

Scottish Natural Heritage

Visual Representation of Wind Farms

Summary for members of the public and
Decision-makers

Version 2.2

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Introduction

Our guidance on “Visual Representation of wind farms” sets the standard for wind farm visualisations in Scotland. The guidance is prescriptive – applicants must comply with the requirements set out in **Annex B** of the guidance.

How to use the visualisations required by this guidance

The guidance requires applicants to provide a range of visualisations, each with a slightly different purpose. All of the images should be viewed at a **comfortable arm’s length**. They are designed to provide a reasonably realistic impression of the wind farm proposal when viewed in this way.

In addition, if you are viewing wind farm visualisations on a screen (for example from an e planning portal), it is important that:

- you view the images on a PC screen or similar. Viewing the images on devices with a smaller screen, such as a tablet, will give you a different impression of the wind farm;
- you enlarge the image so that it fills **the full height of your screen**. This should give you the same impression of the wind farm as the printed visualisations submitted with the application, albeit without the full horizontal extent being visible in a single screen view;
- the images you view are in colour and of sufficient quality (some images are scanned in by planning authorities and can lose resolution).

The best way to gain a good impression of the application is to view properly printed hard copies of the visualisation in the environmental statement. These are normally available at your local planning office and in local libraries, or community facilities.

Ways of engaging in the process

Members of the public and other stakeholders can engage in the process of producing visualisations and assessing the wind farm in the following ways:

- through public exhibitions run by the applicant (see below);
- by engaging in the Environmental Impact Assessment process, particularly at the scoping stage. Contact the planning authority to discuss how and when you can do this. For example, it may be possible to suggest viewpoints and it can be helpful to explain the proposed locations, e.g. that it’s a popular local walking route.

- by taking the visualisations to the viewpoints to compare these to the real view
- by testing the visualisations using the verification process described below

Public exhibitions

Wind farm developers commonly use public exhibitions to engage with local communities and to introduce their plans in public. These are a valuable stage in the planning process, helping the applicant to shape their proposal and to identify, and try to address, public concerns.

To avoid confusion we recommend that applicants should use the same visualisations provided in the environmental statement at the public exhibition. However, **you should always view the final set of images submitted at the application stage** as the design of the wind farm is likely to have changed. The visual impact can change significantly even through small variations in turbine height and location.

Exhibitions may also provide opportunities for residents to be shown visualisations (e.g. on-screen wirelines) from their property. Writing to the developer and local authority to request this may help them plan the event.

Limitations

Visualisations have inherent limitations. For example:

- a visualisation can never show exactly what the wind farm will look like in reality due to different lighting, weather and seasonal conditions which vary through time;
- the images should give a reasonable impression of the scale of the turbines and the distance to the turbines, but can never be 100% accurate;
- a static image cannot convey turbine movement or flicker / reflection from the sun on the turbine blades as they move.

It is important to bear these limitations in mind when assessing a proposal and to use as much other information as possible to reach a conclusion on the likely landscape and visual impacts. In addition to the visualisations provided you should:

- study the **Zone of Theoretical Visibility** map to see where the wind farm would or would not be theoretically visible from;
- refer to the **landscape and visual impact assessment** in the Environmental Statement;

- **visit a selection of the viewpoints** assessed to experience the likely visual impacts in the field.

Verification

Members of the public and decision makers may occasionally wish to 'verify' that the images provided have been taken on the correct type of camera and then enlarged to the correct size. A methodology to verify the images is provided in **Annex E** of the main guidance document. However, we recommend that you contact the relevant planning authority to see if they have already verified the images before setting out to do so yourself.