

UNSHINAGH WIND FARM

Environmental Statement - FEI 2026

Volumes 1 - Non Technical Summary



Preface

This document is Volume 1 of the FEI. The FEI comprises:

Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary (NTS)

Volume 2: Main Report, Figures & Technical Appendices

The aim of the NTS is to summarise the content and main findings of the FEI in a clear and concise manner to assist the public in understanding what the environmental effects of the Unshinagh Wind Farm are likely to be. It should be read in conjunction with the original ES which was submitted to DFI in 2021, Planning REF: LA02/2021/1205/F

The FEI has been prepared by RES in consultation with Department of Infrastructure (Planning), various consultees and in collaboration with the subject specialists outlined below.

Specialism	Author
Introduction & the Proposed Development; Design Evolution & Alternatives; Noise; Transport and Aviation Lighting	RES
Planning Statement	Turleys
Landscape and Visual	Shanti McAllister Landscape Planning & Design
Archaeology and Cultural Heritage	Landgage
Ecology	Blackstaff Ecology
Ornithology	David Steele, Bird Surveyors Ireland
Socioeconomics	Oxford Economics

Commenting on the ES

This Further Environmental Information, together with supporting documents submitted as part of the planning application will be available for viewing during normal opening hours at the address below:

Canlough Library,
32 Harbour Rd,
Carnlough,
Ballymena
BT44 0EU
Tel: **028 2888 5552**

An electronic version of the FEI reports supporting the application, will be available to download free of charge from <http://www.Unshinagh-windfarm.co.uk>

Paper Copies of the FEI can be obtained at a cost of £50 from the address below:

RES Ltd
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Electronic copies (USB) will also be available on request to the address above.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Non-Technical Summary (NTS) has been prepared in support of the Further Environmental Information which accompanies the planning application Ref: LA02/2021/1205/F by RES Ltd for the proposed Unshinagh Wind Farm, hereinafter referred to as ‘the Development’, which is located approximately 4km South west of the village of Cairncastle, Larne, Co. Antrim.
- 1.2 A planning application was submitted to Department of Infrastructure (Strategic Planning Directorate) in accordance with the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations, 2017, in December 2021.
- 1.3 The Development has been amended and now comprises 9 three-bladed, horizontal axis wind turbines, each up to a maximum of 180 m to tip height, associated external electricity transformers; underground cabling; a newly created site entrance; access tracks; turning heads; crane hardstanding’s; control building and substation compound, energy storage containers, tree felling, off-site areas of widening to the public road and all ancillary works. During construction and commissioning there would be a number of temporary works including a construction compound with car parking; temporary parts of crane hardstanding’s; welfare facilities.

The Applicant

- 1.4 RES is the world’s largest independent renewable energy company. At the forefront of the industry for nearly 40 years, RES has delivered more than 22GW of renewable energy projects across the globe and supports an operational asset portfolio exceeding 7.5GW worldwide for a large client base. RES is active in 10 countries working across onshore and offshore wind, solar, energy storage and transmission and distribution.
- 1.5 RES has developed 22 onshore wind farms in Northern Ireland totalling 246 MW and operates over 88.7 MW of wind capacity across Northern Ireland, has secured planning permission for a further 109.9 MW awaiting construction and has 80 MW in the planning system.

The Application Site

- 1.6 There are a number of key technical and environmental factors that influence the suitability of a site for a wind farm. The following are key attributes that contribute to a viable site, which the application site possesses:
- Wind Speeds/Energy Yields: Sufficiently high wind speeds to ensure energy production from the wind turbines that would yield an adequate return on investment
 - Planning: A site which complies with planning policy and in particular, avoids unacceptable effects on areas designated by statutory agencies; maintains appropriate distances from dwellings to avoid unduly impacting local amenity and; avoids impeding or interfering with major electromagnetic transmission and airport communication systems
 - Area of Site: A site must have sufficient area to accommodate the number of wind turbines required for economic viability
 - Access: Adequate vehicular access to a site using existing roads wherever possible to minimise the amount of civil works, particularly during the construction phase
 - Local Terrain and Topography: Terrain and topography affect wind flow across a site and need to be considered in relation to turbine performance, specification and life-span
 - Ground Conditions: A site must have suitable ground conditions for the construction of wind turbine foundations, erection of the machines and the provision of access tracks and cables.
- 1.7 The site is located in the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) approximately 2.8 km to the South- West of the coastal village of Carnlough and approximately 17 km to the North- East of Ballymena town centre, Co. Antrim. The turbines would be located on upland grazing land between the townlands of Unshinagh and Ticloy on the Garron Plateau uplands to the south east of Cleggan Forest and below the summits of Berry Hill, Binnagee and Neill's Top. The site will be accessed from the A42 Carnlough-Ballymena Road.
- 1.8 The Site is currently used for sheep and cattle grazing and predominantly comprises semi-improved agricultural land. The lands are well managed with extensive stoned farm tracks providing access to agricultural fields which are bounded by mature hedgerows and stone walls.

2 Description of the Development

2.1 The main elements of the Development are as follows:

- 9 three-bladed horizontal axis wind turbines of up to 180 m tip-height
- Turbine foundations
- Hardstanding areas at each turbine location for use by cranes erecting and maintaining the turbines
- Electricity transformers
- Wind farm substation compound containing a control building
- Battery Energy Storage Containers
- On-site electrical and control network of underground (buried) cables
- Connection from the substation to the local grid network
- Temporary construction compound
- Permanent and temporary drainage works
- Associated ancillary works
- Temporary enabling works compound
- New site entrance from the public road.
- Tree felling.

2.2 The wind farm layout is shown in **Figure 1.3: Infrastructure Layout**.

2.3 The actual area of permanent land take is limited to the control room and substation compound, energy storage area, wind turbine towers, permanent crane hardstandings and on-site access tracks.

2.4 Prior to construction the locations of the proposed wind turbines would be subject to micro-siting, which allows for a small degree of flexibility in the exact locations of turbines and routes of tracks and associated infrastructure (50 m deviation in plan from the indicative design). Any repositioning would not encroach into environmentally constrained areas. Therefore, 50 m flexibility in turbine positioning would help mitigate any potential environmental effects: e.g. avoidance of unfavourable ground conditions or archaeological features not apparent from current records. The micro-siting allowance has been taken into account in the EIA and FEI.

3 Summary of the findings contained within this FEI

- 3.1 This Further Environmental Information (FEI) has been prepared to address comments received during the planning process and to assess the environmental implications of amendments made to the proposed wind farm. The most significant amendment is the reduction in the number of turbines from fourteen to nine, resulting in a smaller development footprint and a corresponding reduction in environmental effects while retaining a substantial renewable energy contribution.
- 3.2 The revised proposal would provide approximately 37.8 MW of installed renewable electricity capacity and generate around 71 GWh of clean electricity each year, sufficient to meet the annual electricity needs of more than 21,000 homes. The development would make an important contribution towards Northern Ireland's renewable energy and climate change targets, whilst also strengthening energy security.
- 3.3 The FEI concludes that the revised proposal would deliver significant economic benefits during both construction and operation. Construction would involve substantial investment within Northern Ireland, supporting employment, local businesses and the regional economy. Once operational, the wind farm would continue to generate economic benefits through employment, business rates and tax revenues.
- 3.4 The revised layout has also reduced the potential effects on landscape and visual amenity. Although the overall conclusions of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment remain unchanged, the reduction in turbine numbers and the removal of several turbines from more sensitive locations have reduced the extent of landscape and visual effects and further limited the development's influence within the surrounding area.
- 3.5 With regard to cultural heritage, the assessment concludes that the design of the revised development has minimised potential effects on the setting of heritage assets. Any archaeological remains that may be encountered during construction can be appropriately managed through archaeological investigation and planning conditions, ensuring compliance with relevant planning policy.
- 3.6 Updated ecological and ornithological assessments conclude that the revised turbine layout substantially reduces potential impacts on birds, particularly through the removal of turbines previously located within the Antrim Hills Special Protection Area (SPA). Additional bird surveys and updated scientific evidence indicate that potential effects on curlew populations can be appropriately addressed through habitat management and compensation measures (which is provided in detail in Section 6 of this FEI). The revised layout also significantly reduces potential impacts on hen harriers and the integrity of the SPA.

- 3.7 An updated noise assessment has confirmed that operational noise can be controlled through appropriate planning conditions to ensure compliance with recognised national guidance. Although temporary construction noise may exceed guideline levels at some nearby properties during certain activities, appropriate mitigation measures have been identified to minimise these short-term effects.
- 3.8 Across all environmental topics, the revised design demonstrates a clear process of mitigation through design by reducing the scale of the development, limiting infrastructure requirements and avoiding more environmentally sensitive areas wherever practicable. Where potential impacts remain, appropriate mitigation measures and planning conditions have been identified to ensure that residual environmental effects are acceptable.
- 3.9 Overall, the Further Environmental Information concludes that the amended proposal would provide substantial renewable energy, climate change, economic and social benefits while reducing environmental impacts compared with the original scheme. Taking account of the mitigation incorporated into the design and the additional environmental information provided, it is concluded that the remaining environmental effects are localised, can be appropriately managed and do not outweigh the significant public benefits that the development would deliver.