

Eastern Green Link 4: Scottish Onshore Scheme

Volume 2: Main Report

Chapter 4: Legislative and Policy Framework

December 2025



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04. Legislative and Policy Framework

4. Legislative and Policy Framework

4.1 Introduction

This chapter of the EIAR outlines the relevant legislative and policy context for the Scottish Onshore Scheme.

A separate Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany the Applications for consent under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (Scottish Government, 1997) (the Planning Act). The Planning Statement sets out the relevant legislative context in further detail and assesses the Scottish Onshore Scheme against the Development Plan.

4.2 The Legislative Framework

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997

The Applicant has submitted applications for planning permission for the Scottish Onshore Scheme to Fife Council, the Local Planning Authority, under the Planning Act. This comprises an application for:

- Planning permission in principle (PiP) for the proposed converter station located at Westfield, and
- Full planning permission for the DC underground cables from mean low water springs (MLWS) north of Kinghorn to the converter station, and for the AC underground cables from the converter station to the new 400 kV Westfield Substation.

The planning applications will be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, with full statutory weight under Section 25 of the Planning Act and taking into account all relevant material considerations.

The relevant Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations for applications under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 are the Town and Country Planning (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (Scottish Government, 2017a) (hereafter referred to as the 'EIA Regulations').

None of the elements which make up the Scottish Onshore Scheme or the wider Project (i.e. converter stations, underground cables and subsea cables) are identified in Schedule 1 or 2 of the relevant EIA Regulations. As the Scottish Onshore Scheme is not classed as 'Schedule 1 Development' EIA is not mandatory. With regard to Schedule 2, while none of the elements which make up the Scottish Onshore Scheme fall under the descriptions of development in Category 3 Energy Industry, converter stations could broadly be interpreted as an industrial estate development under Category 10 Infrastructure Projects with them having some similar characteristics. EIA may be required for 'Schedule 2 Development' subject to certain thresholds being met or exceeded and having regard to the criteria in Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations. In such instances the requirement for EIA can be determined through submission of a screening opinion request to the relevant authorities (in this case Fife Council).

Planning Circular 1: The Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (Scottish Government, 2017b) makes clear that the basic test of

the need for EIA in this particular case is the likelihood of significant effects on the environment. Therefore, development outside the criteria set out in Schedule 1 or 2 does not preclude significant effects arising, particularly where the development is in an environmentally sensitive location.

In this instance, as a matter of best practice and having regard to their statutory duties and obligations under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989, the Applicant has voluntarily undertaken an EIA and has prepared this EIAR to accompany the planning applications for the Scottish Onshore Scheme.

As noted, SP Energy Networks has voluntarily undertaken an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for the Scottish Onshore Scheme. This has the same effect as a positive screening opinion, which removes the availability of permitted development rights under the General Permitted Development Order (Scottish Government, 1992). Aspects of the Scottish Onshore Scheme, such as underground cables, that might otherwise benefit from permitted development rights now require full planning permission from Fife Council.

4.3 International Legislation and Policy

The Paris Agreement 2015

The Paris Agreement (United Nations Climate Change, 2015), established at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) and ratified by the UK on 17 November 2016, is a key element of the international effort to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to combat climate change. The Agreement sets a goal of keeping the increase in global average temperature “well below 2°C” and aims to limit it to 1.5°C.

The Paris Agreement follows a five-year cycle in which countries commit to progressively more ambitious climate actions. Since 2020, countries have been submitting their national climate action plans, known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Each new NDC is designed to demonstrate a greater level of ambition than the one before.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report series tracks global progress towards limiting warming to well below 2°C, with an aim of pursuing 1.5°C, as set out in the Paris Agreement. Since 2010, this annual report has assessed the gap between projected global GHG emissions - based on countries’ climate mitigation pledges - and the levels needed to avoid the most severe impacts of climate change.

The Emissions Gap Report 2024 (United Nations Environment Programme, 2024) states that:

“Nations must deliver dramatically stronger ambition and action in the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions or the Paris Agreement’s 1.5°C goal will be gone within a few years... [this] calls for countries to set sector-specific global mitigation efforts, including the tripling of renewable energy capacity by 2030, doubling the global average annual rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030, transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, and conserving, protecting and restoring nature and ecosystems....”

COP29 took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, from 11-22 November 2024. COP serves as a critical forum for global negotiations to address climate change, bringing together world leaders, policymakers, climate scientists, businesses, and civil society. The conference aims to accelerate collective actions to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, including limiting

global warming to 1.5 °C, achieving net-zero emissions by 2050, and building climate resilience. Key priorities included finalising a new climate finance goal to help developing nations address climate impacts, enhancing NDCs, and fostering a transition to renewable energy and sustainable practices.

4.4 UK Legislation and Policy

Climate Change Act 2008

The Climate Change Act 2008 (UK Government, 2008) provides a national framework to support the UK Government's commitments under the Paris Agreement and introduced a legally binding target for the UK to reduce CO₂ emissions by at least 80% by 2050, relative to the 1990 levels. The Climate Change Act 2008 also established the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), an independent body to provide evidence-based advice to the UK Government and Parliament on the mandatory carbon budgets.

Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019

In June 2019, the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 (UK Government, 2019) was introduced which amended the Climate Change Act 2008, by introducing a target for at least a 100% reduction of GHG emissions in the UK by 2050, compared to 1990 levels. This order follows on from the recommendations presented by the CCC 2019 publication 'Net Zero, the UK's Contribution to Stopping Global Warming' (CCC, 2024a).

Carbon Budget Delivery Plan 2023

In March 2023, the UK Government published the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan (UK Government, 2023a) which sets out a package of proposals and policies for enabling Carbon Budgets Four, Five and Six to be met. The UK Government is currently in the Fourth Carbon Budget period which runs from 2023 to 2027.

The Seventh Carbon Budget Report 2025

The Seventh Carbon Budget Report (CCC, February 2025), required under the Climate Change Act 2008, describes the potential options to net zero and what steps must be taken to achieve this. The Seventh Carbon Budget is the second to align with the legislated 2050 net zero commitment following its introduction in the 2019 Order.

A key recommendation of the Report is that the UK Government requires a reduction in UK GHG emissions of 87% by 2040 relative to 1990 and that this should be coupled with a pledge by 2030 to reduce emissions by at least 68% from 1990 levels.

British Energy Security Strategy 2022

The UK Government published the British Energy Security Strategy (UK Government, 2022) primarily in response to the rising global energy prices and following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The key aim of the Strategy is to reduce the UK's dependence on imported oil and gas and to help decarbonise the energy sector, by achieving net zero by 2050.

The Strategy states that:

“...the transition away from oil and gas... depends critically on how quickly we can roll out new renewables... the growing proportion of our electricity coming from renewables reduces our exposure to volatile fuel markets.”

...we need to be bolder in removing the red tape that holds back new clean energy developments and exploit the potential of all renewable technologies.”

The Energy Security Act 2023 (UK Government, 2023b) seeks to build on the commitment set out in the British Energy Security Strategy 2022 to reduce the UK’s dependence on volatile fossil fuel markets, by improving domestic energy production and make the UK more self-sufficient when it comes to the energy it uses.

Climate Change Committee Progress Report to Parliament 2024

The 2024 CCC Joint Progress Report to Parliament (CCC, 2024b) considers the global picture with regards to emissions reductions and adaptation to climate change. It discusses the UK’s role in a global context before discussing a range of sectors in terms of emission trends and drivers, indicators of progress, next steps, and major risks. In the Executive Summary, the report notes that:

“British-based renewable energy is the cheapest and fastest way to reduce vulnerability to volatile global fossil fuel markets. The faster we get off fossil fuels, the more secure we become.”

Clean Power 2030 Action Plan

The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (UK Government, 2024) sets out how the United Kingdom will achieve clean power by 2030 addressing three major challenges: the need for a secure and affordable energy supply, the creation of essential new industries and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit the country’s contribution to climate change. The Plan recognises the need for the electricity network to undergo unprecedented expansion in order to connect new generation and meet future demand as the economy electrifies. It focuses on reforming the grid connections process while tightening regulatory incentives for Transmission Owners and streamlining planning consents. The plan also addresses the need for community engagement so that areas hosting new infrastructure benefit directly.

4.5 Scottish Legislation and Policy

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 (Scottish Government, 2009) sets the statutory framework for GHG emission reductions in Scotland and builds upon the framework established by the UK Government’s Climate Change Act 2008. This Act set an initial target to reduce GHG emissions by at least 80% by 2050 and mandated that Scottish Ministers seek advice from relevant bodies, such as the UK Committee on Climate Change, when setting targets.

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 (Scottish Government, 2019a) amended the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. It establishes 2045 as the target date for achieving net-zero emissions in Scotland and provides interim targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040.

Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 (Interim Target) Amendment Regulations 2023

In 2022, the CCC published its first five-yearly review of Scotland's emissions targets (CCC, 2022). They recommended for Scotland's annual targets in the 2020s to be adjusted in order to reflect updated knowledge about the treatment of peatland emissions. The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 (Interim Target) Amendment Regulations 2023 (Scottish Government, 2023a), therefore, adjusted the interim target for 2020 from 56% to 48.5%. It also lowered annual targets for the 2020s in anticipation of the next significant interim target of 75% by 2030.

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2024

The Scottish Government has acknowledged that the UK is substantially off track for 2030 commitments, issuing a new Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act (Scottish Government, 2024a) in November 2024. While 2030 interim targets are out of reach, the legal commitment to net zero 2045 is retained. This new legislation replaces the existing annual targets and introduces a carbon budget target framework. The framework requires that every year between 2026 and 2045, the net-zero emissions target year, is covered by a carbon budget.

Scotland's Electricity and Gas Networks 2019 to 2030

The need for new infrastructure is emphasised in the Vision for Scotland's Electricity and Gas Networks 2019 to 2030 (Scottish Government, 2019b), which anticipates substantial new capacity requirements, including strategic transmission links such as subsea cables and network reinforcements.

Offshore Wind Policy Statement (2020)

The Scottish Government's Offshore Wind Policy Statement (Scottish Government, 2020a) identifies a target of up to 11 GW of installed offshore wind capacity in Scottish Waters by 2030. The scale of the offshore wind development in Scottish Waters is reflected in the most recent seabed leasing rounds, ScotWind (2022) and INTOG (2023) overseen by Crown Estate Scotland (CES), with approximately 30GW of offshore wind capacity in development.

Onshore Wind Policy Statement (2022)

The Scottish Government's Onshore Wind Policy Statement (Scottish Government, 2022) was published in 2022. It sets out a target to achieve a minimum of 20GW of installed capacity of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030. The Policy Statement notes that delivering 20GW targets will require investment in electricity networks with new infrastructure required to be delivered at pace. The 20GW target was most recently reaffirmed in late 2023 with the publication of the Onshore Wind Sector Deal which sets out commitments from the Scottish Government and the onshore wind industry to deliver on the 2030 target.

Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)

The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (Scottish Government, 2023b) set out the Scottish Government's policies and commitments in relation to energy production and use as well as how to ensure those works and communities whose livelihoods are bound up with the current energy system will not be left behind as the sector changes in response to net zero. The Plan also reconfirms the targets set out in the Onshore Wind and Offshore Wind Policy Statements and identifies the need for significant investment in the electricity transmission system to meet 2030 targets.

Green Industrial Strategy (2024)

The purpose of the Green Industrial Strategy (Scottish Government, 2024b) is to ensure that Scotland realises the maximum possible economic benefits from opportunities created by the transition to net zero. It reaffirms the Onshore Wind Policy Statement targets highlighting a commitment to deliver at least 20GW of onshore wind by 2030. With regard to offshore wind, it notes that Scotland currently has a potential pipeline of over 40GW. The Strategy also makes a number of commitments in relation to onshore electricity networks including aiming to accelerate consenting timescales for electricity transmission developments in order to support more rapid expansion of new network infrastructure.

Climate Change Plan 2018-2032 - Update

In April 2019, the Scottish Government declared a climate emergency which was supported by the publication of an updated Climate Change Plan in December 2020. The Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-2032: Securing a Green Recovery on the Path to Net Zero (Scottish Government, 2020b) outlines the Scottish Government's legislative commitment to reducing emissions by 75% by 2030 and achieving net zero by 2045, emphasising these goals within the context of a green recovery from COVID-19.

The Climate Change Plan Update stresses that a coordinated approach across sectors is essential to the green recovery. It highlights Scotland's progress in renewable energy generation, affirming the government's strong commitment to continued growth in this area.

The report notes: *"We will continue to modernise our energy system to support the transition to a low carbon economy"*, considering that modernising the energy system includes the upgrading of transmission infrastructure, including HVDC interconnectors, to enhance efficiency and support the integration of renewable energy sources.

In addition, the report notes that: *"We will work with the UK Government to ensure that the electricity transmission network is developed to support the delivery of our climate change targets"*. New offshore and onshore wind capacity in and around Scotland will contribute to these climate change targets, but the existing electricity network does not have enough capacity to transmit all the additional clean energy from where it is produced to where it is needed.

4.6 Development Plan Policy

Introduction

The Scottish Onshore Scheme is located within the Fife Council area. The statutory Development Plan therefore includes:

- The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023),
- The Fife Council Local Development Plan (FCLDP) (2017), and
- A range of adopted Supplementary Guidance documents.

It should be noted that in accordance with Section 24 of the Planning Act, if there is any incompatibility between a provision of NPF4 and a Local Development Plan (LDP), the more recent provision will prevail. Therefore, for planning applications within the Fife Council area, NPF4 will take precedence as the more recent document in the event of any incompatibility.

A brief summary of the Development Plan policies relevant to the Scottish Onshore Scheme is provided below; more detailed commentary and an assessment of the Scottish Onshore Scheme against those policies and also the relevant Supplementary Guidance is available in the accompanying Planning Statement.

National Planning Framework 4

Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure development, where classified as a ‘Major Development’¹, such as the Scottish Onshore Scheme, are identified within NPF4 as being a National Development. NPF4 recognises the benefits of additional electricity capacity:

“Additional electricity generation from renewables and electricity transmission capacity of scale is fundamental to achieving a net zero economy and supports improved network resilience in rural and island areas.”

NPF4 clarifies that National Development status provides additional certainty:

“The principle of the development does not need to be agreed later in the consenting process, providing more certainty for communities, businesses and investors.”

NPF4 Policy 1, is an overarching policy applying to all development, emphasising that ‘significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises’. The Policy intent is to ‘encourage, promote and facilitate development that minimises emissions and adapts to the current and future impacts of climate change’. The Policy Outcomes being ‘Emissions from development are minimised’ and ‘Our places are more resilient to climate change’.

Given that the policy states that significant weight should be given to climate and nature crises, particular regard should be given to the role of the Scottish Onshore Scheme in supporting renewable energy which in turn will contribute to addressing the global climate crisis. With an estimated transmission capacity of 2GW, the Scottish Onshore Scheme will support a reduction in carbon emissions by transmitting electricity from renewable energy sources.

Policy 11: Energy of NPF4 aims to:

“...encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure...”

Policy 11 further affirms support for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero-emission technology, specifically mentioning “... new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure”.

¹ Under the ‘Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009’ (i.e. 20 MW or above)

It states that “...development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities”.

Additional NPF4 policies relevant to the Scottish Onshore Scheme are briefly summarised in **Table 4-1 - Summary of Relevant NPF4 Policies** below.

Table 4-1 - Summary of Relevant NPF4 Policies

NPF4 Policy	Policy Summary
Policy 3: Biodiversity	This policy aims to protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, and strengthen nature networks. It establishes that national, major, or EIA development proposals will be supported only if they demonstrate a commitment to conserving, restoring, and enhancing biodiversity.
Policy 4: Natural Places	This policy aims to protect, restore, and enhance natural assets, prioritizing nature-based solutions. Development proposals that would have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment due to their type, location, or scale will not be supported. The policy specifies requirements and assessment criteria for European, national, and local natural heritage and landscape designations, with additional criteria for proposals affecting National Parks. For Wild Land Areas, development proposals will be supported only if, among other considerations, they contribute to renewable energy targets.
Policy 5: Soils	This policy aims to protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatlands, and minimise soil disturbance from development. Development proposals on peatland, carbon-rich soils, and priority peatland habitats will only be supported for essential infrastructure (where a specific locational need exists with no suitable alternative) or renewable energy generation that maximise the area’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.
Policy 6: Forestry, Woodland and Trees	Development proposals will not be supported if they would result in: (i) any loss of ancient woodlands, (ii) adverse impacts on native woodlands, or (iii) fragmentation or disruption of woodland habitats.
Policy 7: Historic Assets and Places	This policy aims to protect and enhance historic assets and places, using positive change as a catalyst for regeneration. It outlines specific requirements and assessment criteria for listed buildings, conservation areas, gardens, and designed landscapes, scheduled monuments, and other non-designated historic assets.
Policy 22: Flood Risk and Water Management	This policy aims to enhance resilience to flood risk by prioritising avoidance as the primary principle and reducing the vulnerability of both existing and future developments to flooding. It stipulates that proposals located in flood risk areas will only be supported if they are for: (i) essential infrastructure where the location is necessary for operational reasons, or (ii) water-compatible uses.

NPF4 Policy	Policy Summary
Policy 23: Health and Safety	This policy addresses, among other factors, air quality and noise. It specifies that development proposals likely to have significant adverse effects on air quality or that pose unacceptable noise issues will not be supported.
Policy 25: Community Wealth Building	This policy aims to encourage, promote, and facilitate a new strategic approach to economic development, providing a practical model for building a wellbeing economy at local, regional, and national levels. Proposals that align with these objectives will be supported.

Fife Local Development Plan (FIFEplan)

The key FIFEplan policy relevant to the Scottish Onshore Scheme is Policy 11: Low Carbon Fife. The policy outcome is:

“Energy resources are harnessed in appropriate locations and in a manner where the environmental and cumulative impacts are within acceptable limits.”

Table 4-2 - Summary of Relevant FIFEplan Policies provides an overview of the key policies relevant to the Scottish Onshore Scheme.

Table 4-2 - Summary of Relevant FIFEplan Policies

FIFEplan Policy	Policy Summary
Policy 1: Development Principles	Development proposals will be supported if they conform to relevant Development Plan policies and proposals and address their individual and cumulative impacts.
Policy 3: Infrastructure and Services	Development must be designed and implemented in a manner that ensures it delivers the required level of infrastructure and functions in a sustainable manner. Such infrastructure and services may include low and zero carbon generating technologies in accordance with Policy 11: Low Carbon Fife.
Policy 7: Development in the Countryside	<p>The policy sets out the type of development that will be supported in countryside, and states that development must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be of a scale and nature compatible with surrounding uses; • be well-located in respect of available infrastructure and contribute to the need for any improved infrastructure; and • be located and designed to protect the overall landscape and environmental quality of the area.
Policy 11: Low Carbon Fife	Development of low carbon energy schemes will be supported provided the proposals do not result in unacceptable significant adverse effects or impacts which cannot be satisfactorily mitigated, giving due regard to relevant environmental, community and cumulative impact considerations.
Policy 12: Flooding and the Water Environment	Flood risk and surface drainage is managed to avoid or reduce the potential for surface water flooding. The functional floodplain is safeguarded. The quality of the water environment is improved.

FIFEplan Policy

Policy Summary

Policy 13: Natural Environment and Access

Fife's environmental assets are maintained and enhanced; Green networks are developed across Fife; Biodiversity in the wider environment is enhanced and pressure on ecosystems reduced enabling them to more easily respond to change; Fife's natural environment is enjoyed by residents and visitors.

Supplementary Guidance

The Fife Council website outlines the adopted planning guidance, which includes Low Carbon Fife Supplementary Planning Guidance (2019) and Making Fife's Places Supplementary Guidance (2018).

4.7 Summary

Chapter 4 Legislative and Policy Framework outlines the legislative framework and policy context, and Development Plan policies all relevant to the Scottish Onshore Scheme. A detailed analysis and assessment of the Scottish Onshore Scheme against planning, energy and climate change policy considerations is contained in the separate supporting **Planning Statement** which accompanies the Applications.

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