

Heads of Planning

20 January 2009

WIND FARM PHOTOGRAPHIC VISUALISATION

I am writing to emphasise the importance of good photographic visualisations in the assessment of wind farm proposals. I am particularly concerned that when visualisations are used by elected members, the public and others, including planners, who are not specialists in this field, they understand how accurately the image represents what they would actually see if it were constructed. I'm sure you will agree that a visualisation should not result in someone getting a false impression of the visual impacts.

There are technical issues which have a major bearing on how the images seek to portray the reality. One source of advice on this is Visual Representation of Windfarms – Good Practice Guidance, published by Scottish Natural Heritage. It can be seen at <http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/heritagemanagement/Visual%20Representation%20of%20windfarms%20-%20excerpt.pdf>

I understand that professionals who are experienced in visual assessment work are familiar with using wide panoramic images as the basis for their work. But I also understand that some formats will require some care in the way they are used if the image as viewed is to reasonably portray the potential reality. This may be a challenge to those not used to using such images. In some circumstances it may be beneficial to supplement a panorama with a single frame image, taking care to recognise that while a panorama may reduce the perceived impact of a wind farm, a single frame image may have the opposite effect by cutting out peripheral vision.

I therefore want to emphasise 4 points:

- Visual information should be presented in a way which communicates as realistically as possible the actual visual impact of the proposal. The format of the images and the focal length of the lens will have to be taken into consideration.
- All visualisation images should be accompanied by a description of how to view the image so that it best replicates what will be seen if the proposal is constructed. This should include the required viewing distance between the eye and the image, and

whether it is a single frame image or a composite panoramic image. If a composite image, it is desirable either to curve the edges of panoramic images so that peripheral parts of the image are viewed at the same intended viewing distance, or to 'pan' across the image with the eye remaining at the recommended viewing distance. This is not required for single frame images.

- The viewpoints from which the photographs were taken and the horizontal field of view should be shown on a map so that the images can be used accurately on site.
- Planning authorities should make clear in any scoping advice their visualisation requirements and where these have not been provided use their powers to request further information from applicants.

I trust this letter is self-explanatory but if necessary please contact Nick Evans, nick.evans@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

JAMES G MACKINNON

Cc: Architech Animation Studios
Scottish Natural Heritage