

Agenda Item	5
Report No	PLN/002/25

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: North Planning Applications Committee
Date: 30 January 2025
Report Title: 24/05142/PAN: Statkraft
Land 1280M NW Of Bowside Lodge, Strathy
Report By: Area Planning Manager – North

Purpose/Executive Summary

Achrugan Wind Farm - Proposal of Application Notice for the erection and operation of a wind farm comprising up to 14 turbines with maximum tip height of 200m, battery energy storage system (BESS), and ancillary infrastructure

Ward: 01 North, West And Central Sutherland

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the submission of the PAN and highlight any material issues they wish to be brought to the attention of the applicant before the submission of an application for planning permission.

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report informs the Planning Applications Committee of the submission of the attached Proposal of Application Notice (PAN).
- 1.2 The submission of the PAN accords with the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) and was made valid on 4 December 2024. The PAN is a statutory requirement for planning applications for major or national developments and must be lodged at least 12 weeks prior to the submission of a planning application. Members are asked to note this may form the basis of a subsequent planning application.
- 1.3 The submitted information attached includes:
- Proposal of Application Notice (Application Form)
 - Location / Site Layout Plan
- 1.4 There were two in-person consultation events, the first took place on Wednesday 29 May 2024 between 1:30pm and 7:30pm at Strathy Village Hall and the second on Thursday 30 May 2024 between 10am and 2pm at Bettyhill Village Hall. The second round of public consultation events will be held once the design of the proposed development is confirmed, and the events will be advertised and take a similar form to the events noted in the previous consultation events. The expected dates for the events would be in June 2025. The two events were advertised in the Press and Journal, John O’Groat Journal, Caithness Courier, and in North Times no less than 7 days prior to the date of public event and within the required statutory period. Letters with details of the consultation events will be posted to all residents within an area of 342.8 square km, covering the settlements of Bettyhill, Armadale, Strathy and Melvich.
- 1.5 Details of all notified parties are contained / appended to the PAN form and include the host Strathy and Armadale, Melvic, Helmsdale, Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Alnaharra, Caithness West, and Tongue Community Councils, as well as local Members. The applicant undertook a letter drop to advise the public of the consultation events undertaken to date and the applicant has also put posters up in the local areas, updated social media accounts, as well as the dedicated project website: <http://www.achrugaan-windfarm.co.uk/>
- 1.6 Any forthcoming application will be accompanied by a Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) report explaining the consultation undertaken, feedback received, and any resultant amendments made to the planning application.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 The proposed Achrugaan Wind Farm project entails the erection and operation of a wind farm featuring up to 14 turbines with maximum tip heights reaching 200 meters.

This development is anticipated to deliver an installed capacity of 100.8 megawatts (MW), complemented by a battery energy storage system (BESS) capable of providing up to 50 MW. The ancillary infrastructure associated with this project is expected to include several key components:

- New and upgraded access tracks to facilitate transportation and maintenance.
- Potential upgrades to the site access junction to improve connectivity.
- Possible borrow pits for sourcing materials required for construction.
- A site compound that will house essential facilities such as substations, switchgear, staff welfare amenities, and car parking.
- Temporary construction compounds to support the construction phase.

2.2 The developer sought formal pre-application advice from the Planning Authority through the Pre-Application Advice Service for Major Developments in 2024 for the erection and operation of a wind farm comprising of 14 turbines with maximum tip heights of 200m, with an anticipated capacity of 100.8MW, up to 50MW of battery energy storage system (BESS), and ancillary infrastructure (HC ref. 24/00189/PREMAJ).

2.3 This proposal will be submitted under Section 36 of The Electricity Act 1989 and therefore the applicant has no statutory duty to comply with the provisions of Town & Country Planning (Scotland) Act 2006 or The Town and Country Planning (Pre-Application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2021. Nevertheless, the applicant has submitted a PAN in the spirit of the legislation in order for affected communities to be alerted to the proposal at an early stage. Members are asked to note that the information contained within the submission may form the basis of a subsequent application to the Scottish Minister's Energy Consents Unit, on which The Council will be consulted.

2.4 An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Scoping request under the Highland Council's reference (24/02473/SCOP) was issued for the proposed development.

3.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

3.1 The PAN boundary covers approximately 560 hectares and is located approximately 1.7km south of Strathy and 2.5km south east of Armadale on predominantly commercial forestry land. Strathy North Wind Farm access road lies to the east of the site and the A836 lies to the north. The site slopes eastward and sits at elevations between 90mAOD (above Ordnance Datum) to 30mAOD. The proposal is also adjacent to the Flow Country World Heritage Site which borders the northern and western edges of the site, and there are a number of lochs located within the site boundary, including Achrugan Loch, Loch Nam Breac Beag and other unnamed lochans.

3.2 The proposal lies within an area of commercial forestry, parts of the development site appear to lie within areas of Class 1 and Class 5 peat, as identified on the Carbon and Peatland 2016 map. The proposed development is situated entirely within the Sweeping Moorland and Flow landscape character type, as delineated by NatureScot's Landscape Character Assessment. Within the site boundary, there are no ecological statutory designated sites, however, it is flanked to the west and east by the Caithness and Sutherland peatland, which is recognized as a Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC), SSSI and Ramsar site. Approximately 2km to the north of the proposed site is the Farr Bay, Strathy, and Portskerra Special Landscape Area (SLA), further emphasising the area's rich landscape character. The Kyle of Tongue National Scenic Area (NSA) is located 10 km to the west, adding to the scenic value of the region. Within a 2km radius lies the Category C listed building of Strathy Former Church of Scotland. Notably, there are no core paths within the site or in a 3km radius.

3.3 Schedule Monuments in the vicinity include:

- Armadale Burn, broch 1420m SE of Armadale House (SM13678) - 1km west
- Baligill, mill - 2-5km radius
- Baligill Burn, limekilns 2.7km north east
- Halladale Bridge, hut circles 670m NE of, on banks of Giligill Burn - 6km east.
- Achcoillenaborgie, cairns 500m N of Lochan Duinte - within 10km west.
- Skelpick, long cairn 350m NE - 10 km west.
- Four cairns, 570m WSW, 345m SW, 355m SW, and 385m SSW of The Glen - 5-10km radius.
- Ben Griam Beg, fort, Forsinard (SM1836) - 20km south.

3.4 The proximity of the site to the River Strathy means areas of the site fall within the river flood plain and consequently at 1:200 year plus climate risk of flooding, according to SEPA's Flood Risk Mapping.

4.0 DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The following policies are relevant to the assessment of the proposal:

4.1 National Planning Framework 4 (Adopted 2023) (NPF4)

Policy 1 – Tackling the climate and nature crises

Policy 2 – Climate mitigation and adaptation

Policy 3 – Biodiversity

Policy 4 – Natural places

Policy 5 – Soils

Policy 6 – Forestry, woodland and trees

Policy 7 – Historic assets and places

Policy 11 – Energy

Policy 14 – Design, quality and place
Policy 20 – Blue and green infrastructure
Policy 22 – Flood risk and water management
Policy 23 – Health and safety
Policy 25 – Community wealth building
Policy 29 – Rural development
Policy 33 - Minerals

4.2 **Highland Wide Local Development Plan (2012) (HwLDP)**

28 - Sustainable Design
29 - Design Quality and Placemaking
30 - Physical Constraints
31 - Developer Contributions
36 - Development in the Wider Countryside
51 - Trees and Development
52 - Principle of Development in Woodland
56 - Travel
57 - Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
58 - Protected Species
59 - Other Important Species
60 - Other Important Habitats
61 - Landscape
63 - Water Environment
64 - Flood Risk
66 - Surface Water Drainage
67 - Renewable Energy Developments
69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure
72 - Pollution
74 - Green Networks
77 - Public Access

4.3 **Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan adopted 2018 (CaSPlan).**

There are no site specific policies relevant to the proposed development.

4.4 **Highland Council Supplementary Guidance**

- Biodiversity Enhancement (May 2024)
- Developer Contributions (November 2018)
- Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment (Jan 2013)
- Green Networks (Jan 2013)
- Highland Historic Environment Strategy (Jan 2013)
- Highland's Statutorily Protected Species (March 2013)
- Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines (May 2006)
- Managing Waste in New Developments (Mar 2013)

- Physical Constraints (Mar 2013)
- Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments (May 2013)
- Standards for Archaeological Work (Mar 2012)
- Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)
- Trees, Woodlands and Development (Jan 2013)

4.5 **Scottish Government Policy and Other Guidance**

- Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement (2022)
- Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)
- Scottish Energy Strategy (2017)
- 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy (2011)
- Energy Efficient Scotland Route Map, Scottish Government (2018)
- Historic Environment Policy for Scotland, HES (2019)
- PAN 1/2011 - Planning and Noise (2011)
- PAN 60 – Planning for Natural Heritage (2008)
- Circular 1/2017: Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (2017)
- PAN 61 – Sustainable Drainage Systems (Jul 2001)
- PAN 68 – Design Statements (Aug 2003)
- PAN 75 – Planning for Transport (Aug 2005)

5.0 **POTENTIAL MATERIAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

- a) Development Plan and other planning policy;
- b) Residential amenity;
- c) Roads and transport;
- d) Flood risk and drainage impacts;
- e) Impact on trees and woodland;
- f) Design, landscape, and visual impact (including cumulative impacts);
- g) Natural heritage including protected species and habitats;
- h) Built and cultural heritage;
- i) Economic impact and tourism;
- j) Construction impacts;
- k) Pollution;
- l) Decommissioning and restoration;
- m) Outdoor access; and,
- n) Any Other Material Considerations Raised within Representations.

6.0 **CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 The report presents the information submitted to date as part of the PAN. The policy considerations against which any future planning application will be considered have been summarised as well as the potential material planning considerations and key issues based on the information available to date. The list is not exhaustive, and further matters may arise as and when a planning application is received and in the light of public representations and consultation responses.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Not applicable.

8.0 RECOMMENDATION

8.1 It is recommended the Committee notes the submission of the PAN and advises of any material issues it wishes to be brought to the applicant's attention.

Designation: Area Planning Manager – North

Author(s): Ikram Ullah

Background Papers: Documents referred to in report and in case file.

Relevant Plans: Plan 1 – Proposal of Application Notice (Application Form)
Plan 2 – Location Plan

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended by the Planning Etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 and Planning (Scotland) Act 2019

Town and Country Planning (Pre-Application Consultation) (Scotland) Regulations 2021

The Council will respond within 21 days of validation the Notice. It will advise whether the proposed Pre-application Consultation is satisfactory or if additional notification and consultation above the statutory minimum is required.

Please note that a planning application for this proposed development cannot be submitted less than 12 weeks from the date the Proposal of Application Notice is received by the Council and without the statutory consultation requirements having been undertaken. The planning application must be accompanied by a Pre-application consultation report.

The Proposal of Application Notice will be valid for a period of 18 months from the date of validation of the notice by the Council.

Data Protection

Your personal data will be managed in compliance with the Data Protection legislation. You can read our privacy notice for planning related certificates on the Council's website at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/1052173/planning_applications_consents_and_notice_of_review

I have read and understood the privacy notice.

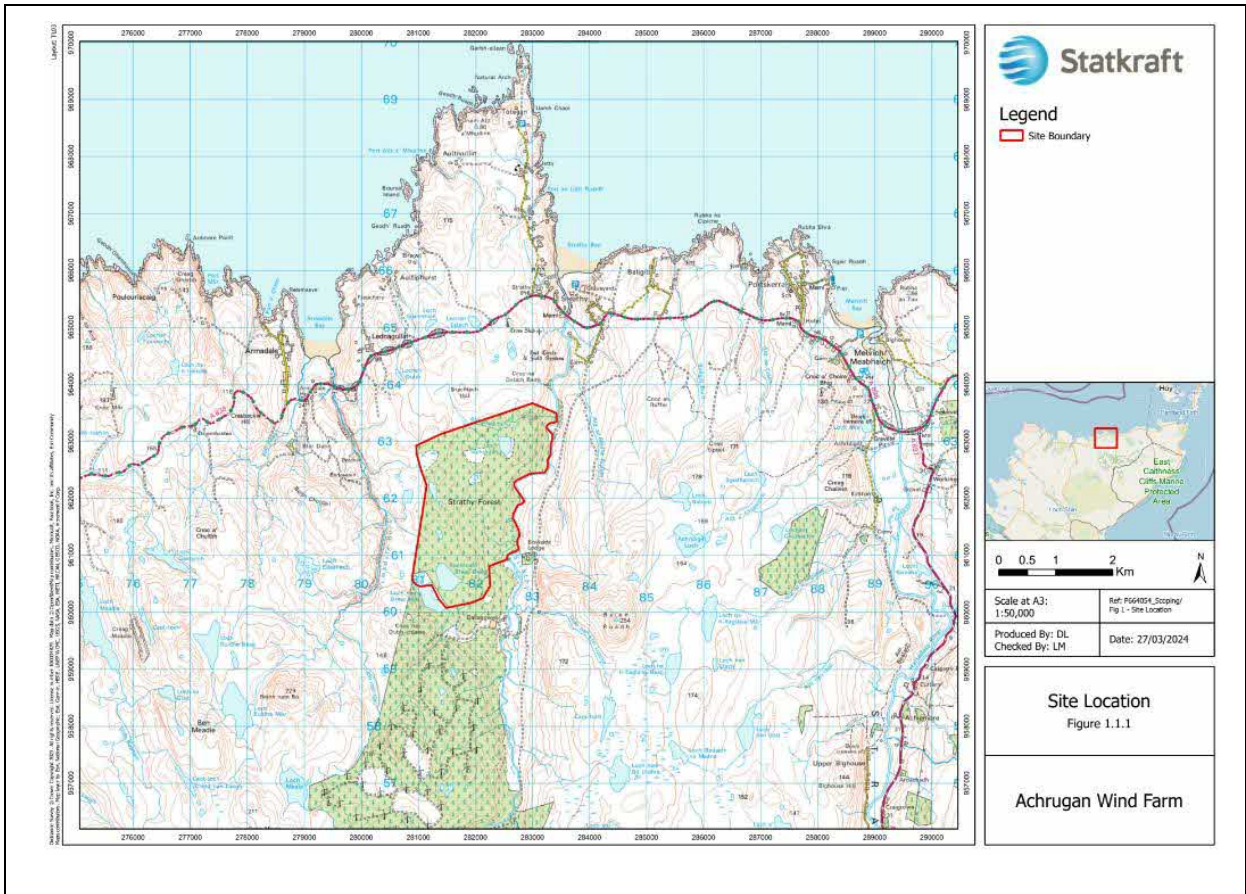
Contact Details

Applicant	STATKRAFT WINDCO 1 LIMITED	Agent	RSK Environment Ltd
Address	19th Floor 22 Bishopsgate, London, United Kingdom, EC2N 4BQ	Address	65 Sussex St, Glasgow, United Kingdom, G41 1DX
Phone	+44 (0)141 846 1444	Phone	+44 (0) 7776 649919
Email	joanne.jack@statkraft.com	Email	lmcgee@rsk.co.uk

Address or Location of Proposed Development

Please state the postal address of the prospective development site. If there is no postal address, please describe its location. Please outline the site in red on a base plan to a recognised metric scale and attach it to this completed Notice.

Achrugan Forest,
Sutherland,
Highlands



Description of Development

Please include detail where appropriate – eg the number of residential units; the gross floorspace in m² of any buildings not for residential use; the capacity of any electricity generation or waste management facility; and the length of any infrastructure project. Please attach any additional supporting information.

The Proposed Development will comprise up to 14 wind turbines with maximum tip heights of up to 200m, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated infrastructure.

Pre-application Screening Notice

Has a Screening Opinion been issued on the need for a Proposal of Application notice by the Highland Council in respect of the proposed development?
If yes, please provide a copy of this Opinion.

Yes No

Community Consultation

State which other parties have received a copy of this Proposal of Application Notice.

Community Council/s	Date Notice Served
Host - Strathy and Armadale strathyarmadalecc@btinternet.com Neighbours – Melnich	04.12.2024

<p>melvichcommunitycouncil@gmail.com Neighbours – Helmsdale helmsdalecouncil@gmail.com Neighbours - Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Alnaharra Bascommunitycouncil@gmail.com Nearby - Caithness West secretary@caithnesswestcc.co.uk Nearby – Tongue tmscc@btinternet.com</p>	
<p>Local Elected Members</p>	<p>Date Notice Served</p>
<p>Ward councillors 01 North, West and Central Sutherland (host ward) Cllr Michael Baird - Michael.Baird.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Hugh Morrison - Hugh.Morrison.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Marianne Hutchison - Marianne.Hutchison.cllr@highland.gov.uk</p> <p>02 Thurso and Northwest Caithness Cllr Ronn Gunn - Ron.Gunn.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Struan Mackie - struan.mackie.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Matthew Reiss - Matthew.Reiss.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Karl Rosie - karl.rosie.cllr@highland.gov.uk</p> <p>03 Wick and East Caithness Cllr Raymond Bremner - raymond.bremner.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Willie MacKay - Willie.MacKay.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Andrew Jarvie - andrew.jarvie.cllr@highland.gov.uk Cllr Jan McEwan - Jan.McEwan.cllr@highland.gov.uk</p>	<p>04.12.2024</p>
<p>Members of Scottish Parliament and Members of Parliament</p>	<p>Date Notice Served</p>
<p>MP Jamie Stone - jamie.stone.mp@parliament.uk</p>	<p>04.12.2024</p>

<p>Constituency MSP Maree Todd - Maree.Todd.msp@parliament.scot</p> <p>Regional MSPs - Highlands and Islands Edward Mountain - Edward.Mountain.msp@parliament.scot Rhoda Grant - Rhoda.Grant.msp@parliament.scot Jamie Halcro Johnston - Jamie.HalcroJohnston.msp@parliament.scot Ariane Burgess - Ariane.Burgess.msp@parliament.scot Tim Eagle - Tim.Eagle.msp@parliament.scot Emma Roddick - Emma.Roddick.msp@parliament.scot Douglas Ross - Douglas.Ross.msp@parliament.scot</p>	
<p>Names / details of other parties</p>	<p>Date Notice Served</p>

Details of Proposed Consultation		
Proposed Public Event 1	Venue	Date and Time
Public Consultation Events	Strathy Village Hall	Wednesday, 29th May 2024: 1.30pm to 7.30pm
Public Consultation Events	Bettyhill Village Hall	Thursday, 30th May 2024: 10am to 2pm
Proposed Public Event 2 <i>(at least 14 days after Public Event 1)</i>	Venue	Date and Time
To be confirmed. The second round of public consultation events will be held once the design of the Proposed Development is further progressed. The events will	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.

be advertised and take a similar form to the events noted above.		
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Publication of Event		
Newspaper Advert	Name of Newspaper	Advert Date
	Press and Journal	Wednesday, 22 nd May 2024
	John o’Groat Journal	Friday, 17 th May 2024
	Caithness Courier	Wednesday, 22 nd May 2024
	Northern Times	Friday, 17 th May 2024

Details of any other consultation methods (date, time and with whom)

Prior to public consultation events, community groups were sent a copy of the public consultation event advert.

A consultation website has been set up (www.achrugin-windfarm.co.uk) which provides key information about the project and details on how to get in touch with the project team.

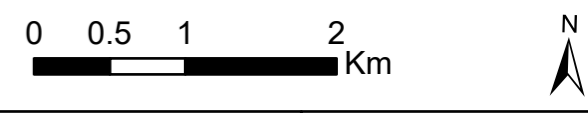
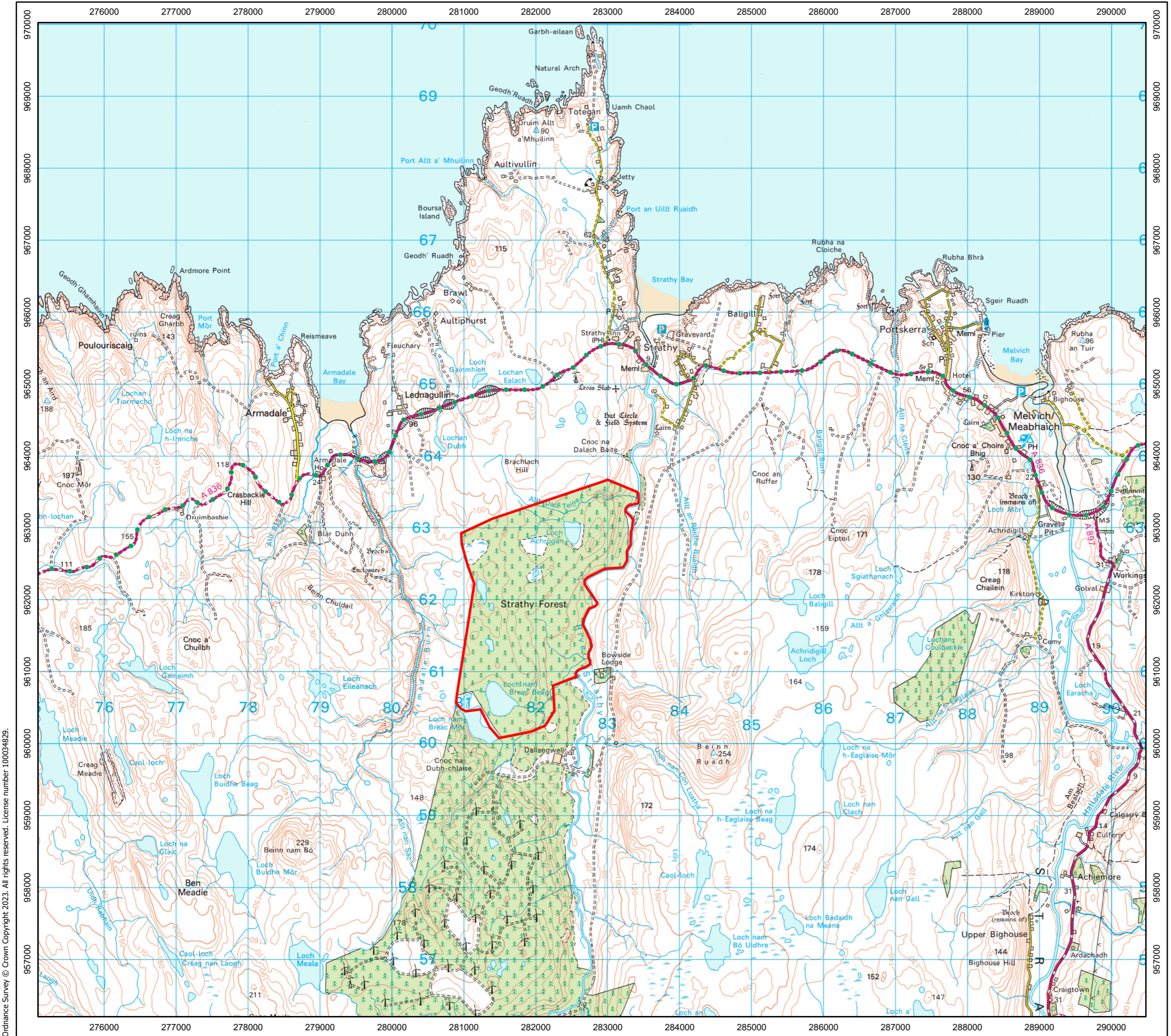
Over 700 letters were sent to local residents notifying them of the Proposed Development and providing them details of the public consultation events. The below plan shows the postal area.



Members of the project team attended a Strathly and Armadale Community Council meeting on October 7th 2024 to provide the community a further introduction to the project after the public consultation events.

Signed				Date	04.12.24
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 Achrugan Site Boundary



Produced By: DL Ref: P664054_Scoping SiteLocation

Checked By: LM Date: 20/12/2023

Site Location
Figure 1

Achrugan Wind Farm

Ordnance Survey © Crown Copyright 2023. All rights reserved. License number 100034829.