of the planning process. Indicative details of the anticipated route of the grid connection for the project will also be included by RES within the Project Description chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) which will accompany the Hill of Fare Wind Farm proposal planning application.

The proposal for Hill of Fare Wind Farm has no direct association with grid works currently being undertaken in the area.

11. HYDROLOGY and HYDROGEOLOGY feedback

11.1 Key themes

Approximately 2% of all of the topical feedback received (approximately 46 topical comments) focused on the hydrology and hydrogeology. The key themes and comments raised within the feedback were:

- **Private water supplies** (approximately 52% of hydrology and hydrogeology feedback): concerns about potential impact on private water supplies; would like more information on how private water supplies will be protected; would like a wider area surveyed.
- **Peat** (approximately 48% of hydrology and hydrogeology feedback): concerns about carbon release from damaged peat; concerned about disturbance to peat; would like more information on infrastructure siting to avoid peat.

11.2 RES response to hydrology and hydrogeology feedback

RES has collected Private Water Supply (PWS) data from Aberdeenshire Council and holdings within Dunecht Estate and openly consulted members of the public in the surrounding area. In May 2023, RES issued a PWS 'call for information' in a newsletter to over 1,700 households in the local area - inviting local residents who had private water supplies linked to Hill of Fare to get in touch with RES' hydrology consultants, EnviroCentre (who were undertaking the hydrology work on the site and assessing private water supplies) and provide details of their private water supplies so that RES could ensure all supplies were checked.

The purpose of collecting PWS information has been to establish the PWS source locations and source types in order to inform the PWS assessment that will be presented in the EIAR. The assessment's findings will inform what further work would be required, if any, which may include baseline monitoring of relevant PWS, before, during and after construction. Any work associated with PWS post consent will be enforced through condition and subject to agreement with Aberdeenshire Council.

Private Water Supply sources surrounding Hill of Fare consist of surface watercourses, wells intercepting near surface water/springs as well as boreholes intercepting groundwater within bedrock. The bedrock geology within the proposed development site at Hill of Fare comprises granite (leucogranite and microgranite) from the Hill of Fare Intrusion, where groundwater can be present within fractures and the near surface weathered zone. The fracture network is considered to be highly heterogenous with limited wider connectivity within the bedrock mass. Presence of superficial deposits is limited to peat in flatter areas, and glacial till on lower and gentler slopes.

Surrounding the Hill of Fare Intrusion are a number of other bedrock units, including other igneous bedrock (microgranodiorite, granodiorite, tonalite and quartz-diorite) and metamorphic bedrock to the south (semipelite, pelite and psammite). These various bedrock units will have distinct groundwater character from, and limited connectivity with, the Hill of Fare Intrusion. Given the nature of the bedrock underlying the development site, and the limited depth and extent of superficial cover, it is considered that any impacts on groundwater resulting from the proposed development would be limited, and spatially restricted to the footprint of the development infrastructure and immediate surrounds. As outlined above, full assessment of PWS will be presented in the EIAR, along with any recommendations for mitigation and monitoring.

Peat depth surveys and assessments have been undertaken. Peat is not uniform across the site and deeper peat is being avoided wherever possible. Typically, wind farms pay back the carbon within 1-3 years and operate carbon free thereafter. A carbon balance assessment will be provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) that will accompany the planning application. This will also be supported by a Peat Management Plan and an outline Habitat Management Plan.

12. OTHER TOPICAL and GENERAL PROJECT feedback

12.1 Summary of other topical feedback

Approximately 4% of the remaining topical feedback (approximately 125 topical comments) focused on the following topics: Ornithology, Shadow flicker, Tourism, Cultural heritage, and Aviation.

12.2 Summary of general project feedback

Approximately 6% of the remaining topical feedback (approximately 180 topical comments) focused on a wider range of general comments, for example: project economics, operation phase, decommissioning phase, timescales, telecoms.

Approximately 9% of the remaining topical feedback (approximately 247 comments) focused on the exhibition events, for example: exhibition format; exhibition staff; communications; and a range of general comments (positive, negative, and neutral) on the exhibition events.

12.3 RES response to other topical and general project feedback

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are a compulsory part of the planning and consenting process for wind farms. The purpose of an EIA is to investigate and mitigate any potential effects of a development on the natural, physical and human environment.

Over the last couple of years, RES has undertaken a wide range of technical studies and environmental surveys on the site, as well as desktop studies and assessments, including:

- Landscape and Visual
- Ornithology
- Ecology
- Acoustics
- Shadow flicker
- Archaeology and Cultural Heritage
- Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology
- Traffic and Transport
- Tourism
- Aviation

The findings from the site studies will be written up in a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) which the Scottish Ministers will take into account when deciding whether or not to grant consent for the wind farm.

A Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) Report will accompany the planning application submission. The report will summarise the exhibition events, communications activity that has been undertaken on the project and consultation feedback received.