

SUBMISSION FROM ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL

1. SUMMARY

1.1 As Members will be aware the Scottish Government issued a consultation on the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2 (NPF2) Discussion Draft in early 2008. The NPF2 sets out a spatial strategy for Scotland's development to 2030, providing a national strategic context for development plans and planning decisions and helping to inform the wider programmes of government, public agencies and local authorities in Scotland. It takes forward the spatial aspects of the Government Economic Strategy and identifies priorities for investment to enable each part of the country to play to its strengths and whilst it is not itself a spending document it is closely linked to the Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan and will inform the investment programme of public agencies and infrastructure providers.

1.2 Under the terms of the Planning, etc (Scotland) Act 2006, the NPF has a considerably enhanced status and role as it now places it on a statutory footing. The existing NPF1 was published in 2004 and will ultimately be replaced by NPF2 following its finalisation.

1.3 This report seeks to update Members as to the current position with regard to the NPF2 and seeks Members approval to make representation to the Scottish Parliament on the specific issue of electricity grid reinforcements as contained in the NPF2 as they relate to Argyll and Bute following a debate about this matter at the Economy Policy and Performance Group on the 28 January 2009.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Members agree that the Council write to the Clerk to the Local Government and Communities Committee at the Scottish Parliament: and all Argyll and Bute members of parliament seeking the inclusion of a new sub-sea cable link from Hunterston to Carradale in the future electricity grid reinforcements identified within the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The NPF2 covers a wide variety of spatial aspects of the Scottish Government's policy commitment on sustainable growth and climate change, which will see Scotland move towards a low carbon economy. It identifies the strategic priorities for investment in energy and specifically identifies the reinforcements required to the electricity grid within Scotland in order to

provide the transmission necessary to realise the potential of Scotland's renewable energy resources, maintain long term security of electricity supply and support sustainable economic growth and whilst it is not itself a spending document it is closely linked to the Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan and will inform the investment programme of public agencies and infrastructure providers. It is supported by an action plan

3.2 Following of the issuing of the National Planning Framework for Scotland 2 (NPF2) Discussion Draft in early 2008, a report was placed before Members at the Executive Committee on the 17th April 2008 raising a number of concerns relating to the consultation document. At that time no national infrastructure projects had been identified with Argyll and Bute with the exception of the new electricity substation at Sloy, which was part of the reinforcement of the national grid.

3.3 The Council made representation to the Scottish Government on a number of issues which it felt had not been fully addressed including the lack of any mention of the proposal to develop the Hunterston to Carradale sub-sea cable link which it was felt should be included as part of the transmission system reinforcements.

3.4 Following consideration of all the consultation responses amendments were made and the proposed Framework was laid before the Scottish Parliament for a total of 60 days on the 12 December 2008 by the Scottish Ministers in pursuance of Section 3B of the Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. The 60 day consideration period will end on the 6 March 2009.

3.5 Notwithstanding the previous representation from Argyll and Bute Council seeking the inclusion of the subsea cable link running from Hunterston to Carradale, this grid upgrade has not been included in the Framework currently before Parliament. There is no mention of it in either Map 8 – Transmission System Reinforcements or Map 10 – National Designations (unlike other proposed sub-sea cable links to Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles). It is critical that the Argyll link receives equal priority to these others.

3.6 The Parliament will debate the matter on Thursday 5 March 2009. It is estimated that the debate will last for 2 hrs 30min and each political party will decide who will take part in the debate. It is vital that the Council lobby the Argyll and Bute local Members of Parliament on this matter to ensure that this issue is raised on the day of the debate.

3.7 It is for Parliament to manage the 60 day consideration process and as well as the information about submitting any representation. The lead Committee considering this matter is the Local Government and Communities Committee at the Scottish Parliament. The Clerk to the Committee has advised that they are happy to take representation from the Council however they would encourage the submission of this as early as possible as they will be publishing their final report on the 26 February but it will be considered by members of the Committee during the week beginning the 9 February. To

ensure that the Councils representation is circulated around members of the Committee the Clerk has asked if the Council could e-mail a copy of the report to them as soon as possible.

3.8 The lead Committee as well as the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee have held sessions in the Parliament throughout January with stakeholders and the Minister. The Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee and the Transport publicised their report on Tuesday 3 February 2009. The Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change Committee will publish their report later on this month.

3.9 As Members will be aware grid infrastructure is a critical issue affecting Argyll and Bute. The grid is currently considered to be effectively “saturated”, with the result that any new projects (even very small ones) are being refused connections any earlier than 2018. The sustainable development of further onshore wind and new marine and tidal renewable developments will only be taken forward in Argyll and Bute if the necessary capacity is first built into the grid. There is no doubt that the current lack of capacity is holding back the future development of our extensive renewable resource. The inclusion of the Hunterston to Carradale sub-sea cable link as a significant electricity grid reinforcement within the NPF2 is critical in planning for the future. With the inclusion of this subsea cable in the NPF2 Argyll and Bute could begin to play to its strengths and to assist the Government in delivery their targets as set out in the Government Economic Strategy.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 There is no doubt that this is a significant issue for Argyll and Bute and we need to proactively in our approach and lobby at every opportunity to ensure that Argyll and Bute does not lose out when it comes to taking forward future opportunities for sustainable development arising from onshore wind and new marine renewable developments. The inclusion of the Hunterston to Carradale subsea cable link within the NPF2 is critical to the future planning for our area.