

# Producing and Delivering the Hagshaw Energy Cluster Development Framework



## Context

The onshore wind policy statement, published by Scottish Government in 2017, called for more collaboration across the onshore wind sector. Responding to that call NatureScot identified a potential at Hagshaw to pilot a more strategic, joined up approach to planning for wind energy. The Hagshaw cluster is centred on Scotland's oldest commercial wind farm which continues to be subject to ongoing change and development activity, with re-powering and new developments at differing stages in the planning process. The location of the cluster is adjacent to the M74 strategic road network with several surrounding communities, including Douglas, Coalburn, Lesmahagow and Muirkirk. These surrounding communities are former mining communities, which have faced socio-economic challenges for decades. The pilot project brought the opportunity to explore how these communities can harness the landscape change going on around them, to deliver a more positive



future. Most of the cluster sits within South Lanarkshire, with a small portion at the west edge falling within East Ayrshire. Getting the pilot off the ground depending on gaining the commitment of the two planning authorities (East Ayrshire Council and South Lanarkshire Council) as well as six renewables operators active within the cluster.

## What Happened

In 2020, NatureScot set up the Hagshaw Energy Cluster Steering Group, comprising South Lanarkshire Council (SLC), East Ayrshire Council (EAC), 6 renewable energy developers (3R Energy, ScottishPower Renewables, BayWa.re UK, Energiekontor UK, Octopus Renewables, Ventient Energy) and Architecture and Design Scotland to discuss how they could work together on the future of renewable energy development in the context of planning for and delivering Net Zero in Scotland. In June 2021, after collectively exploring different options, the steering group appointed LUC to produce a Development Framework, with contract management from NatureScot and financial support from the renewables developers, overseen by the steering group. Key elements of the process involved:

- Online community and stakeholder engagement carried out - October to December 2021
- Targeted one-to-one engagement with stakeholders and community groups - January to February 2022
- Final draft approved by SLC and EAC - October 2022
- Formal public consultation - 6 weeks from October to November 2022
- Adopted as planning guidance by SLC and EAC - August 2023

## Areas of Collaboration

The approach taken to produce the framework has been an exemplar in terms of collaborate working; the multidisciplinary steering group, with different interests and priorities, worked productively together to arrive at a Plan that was endorsed by all with a positive vision for renewable energy development.

**Leadership and Vision:** Whilst the overall project was instigated by NatureScot, and its role was critical throughout to the overall project, the buy-in and commitment from the two planning authorities from the outset was also important. Both planning authorities quickly recognised the value of the project and enthusiastically committed early on to both being part of the pilot project and importantly, showed their vision for the project by committing to adopting the Framework as Planning Guidance. This ensured that from the outset, there was certainty that the work would be meaningful and be given appropriate recognition and status, helping to secure and importantly sustain the buy-in from all other partners.

**Public and Private Collaboration:** The development of the framework is considered an exemplar of collaborative working between private and public interests. The multiple



interests represented in the steering group, were, with the careful management and guidance of NatureScot, able to collectively work together, agree the principles, content and final sign off. Differences of opinion arose, but compromises were reached, with all partners willing to work together to find solutions.

**Working in Partnership Across Local Authority Boundaries:** The Planning Authorities of SLC and EAC do not have history of partnership working, SLC being traditionally part of Clydeplan and EAC working closely with its Ayrshire counterparts on strategic planning matters. Work on the development framework forms the first time the two authorities have worked collaboratively on planning guidance, which has helped form stronger cross-boundary relationships and understanding of common issues.

**Combining Development Planning and Development Management Expertise:** For the duration of the project, SLC input into the steering group came from a Development Management perspective, whilst EAC brought a distinct Development Planning perspective to the group. This combination of skills was invaluable; bringing both expertise on policy context and formation, alongside expertise on how the framework could be used on a practical level in relation to the planning application process.

## Overall Result

The framework has been approved by both planning authorities as non-statutory planning guidance and as such will be used to help guide and inform development proposals within the cluster. This will help to ensure that development coming forward accords with the principles of the framework, delivering improving planning Outcomes. Alongside the planning process, an economic development officer has been employed by SLC to develop and then oversee delivery of a project plan that underpins the framework. As part of this, the officer also supports community groups, charities and social enterprises to deliver projects that align with the Framework, such as community ownership projects. Some of examples of work now progressing comprises:

1. Circular Economy Activity led by Zero Waste Scotland: Work is underway to bring communities and developers together to allow communities to be able to benefit from any excess material etc. that may be generated through wind farm developments
2. Strategic Path Networks: Feasibility work is being undertaken to look at the best routes for connecting the communities around the cluster and connecting them to established long distance walking routes in the area.

The success of the pilot project has been recognised through several means:

1. Included as a case study in the Onshore Wind Policy Statement (December 2022).
2. Included as a case study in the Scottish Government's draft planning guidance on biodiversity (November 2023).



3. Shortlisted for the UK Landscape Institute Awards 2023 in the Excellence in climate, environment and social outcomes category.
4. Winner of the Green Energy Awards 2023 in the Sustainable Development category.

## Lessons Learned

Relationships Developed: Developers in the cluster have been brought together and now have a better working relationship to be able to identify areas where working together has clear benefits, both financially and to achieve better outcomes. A developer group continues to meet regularly to take forward joint projects.

NatureScot played an important leadership, and at times conciliatory role, important in bringing together the different interests and viewpoints. The project would have been more difficult to progress without the strong involvement of NatureScot.

The framework document is intentionally visionary, with a focus on the kind of place Hagshaw could become. LUC and NatureScot were able to bring high quality mapping and drawing skills to the table to produce a final document that is of a high quality and visually appealing.

It took over 3 years, from initial discussion on the project to adopting the framework as planning guidance. This was undoubtedly impacted by the pandemic, but in general it proved relatively time and resource intensive to progress. If replicating elsewhere, ways to make the process more succinct and streamlined should be explored.

Given the limitations of the pandemic, LUC set up an innovative online engagement platform to engage local communities in the work. Whilst this was a good solution at that time, on reflection and based on some activities post-pandemic, the benefits in getting people up into the landscape cannot be underestimated. The best way to try to explore with residents how the landscape and renewables developments can relate to their community.

