

Agenda Item	7.3
Report No	PLN/063/25

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: North Planning Applications Committee

Date: 24 September 2025

Report Title: 25/01306/FUL: Whirlwind Renewables
Achlachan Wind Farm, Watten

Report By: Area Planning Manager - North

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Achlachan Wind Farm 2 Redesign - Erection and operation of a wind farm for a period of 40 years, comprising of up to 2 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 149.9m, access tracks, hardstandings and ancillary infrastructure

Ward: 03 – Wick and East Caithness

Development category: Local Development (Electricity Generation)

Reason referred to Committee: Local Development – 5 or more Objections

All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal accords with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations.

Recommendation

Members are asked to agree the recommendation to **GRANT** the application as set out in section 11 of the report.

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 This planning application is for the erection and operation of two wind turbines for a period of 40 years, with a maximum blade tip height of 149.9m, access tracks, hardstandings and ancillary infrastructure. The proposal has the capacity to generate up to 8.52MW per annum.
- 1.2 The proposal has been submitted under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 on the basis that they are seeking to operate the wind farm as a standalone consent which would have an electricity output of less than 50MW per annum.
- 1.3 The proposed development comprises:
 - two wind turbines, with a maximum tip height of up to 149.9m (capable of generating 4.26MW);
 - two wind turbine foundations, crane hardstandings and construction areas adjacent to the turbines;
 - two new lengths of access track to provide access to the turbines; and
 - two watercourse crossings.
- 1.4 The site would be accessed by separate tracks, both off the existing access track from the B870, serving the existing Achlachan Wind Farm.
- 1.5 As a local development, the application is of a scale which does not require any formal pre-application consultation with the public to be undertaken. The application however underwent Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening upon receipt, and although the proposal does not constitute EIA Development, the application is supported by a suite of supporting documents:
 - Supporting Statement, incorporating Design and Access Statement;
 - Noise Assessment;
 - Ecological Impact Appraisal;
 - Archaeological Assessment;
 - Viewpoint Visualisations;
 - Ornithological Assessment;
 - Peat Management Plan
- 1.6 There have been no variations to the proposal since submission of the application.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site is 2.5km south of the village of Spittal and 6.5km south of Halkirk, and would be accessed directly off the B870 road between Mybster and Westerdale. The site is

generally flat, open moorland with plantation forestry to the north and the A9 road to the east. The existing Achlachan Wind Farm, comprising 5 turbines lies immediately to the south and west. These existing turbines have a blade tip height of 115m. Beyond these turbines to the west is a further area of plantation forestry, beyond which is the River Thurso, approximately 2.4km from the site.

- 2.2 The existing Achlachan Wind Farm forms part of a larger cluster of wind turbines which include the Causeymire scheme to the south, consisting of 21 turbines with a tip height of 100m. There are two other operating wind farms in the immediate area: Bad á Cheò Wind Farm comprising 13 turbines with a tip height of 112m, situated west of the A9, and Halsary Wind Farm comprising 15 turbines with a tip height of 120m, situated east of the A9. Collectively this grouping of wind farms is known as the Causeymire Cluster.
- 2.3 The Mybster 132KV/33KV substation also lies close to the A9, 1km south east of the site. The nearest inhabited dwellings to the proposed turbines are at Mybster Inn Farm at the junction of the B870 with the A9. Mybster Farm is 500m from the nearest turbine and is currently uninhabited.
- 2.4 In 2016, permission was granted on appeal for three turbines at 110m in height, immediately south of the existing Achlachan Wind Farm. This extension was not implemented and the permission has now lapsed. The applicant advises that this current proposal would in effect replace the previously consented extension to the Achlachan Wind Farm, albeit on a different area of land. Notwithstanding this, the application must be assessed on its own merits.

Environmental Designations and Habitats

- 2.5 The site does not form part of any landscape, built or natural heritage designation. There are however a number in proximity:

Natural Heritage Features:

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)** (Achannas and Spittal Quarries) – 2km north and east
- **Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)** (River Thurso) – 2.4km west
- **World Heritage Site** (Flow Country) – 3.6km south
- **Special Protection Areas (SPA)** (Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands) – 3.6km south (also Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC, corresponding with Blar nam Faoileag, Shielton Peatlands, and Strathmore Peatlands SSSIs)

Landscape Features:

- **Wild Land Area (WLA)** (Causeymire and Knockin Flows) -3.6km south
- **Special Landscape Area (SLA)** (Flow Country and Berridale Coast) – 5km south

Built Heritage Features:

- **Scheduled Monuments (SM)** (Ballone Broch) – 0.5km northeast
- **SM** (Knock Don Broch) 1.8km northwest
- **SM** (Tulah Lochain Bhraseil Cairn and Tulach an Fhurian cairn) – 2.6km west
- **Listed Buildings (LB)** – (Westerdale Bridge, Westerdale Church Wall and Gates, Westerdale House, Dovecote and Walled Garden) – 2.5km west.

- 2.6 The site lies within Landscape Character Type (LCT) 134 (Sweeping Moorlands), as identified in NatureScot's Landscape Character Assessment of Scotland, and within 0.5km to the boundary with LCT143 – Farmed Lowland Plain to the north. The Sweeping Moorland and Flows character type is described as occurring extensively across Caithness and east Sutherland, forming a flat, gently undulating and generally smooth landform. Transitions between the Rocky Hills and Moorland and Rounded Hills - Caithness and Sutherland tend to be subtle.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

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|-----|------------|--|---|
| 3.1 | 20.09.2017 | 17/02176/FUL - Erection of 5 wind turbines with a maximum height to tip of 115m. | Planning Permission Granted |
| 3.2 | 29.03.2016 | 15/01831/FUL - Erection of 3 additional turbines with a max height of 110m and combined capacity of up to 7.5MW and associated infrastructure | Planning Permission Granted on Appeal |
| 3.3 | 13.11.2013 | 13/01190/FUL - Erection of 5 x 2 MW wind turbines with a maximum height to tip of 110m and associated infrastructure including: site tracks, crane hardstandings, external transformer housings, electrical control building and temporary anemometer mast at Achlachan Wind Farm. | Planning Permission Granted & development completed and operating |

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 4.1 Advertised: Unknown Neighbour / Schedule 3 Development

Date Advertised: John O Groats Journal, 16.05.2025

Representation deadline: 30.05.2025

Timeous representations:

26 (from 22No. households) 14 objections and 12 in support of the proposal

Late representations:

1 support comment (from 1No. Household)

4.2 Material considerations raised in objections are summarised as follows:

- Landscape and visual effects, including cumulative along with nearby wind farms and other energy infrastructure; adverse effect on views to Morven and beyond;
- Loss of farmland / soils;
- Proximity to houses (residential amenity);
- Aviation lighting effect on residential amenity;
- Adverse effect on tourism;
- Inappropriate imposing scale; proposed turbines (149.9m) are taller than existing ones (115m at Achlachan, 100m at Causeymire), creating visual discord;
- Adverse ornithological impacts;
- Viewpoints provided in the application are insufficient; key perspectives (e.g., from across River Thurso) are omitted;
- Construction disruption; blasting vibration impact (required to create platforms); and
Adverse cultural heritage impacts.

4.3 Material considerations raised in representations in support are summarised as follows:

- 2 turbines will have little negative visual impact;
- Contribution to achieving net zero; and
- Infrastructure is already in place to serve the development.

4.4 Non-material issues raised are summarised as follows:

- No community benefit;
- Local grid constraints result in turbines being frequently turned off, implying further installations may increase constraint payments;
- National energy statistics suggest no need for additional turbines, with existing and planned capacity far exceeding demand;
- Call for moratorium on new wind farm consents;
- Causeymire set to be decommissioned and no recycling of parts;
- Devaluation of properties; and
- In wrong location – should be in south of the country.

4.5 All representations are available for inspection via the Council's eplanning portal which can be accessed through the internet www.wam.highland.gov.uk/wam

5. CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 **Halkirk and District Community Council (Host)** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.2 **Berriedale and District Community Council** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.3 **Bower Community Council** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.4 **Caithness West Community Council** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.5 **Castleton Community Council** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.6 **Latheron Community Council** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.7 **Watten Community Council** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.8 **Community Wealth Building:** No comments but contact made with applicant.
- 5.9 **Contaminated Land** does not object to the application and has no concerns regarding potential for contamination within the application site.
- 5.10 **Development Plans Team** does not object. The proposal is in overall conformity with the approved development plan. Consideration should be given towards the need for any developer contributions.
- 5.11 **Environmental Health** does not object, subject to conditions requiring control of construction noise and dust management, and imposing operational noise limits, as well as the provision of a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- 5.12 **Flood Risk Management Team:** does not object. There should be no net ground raising in this area to prevent any changes in flood conveyance.
- 5.13 **Forestry Team** does not object. The proposed development does not appear to involve any significant adverse impact on existing trees or woodland.
- 5.14 **Civic Aviation Authority** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.15 **Historic Environment Team (Archaeology)** does not object. It is not expected that there will be unavoidable direct impacts to archaeological assets, an additional assessment of the potential for the peat to contain palaeoenvironmental evidence should be considered. This will enable an opinion on any necessary and appropriate mitigation to be formed. HES should be consulted on impacts to designated assets in the area to determine if Heritage Impact Assessment is required.
- 5.16 **Transport Planning:** does not object. Conditions should reflect those previously used for wind energy developments in this locality, including requirement for a Construction Phase Traffic Management Plan(CPTMP), Abnormal Indivisible Loads (AIL) Routing

Assessment and “Wear and Tear” agreement under Section 96 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

- 5.17 **Defence Infrastructure Organisation** does not object. Requested conditions on aviation lighting and charting/safety management. Infrared lighting will be suitable.
- 5.18 **Highlands and Islands Airport Limited** does not object. The development would not infringe the safeguarding criteria and operation of Wick Airport.
- 5.19 **Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** does not object to the application. The proposals do not raise historic environment issues of national significance.
- 5.20 **NATS** does not object to the application. It has no safeguarding concerns.
- 5.21 **NatureScot** does not object to the application. Require an Appropriate Assessment to be undertaken in respect of impacts on River Thurso SAC, and peatland restoration to be undertaken in accordance with a habitat management plan.
- 5.22 **SEPA** does not object to the application. The application falls below the thresholds for which SEPA provides site specific advice.
- 5.23 **Transport Scotland** does not object to the application, subject to conditions in respect of details of abnormal vehicle routing, details of any additional traffic control measures. Construction Traffic Management Plan required.

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY

- 6.1 The following policies are of most relevance to the assessment of the application:

National Planning Framework 4 (2023) (NPF4)

- 6.2
 - 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 13 - Sustainable Transport
 - 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

Highland Wide Local Development Plan 2012 (HwLDP)

- 6.3
- 28 - Sustainable Design
 - 29 - Design Quality and Place-making
 - 30 - Physical Constraints
 - 31 - Developer Contributions
 - 36 - Development in the Wider Countryside
 - 51 - Trees and Development
 - 55 - Peat and Soils
 - 56 - Travel
 - 57 - Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
 - 58 - Protected Species
 - 59 - Other important Species
 - 60 - Other Importance Habitats
 - 61 - Landscape
 - 62 - Geodiversity
 - 63 - Water Environment
 - 64 - Flood Risk
 - 66 - Surface Water Drainage
 - 67 - Renewable Energy Developments
 - 68 - Community Renewable Energy Developments
 - 72 - Pollution
 - 73 - Air Quality
 - 74 - Green Networks

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (2018) (CaSPlan)

- 6.4
- No specific policies apply. The plan does however confirm the boundaries of the regionally significant Special Landscape Areas.

Highland Council Supplementary Guidance

- 6.5
- Onshore Wind Energy: Interim Supplementary Guidance (March 2012)
 - Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance (May 2024)
 - Developer Contributions (March 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)
 - Physical Constraints (March 2013)
 - Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments (May 2013)
 - Special Landscape Area Citations (June 2011)
 - Standards for Archaeological Work (March 2012)

7. OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Other National Legislation, Policy and Guidance:

- Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 – interim and annual targets replaced by Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill in November 2024
- Climate Change Committee Report to UK Parliament (July 2024)
- UK Government Clean Power Action Plan (Dec 2024)
- Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)
- Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement (2022)
- Draft Scottish Biodiversity strategy to 2045:tackling the nature emergency (2023)
- Scottish Energy Strategy (2017)
- 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy (2011)
- Energy Efficient Scotland Route Map, Scottish Government (2018)
- Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape, SNH (2017)
- Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas, Technical Guidance, NatureScot (2020)
- Wind Farm Developments on Peat Lands, Scottish Government (2011)
- 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)

8. PLANNING APPRAISAL

8.1 Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

8.2 This means that the application requires to be assessed against all policies of the Development Plan relevant to the application, all national and local policy guidance and all other material considerations relevant to the application.

8.3 Planning Considerations

- a) Compliance with the Development Plan/Other Planning Policy
- b) Energy and Economic Benefits
- c) Design, Landscape and Visual Impacts
- d) Construction
- e) Roads, Transport and Access
- f) Water, Flood Risk, Drainage and Peat

g) Natural Heritage (including ornithology)

h) Built and Cultural Heritage

i) Noise and Shadow Flicker

j) Other Material Considerations

Development Plan / Other Planning Policy

- 8.4 The Development Plan comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the adopted Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan), and all statutorily adopted supplementary guidance.
- 8.5 In summary, while the development plan does not establish the principle of development for local or major scale renewable energy development, it does establish strong policy support for such schemes. Indeed, the Spatial Strategies and Spatial Priorities for the north of Scotland highlight how Highland can continue to make a strong contribution toward meeting Scotland's ambition for net zero, against which this application can make a small contribution. Alongside these ambitions, the strategy for Highland aims to protect environmental assets as well as to stimulate investment in natural and engineered solutions to address climate change. This aim is not new and will clearly require a balancing exercise to be undertaken, which is reflected throughout NPF4.

Energy and Economic Benefits

- 8.6 The applicant's assessment of the socio-economic impact of the proposed development is set out in Section 15 of the Supporting Statement accompanying the application. This notes that the two turbines will generate enough electricity to supply the equivalent of 10,300 homes, equivalent to over 70% of homes in Caithness with electricity every year for their operating life and prevent the emission of around 13,524 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year during that time.
- 8.7 The Council has published the Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment in June 2024. This has been brought to the applicant's attention. Raw material, in the form of crushed stone is proposed to be sourced locally and local businesses would be encouraged to tender for the construction works. The applicant considers that the development of the proposed wind farm extension will have a positive economic impact.
- 8.8 In respect of community benefit, the developer operates a good neighbour process and intends to establish a community benefit package for the project to support local community-based projects. Whilst not a material planning consideration, this is stated to be £5,000 per MW per annum index linked. The Council's Community Wealth

Building Team has been informed of the proposal in order to engage the developer about maximising benefits to the community if the scheme is granted consent.

Design, Landscape and Visual Impacts

- 8.9 The applicant's assessment of landscape and visual impact is set out in Section 5 of the Supporting Statement accompanying the application. A total of 19 viewpoints (VPs) within a 30km study area have been assessed in relation to landscape and visual effects. The supplied visualisations and wirelines are based on the locations of visualisations and viewpoints previously assessed in relation to the operating Achlachan scheme. The applicant has advised that this scheme is being pursued in lieu of the previously approved three turbine extension on land to the south of the existing 5 Achlachan turbines, to avoid potential effects on the Causeymire wind farm to the south with regard to the wind resource and associated potential effects on the production of that site which is in separate ownership.
- 8.10 The consideration of the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposal has focussed on the assessment of how it would modify the appearance of the existing Causeymire Cluster, which the two turbines would effectively form a northern addition to. The cluster comprises the 54 operational turbines of the Achlachan, Bad a' Cheò, Causeymire and Halsary wind farms, whilst three consented turbines at Tacher, at the south end of the cluster, are also under construction.
- 8.11 As noted, the site lies within the LCT 134 - Sweeping Moorland and Flows. The assessment considers impact on this LCT and two other LCTs that adjoin it, namely, LCT 143 - Farmed Lowland Plain, which includes land immediately north of the site and which continues northwards to the north coast, and LCT 138 – Lone Mountains which lies 25km to the south and encompasses summits such as Morven and Scaraben.
- 8.12 **LCT 134 - Sweeping Moorland and Flows:** The LCT forms a large-scale landscape consisting of undulating moorland predominantly covered by heather and grassland, extending south and west of the site, including the Causeymire Cluster. The LCT would experience both direct and indirect impacts as a result of the development. The ZTV has indicated that potential intervisibility would be widespread to the south, south-east and south-west of the site. Thereafter, potential intervisibility would reduce and generally be experienced from hill slopes over 10km away in which the turbines would be viewed in conjunction with the wider Causeymire Cluster, and would, together, appear as a small part of a single large wind cluster. The proposal's effect on landscape character will be at the site level and extending to the nearest turbines only. The proposal is not a characterising development on the hosting landscape character area (LCA) of LCT134 given the extensive wind farm landscape to its south and therefore the effect on the LCA is negligible overall, and not significant.

- 8.13 **LCT 143 - Farmed Lowland Plain:** The proposal lies within 0.5km of LCT143, which is a similar distance to the boundary as existing turbines, and therefore the proposal will not result in direct effects on the LCT. The fringes of this LCT where it meets the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT are already characterised by turbine development, which are a defining feature of the boundary where they transition from one LCT to another. Given that the proposal will reinforce the wind farm landscape that already exists south of this boundary straddles the A9(T), there will be little to no change to the character of LCT143 except in a very localised location around the B870 where turbines will appear nearer. These effects on the character of the LCT are not significant and well within acceptable limits.
- 8.14 **LCT 138 – Lone Mountains:** The part of this LCT within the 30km study area lies some 25km to the south of the site. The viewpoint visualisation illustrates the predicted visibility of the project in combination with the baseline comprising the Causeymire Cluster. At this distance predicted effects on the LCT are considered to be negligible and not significant.
- 8.15 The LVIA submitted with the application also considers the impacts of the development on landscape designation within the study area. There are no national designations within the 30km study area, however there are three regionally designated Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) within 30 km of the site.
- 8.16 The Flow Country and Berridale Coast SLA is the closest SLA to the site, lying 5km to the south. This SLA predominantly consisting of flat peatlands, but includes foothills and lone mountains, which provide a sharp contrast and focal point within the landscape. The designation is considered to have a high scenic quality due to its generally undeveloped nature and contrasting landscape components. The designation is also highly valued as indicated by its inclusion as a SLA within development plans. The designation is not regarded as being suitable for potential wind farm development due to its distinctive horizontal plains and low horizons. Therefore, sensitivity to change is considered to be High.
- 8.17 While there will be intervisibility of the proposal from within the SLA, the two turbines will not result in any apparent change to the current baseline in outward views from the SLA given their relative position behind the Causeymire cluster.
- 8.18 As such the proposal will not in and of itself result in any impacts on the SLA's Distinctive Mountain and Moorland Skyline, the Exposed Peaks, Vast Openness and Intimate Glens, or The Historic Landscape Special qualities or the integrity of the designation itself.
- 8.19 The Dunnet Head SLA is around 20km north of the site, and it is predicted that there would be very limited visibility of the development from this location. No viewpoint from the SLA was provided however, a wireline illustrated the predicted cumulative appearance of the proposal from a location at Weydale, which is 10km to the south of

Dunnet Head. This shows that the site would fall within the Causeymire Cluster and any additional effects in the Dunnet Head SLA would not be significant. There is no predicted visibility of the project from the Duncansby Head SLA, which is around 30km to the northeast of the site. As such, neither of these SLAs require to be considered further.

- 8.20 The development would be located 4km northeast of the Causeymire - Knockfin Flows Wild Land Area (WLA36). Notwithstanding that Policy 4 in the NPF4 states that Buffer zones around Wild Land will not be applied for energy developments, and that the effects of development outwith Wild Land Areas will not be a significant consideration, the proposal is not considered to result in and change to the current baseline when considered against the Wild Land Qualities of the WLA.
- 8.21 Overall, the landscape sensitivity to wind farm development and the magnitude of change in these areas is significantly reduced and mitigated both by the presence of the 54 operational turbines making up the Causeymire Cluster, and the modest scale of change proposed by these two turbines, which would appear as a cohesive and conjoined with the wider grouping. The overall landscape impact, including on landscape composition, will not be significant.
- 8.22 In terms of effects on visual amenity, the Viewpoint Appraisal included in Appendix 3 of this report, concludes that the proposal will result in no additional significant effects at all viewpoint locations. This is because, the two additional turbines would visually assimilate with the existing large cluster, adding very slightly to the visual presence and density of the turbines from the closer receptors. From viewpoints over 10km from the site, the predicted magnitude of change in the appearance of the existing cluster is considered negligible (with the exception of VP13 Ben Dorrery which where the change is slightly more notable due to being experienced on higher ground).
- 8.23 Moreover, the two proposed turbines would appear as an addition to the existing cluster without significantly increasing the lateral spread or mass of the existing group. The additional two turbines are seen in ZTVs to only very marginally increase the visual extent or spread of the existing cluster; resulting in no discernible change to key to the character or amenity of views. The predicted cumulative landscape and visual effects of the proposal are appraised as overall not significant.
- 8.24 Appendix 2 and 3 of this report provide an appraisal of visual impacts and an assessment of compliance with the Council's Onshore Wind Energy SG (OWESG). In summary, no new significant visual effects over and above the existing baseline site context have been identified, with the proposal (unusually) meeting all the OWESG criteria, indicating overall compliance with the HwLDP Policy 67 (Renewable Energy Developments) and NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy).
- 8.25 The development is located in an area identified in the OWESG as one where wind energy is more likely to receive support. The OWESG notes that this LCT is

particularly susceptible to wind energy developments that would extend west towards the more rugged Sutherland landscape to the west and south. The SG notes that the Causeymire Cluster has a simple contained relationship to the much wider landscape. The A9 corridor is noted as having OHL towers running parallel to it at this location. It is noted that there is limited scope for larger turbines that consolidate with existing developments, maintain clear and open views which allow appreciation of the wild landscape, particularly from the A9, and have a logical relationship with the landscape.

- 8.26 Extensions to existing clusters should continue the scale and form of existing developments and avoid unnecessary cumulative impacts. The proposed development, whilst involving taller turbines than existing, appears to be sited and designed to achieve the requirements of the OWESG in this LCT and as such it is appropriate to consider the two turbines as a small extension to the existing Causeymire Cluster. It should also be noted that while the turbines will be higher than any existing turbines in this area, all of these wind farm sites have been assessed as being suitable for wind farms in perpetuity, and with some nearby schemes coming to the end of their operational lives, these are likely to be subject to applications for repowering in the short to medium term.
- 8.27 Consequently, it is considered that the two turbines can be accommodated at this location without resulting in adverse landscape or visual impacts. Whilst higher than the existing turbines, and slightly extending the cluster in a northeasterly direction, the turbines would be viewed and experienced as a cohesive element of the larger cluster, and it is concluded that they would not result in an unacceptable landscape, visual or cumulative impacts.

Aviation Lighting

- 8.27 The turbines are proposed to have no permanent lighting, and as they are below 150m, and as such will not require permanent visible aviation lighting. The Ministry of Defence have requested a condition about aviation lighting, and this will be in the form of non-visible infra-red spectrum.

Construction

- 8.28 The proposed turbines will benefit from existing infrastructure already in place to serve the existing Achlachan turbines, such as the access off the public road. The construction program is predicted to last 9 months. Construction hours are proposed by the applicant to be 07:00 – 19:00 Mon-Fri and 07:00 – 16:00 on Saturday. This however deviates from standard working hours which will restrict works on site to 08:00 - 19:00 Monday to Friday, 08:00 and 13:00 on Saturdays with no working at any time on a Sunday or Bank Holiday in Scotland. Any blasting on site shall only take place between the hours of 10:00 to 16:00 on Monday to Friday inclusive and 10:00 to 12:00 on Saturdays with no blasting taking place on Sunday or on Bank Holidays. Developers still have to comply with reasonable operational practices with regard to

construction noise so as not to cause nuisance. Section 60 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 sets restrictions in terms of hours of operation, plant and equipment used and noise levels etc. and is enforceable via Environmental Health and not Planning. Should the applicant look to deviate from the standard working hours, a construction noise assessment will be required, with this being subject to prior written approval of the Council.

- 8.29 Construction would be carried out in accordance with a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), to be agreed with The Highland Council and statutory consultees. Environmental Health have raised no objections and propose a condition in respect of construction noise management.

Roads, Transport and Access

- 8.30 The proposed development will utilise the vehicle access already created and in place to serve the original Achlachan Wind Farm off the B870. This access is less than 1km from the junction with the A9 Trunk Road.
- 8.31 Construction of the turbines will require a limited number of abnormal vehicle movements, which would be between Wick Harbour and the site, utilising the A99 and A9 trunk roads. Mitigation measures are proposed to deal with this. It is proposed that a Construction Phase Traffic Management Plan (CPTMP) is prepared and submitted to the Council for approval in advance of construction commencing.
- 8.32 Transport Scotland and the Council's Transport Planning Team have no objections to the application and requires that conditions on abnormal load routing, details of any temporary traffic control measures and CPTMP are required before works commence.

Water, Flooding, Drainage and Peat

- 8.33 The site is drained by the Achlachan Burn which runs in a north-westerly direction through the Achlachan Wind Farm to join the River Thurso 2.4km to the northwest. The geology of the site is characterised by shallow peat soils with Spital Flagstone Formation of sedimentary rock below, typical of the area. The habitat is likely to be dominated by a combination of rainfall and surface water seepage from drains and watercourses and therefore is not considered to be a groundwater dependent habitat.
- 8.34 The development does not require any water or sewerage connection. The main issues in respect of surface water drainage would be when the turbines are under construction, where measures will be required to control run-off into the receiving watercourse. These can be controlled by a suitable condition requiring a CEMP. Whilst there are no details of permanent drainage arrangements, again, a condition can be utilised to require details of SUDs, which is not likely to be onerous.
- 8.35 The scale of development falls below SEPA's threshold for consulting on, and their standing advice applies. In respect of flood risk, the site is not identified as being at

risk from flooding on SEPA's flood map, and the Council's Flooding Officer has no objection to the development on flood risk grounds.

- 8.36 The development design has been informed to ensure the turbines and access track extension to serve them avoid areas of deep peat, with peat depths at the turbine locations typically around 1m and 2m being the maximum anticipated depth. It is anticipated that the volume of peat extraction will be 2,200m³, all of which would be re-used within the site. Appropriate on-site management plans are proposed as part of an overall CEMP.
- 8.37 A total of 0.05Ha of peat is predicted to be lost as a result of the development. As such, the applicant proposes to undertake peatland restoration of an area totalling 5.06Ha, on adjoining peatland in the same ownership, as was the case for the original Achlachan scheme details of which can be set out in an outline Habitat Management and Biodiversity Enhancement Plan to be conditioned.

Natural Heritage including Ornithology

- 8.38 The site lies within 3km of the River Thurso SAC, which is designated for Atlantic salmon. The site is hydrologically connected to the River Thurso via the Achlachan Burn. Given that without mitigation the proposal is capable of having a likely significant effect on Atlantic salmon, NatureScot require an Appropriate Assessment to be undertaken. NatureScot advise that proving that appropriate mitigation is followed, the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC. Specifically, this will require a Construction and Environment Management Plan/Pollution Prevention Plan to be prepared and implemented in accordance with SEPA guidance. This matter can be addressed by a planning condition, with the Planning Authority's Habitats Regulations Appraisal and Appropriate Assessment forming Appendix 4 of this report.
- 8.39 The application is supported by an Ecological Impact Assessment. This assessment does not predict any likely significant ecological residual effects associated with the proposed development. An Ornithological Assessment indicates that habitat loss arising from the development will be limited and that any effects during construction will be short term and can be mitigated by appropriate measures through a CEMP and employment of an Ecological Clerk of Works, which is proposed and would also be conditioned. Any construction work to be undertaken during the breeding season should be subject to a breeding bird survey, which again can be subject of a planning condition.

Built Heritage

- 8.40 As noted, there are a number of Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments within 2.5km of the site. The area is well known for its brochs, and the nearest of these (Ballone Broch) is 0.5km from the site. HES have assessed the potential impact of the development on these heritage assets and their settings. They consider that whilst

the proposed turbines would appear prominent in the middle distance to the southwest of the broch, the turbines are back-dropped by existing wind turbines and as such do not interrupt key visual relationships, and the turbines would read as an expansion of the existing development from Ballone and other nearby heritage receptors.

- 8.41 The Council's archaeologist has noted that direct impacts on archaeological assets are unlikely, however, additional assessments should be undertaken as part of a Heritage Impact Assessment, and this matter can be conditioned.

Operational Noise and Shadow Flicker

- 8.42 The application is accompanied by a Noise Assessment that assesses Operational noise levels, both in isolation and cumulatively with adjacent turbines, in respect of 20 properties, scoped into the assessment, with 6 properties scoped out due to being financially involved in the development. Required noise levels are shown as being met (both for the development in isolation and cumulatively) for all properties with the exception of Mybster Farm, which is unoccupied and owned by someone with a financial interest in the scheme. Environmental Health note that noise levels at Mybster Farm may be close to acceptable limits in certain wind speed scenarios, and it is noted that the property is unoccupied but owned by someone with a financial interest in the scheme. As such, a set of conditions on construction noise management and wind turbine noise are suggested. The applicant has advised that the owner has no plans to occupy the house during the operation of the project, and if it were to be occupied, noise management would be used to prevent noise nuisance, or the potential occupants would enter into a financial agreement for involvement in the scheme. Environmental Health have raised no concern in this regard, with this to be controlled by condition.
- 8.43 The application is accompanied by an assessment of the effect of shadow flicker on nearby properties. The HC's guidance on shadow flicker within the Highland Onshore Wind Energy SG, states that properties within a radius of 11 times the rotor diameter centred on the turbine may be affected by shadow flicker. In this instance, the radius would be a total distance of 759m. The applicant has carried out modelling of the shadow flicker using a study radius of 10 times the rotor diameter (690m), however, in practice has assessed all properties up to 1,400m from either turbine. The only property within 10 or 11 times the rotor diameter of either turbine is Mybster Farm, which as noted above is unoccupied and owned by parties with an interest in the development, (514m from Turbine 1). Four other properties were assessed, all of which lie more than 1km from either turbine.
- 8.44 The study concludes that under worst case conditions, the maximum unmitigated occurrence of shadow flicker amounts to 15.5 hours per year, which could potentially be experienced at Mybster Farm. The effects of shadow flicker on any property are considered to be below the levels requiring any mitigation.

Other Material Considerations

- 8.45 The applicant has advised that there are no existing telecommunications fixed links or other assets in the area of the project. No concerns have been raised in relation to potential interference with radio / television networks in the locality. Nonetheless, it is appropriate to apply a Condition to secure a scheme of mitigation should issues arise during the lifetime of the development.
- 8.46 No aviation authorities have raised any objection to the application. The Ministry of Defence requests conditions on mitigation measures with regards to aviation lighting and charting/safety management.
- 8.47 In line with Council policy and practice, community benefit considerations are undertaken as a separate exercise and generally parallel to the planning process. The proposals are not expected to impact on THC service provision or create additional demand on Council facilities and infrastructure, and therefore no financial contributions are required under HwLDP Policy 31. Any expected impacts on Council maintained public roads will be covered through the relevant wear and tear agreement, which is secured by condition.
- 8.48 There are no other matters that require to be taken into account when assessing this application.

Matters to be secured by Legal Agreement

- 8.49 A decommissioning, restoration and aftercare financial guarantee along with a Section 96 Roads wear and tear agreement can be secured by condition. A legal agreement is not required.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Scottish Government gives considerable commitment to renewable energy and encourages planning authorities to support the development of wind farms where they can operate successfully and be situated in appropriate locations. The project has potential to contribute to addressing the climate emergency through additional renewable energy generation. In this regard it is anticipated to contribute an additional 8.52MW of installed capacity, making a meaningful contribution toward addressing climate change on the road to net zero.
- 9.2 As with all applications, a balancing exercise must be undertaken. The benefits of the proposal must be weighed against potential drawbacks and then considered in the round, taking account of the relevant policies of the Development Plan, which includes NPF4, as well as all other material planning considerations. THC has received 14 letters of objection and 13 letters of support in respect of the application. No statutory consultees have raised any objection, however, planning conditions will be required

to address certain matters of detail raised by consultees before development could commence. The proposal can be considered to benefit from an in-principle support, with the extent of localised landscape and visual effects being outweighed by the contribution the development would make toward tackling climate change which must be given significant weight. The development also contains proposals for habitat management, which could, if appropriately conditioned, lead to peatland and biodiversity enhancement.

- 9.3 Whilst the two turbines at 149.9m height to blade tip would be 35m higher than the existing adjacent turbines in the Achlachan Wind Farm and to a degree increase the visibility of wind energy development in the area, their impact is very localised, and overall they assimilate comparatively well with both the existing Achlachan Wind Farm, and also the wider Causeymire Cluster, to the south. The turbines would not have a significant effect on the host Landscape Character Type or hosting landscape character area, or indeed any nearby designated landscapes. Although taller than existing turbines in the immediate area, and even while slightly extending the cluster in a northeasterly direction, the two turbines can be accommodated at this location as being a cohesive addition to it without resulting in adverse landscape or visual impacts and can be supported in this instance. The application has been assessed against the policies set out in NPF4 and the Development Plan, including Policy 67 of the Highland wide Local Development Plan with its eleven tests which are expanded upon with the OWESG.
- 9.4 It is considered that the environmental effects of this development can be addressed by way of mitigation, with the suggested conditions incorporating a schedule of mitigation and operational compliance monitoring should permission be forthcoming. All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal accords with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations.

10. IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Resource: Significant staff and financial resources should the application proceed to appeal.
- 10.2 Legal: If refused, the application may be subject to further legal procedure such as a hearing session or inquiry.
- 10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Not applicable
- 10.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: The proposal can make a meaningful contribution toward the production of renewable energy.
- 10.5 Risk: Not applicable

10.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

11. RECOMMENDATION

Action required before decision issued: None

Subject to the above actions, it is recommended to **GRANT** the application subject to the following conditions and reasons:

1. Commencement of Development

The Development shall be commenced no later than five years from the date of this consent, or such other period as the Scottish Ministers may approve in writing. Written confirmation of the intended date of Commencement of Development shall be provided to the Scottish Ministers and the Planning Authority as soon as is practicable after deciding on such a date and in any event no later than one calendar month prior to the Commencement of Development.

Reason: To ensure that the consent is implemented within a reasonable period and to allow the Planning Authority to monitor compliance with obligations attached to this planning permission as appropriate.

2. Period of Consent

This planning permission shall expire and cease to have effect after a period of 40 years from the date when electricity is first exported from any of the approved wind turbines to the electricity grid network (the "First Export Date"). Upon the expiration of a period of 35 years from the First Export Date, the wind turbines shall be decommissioned and removed from the site, with decommissioning and restoration works undertaken in accordance with the terms of Condition 5 of this permission. Written confirmation of the First Export Date shall be submitted in writing to the Planning Authority within one month of the First Export Date.

Reason: The wind turbines have a projected lifespan of 35 years, after which their condition is likely to be such that they require to be replaced, both in terms of technical and environmental considerations. This limited consent period also enables a review and, if required, reassessment to be made of the environmental impacts of the development and the success, or otherwise, of noise impact, species protection, habitat management and mitigation measures. The 40 year cessation date allows for a 5 year period to complete commissioning and site restoration work.

3. External Details

No development shall commence until full details of the location, layout, external appearance, dimensions and surface materials of all buildings, welfare facilities, compounds and parking areas, as well as any fencing, walls, paths and any other ancillary elements of the development, have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority (in consultation with SEPA and NatureScot, as

necessary). Thereafter, development shall progress in accordance with these approved details.

Reason: To ensure the final design uses materials that are suitable in terms of visual impact considerations.

4. Interim Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare Strategy

There shall be no Commencement of Development until an Interim decommissioning, restoration and aftercare strategy has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA and Transport Scotland. The interim decommissioning, restoration and aftercare strategy shall outline measures for the decommissioning of the Development and restoration and aftercare of the site, and shall provide proposals for the removal of the Development, the treatment of ground surfaces, the management and timing of the works and environmental management provisions in any instance that the site as a whole, or in part, ceases to operate prior to the approval of the Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare Plan required under the provisions of Condition 5.

Reason: To ensure the decommissioning and removal of the Development in an appropriate and environmentally acceptable manner and the restoration and aftercare of the site, in the interests of safety, amenity and environmental protection when a detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare Plan has not yet been approved.

5. Site Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare

The Development shall cease to generate electricity to the grid network by no later than the date falling 40 years from the Date of Final Commissioning.

No later than one year prior to the Date of Final Generation or the expiry of this planning consent (whichever is earlier) a decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan shall be submitted for the written approval of the Planning Authority, in consultation with SEPA and Transport Scotland. The detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan shall provide updated and detailed proposals, in accordance with relevant guidance at that time, for the removal of the Development, the treatment of ground surfaces, the management and timing of the works and environment management provisions which shall provide:

(a) a site waste management plan (dealing with all aspects of waste produced during the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases and, including details of measures to be taken to minimise waste associated with the Development and promote the recycling of materials and infrastructure components);

(b) details of the formation of the construction compound, welfare facilities, any areas of hardstanding, turning areas, internal access tracks, car parking, material stockpiles, oil storage, lighting columns, and any construction compound boundary fencing;

(c) a dust management plan;

- (d) details of measures to be taken to prevent loose or deleterious material being deposited on the local road network, including wheel cleaning and lorry sheeting facilities, and measures to clean the site entrances and the adjacent local road network;
- (e) a pollution prevention and control method statement, including arrangements for the storage and management of oil and fuel on the site;
- (f) details of measures for soil storage and management;
- (g) a surface water and groundwater management and treatment plan, including details of the separation of clean and dirty water drains, and location of settlement lagoons for silt laden water;
- (h) details of measures for sewage disposal and treatment;
- (i) temporary site illumination;
- (j) the construction of any temporary access into the site and the creation and maintenance of associated visibility splays; and
- (k) a species protection plan based on surveys for protected species (including birds) carried out no longer than eighteen months prior to submission of the plan

The Development shall be decommissioned, the site restored and aftercare undertaken prior to the date falling three years after the Date of Final Generation and in accordance with the approved detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan.

Reason: To ensure the decommissioning and removal of the Development in an appropriate and environmentally acceptable manner and the restoration and aftercare of the site, in the interests of safety, amenity and environmental protection.

6. Financial Guarantee

There shall be no Commencement of Development until a bond or other form of financial guarantee in terms which secures the cost of performance of all decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligations referred to in Conditions 4 and 5 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

The value of the financial guarantee shall be agreed between the Company and the Planning Authority or, failing agreement, determined (on application by either party) by a suitably qualified independent professional as being sufficient to meet the costs of all decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligations referred to in Condition 5.

The financial guarantee shall be maintained in favour of the Planning Authority until the completion of all decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligations referred to in Conditions 4 and 5. The value of the financial guarantee shall be reviewed by agreement between the Company and the Planning Authority or, failing agreement, determined (on application by either party) by a suitably qualified independent

professional not less than every five years, and at the time of the approval of the detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan approved under Condition 5. The value of the financial guarantee shall be increased or decreased to take account of any variation in costs of compliance with decommissioning, restoration and aftercare obligations referred to in Conditions 4 and 5 and best practice prevailing at the time of each review.

Reason: To ensure that there are sufficient funds to secure performance of the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare conditions attached to this planning permission in the event of default by the Company.

7. Planning Monitoring Officer

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development until the terms of appointment by the Company of an independent and suitably qualified consultant as Planning Monitoring Officer ("PMO") have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The terms of appointment shall:

(a) impose a duty to monitor compliance with the terms of the planning permission and the conditions attached to it;

(b) require the PMO to submit a quarterly report to the Planning Authority summarising works undertaken on site, matters of compliance or otherwise with the terms of the planning permission and conditions attached to it, alongside a summary of the incidents recorded and reported by the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW); and

(c) require the PMO to report to the Planning Authority any incidences of non-compliance with the terms of the planning permission and conditions attached to it at the earliest practical opportunity, and no later than 10 working days following the incidence of non-compliance.

(2) The PMO shall be appointed on the approved terms throughout the period from Commencement of Development to completion of construction works and post-construction site reinstatement works.

(3) Prior to the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development or the expiration of the operational period of the consent (whichever is the earlier), details of the terms of appointment of a suitably qualified consultant as PMO by the Company throughout the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

(4) the PMO shall be appointed on the terms approved under part (3) throughout the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development.

Reason: To ensure compliance with the planning permission and the conditions attached to it.

8. Bird Breeding Season

If construction works associated with the proposed development are to be carried out during bird breeding season, no development should take place until pre-construction surveys for breeding birds has been undertaken following best practice guidance. The surveys should cover all aspects of the proposal (including access) plus an appropriate buffer around these. If nesting birds are found, protective buffers should be adopted based on published disturbance distances.

Reason: To mitigate against adverse impact of the proposed development on the protected peatland breeding birds.

9. Traffic Management

There shall be no Commencement of Development until a Traffic Management Plan has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland. The Traffic Management Plan shall provide:

- (a) the routeing of all traffic associated with the Development on public roads;
- (b) measures to ensure that the specified routes are adhered to, including monitoring procedures;
- (c) details of all signage and lining arrangements to be put in place;
- (d) provisions for emergency vehicle access;
- (e) provision for the submission and agreement of a roads condition survey pre-and post-construction accompanied by an appropriate agreement between the Planning Authority and the Company to ensure the delivery of any post-construction public road restoration that may be required; and
- (f) identification of a nominated person to whom any road safety issues can be referred.

The approved Traffic Management Plan shall be implemented in full, unless otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of road safety.

10. Abnormal Loads

There shall be no abnormal load deliveries to the site until an Abnormal Load Route Assessment Report, (including proposed trial runs), has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland. The Abnormal Load Route Assessment Report shall provide:

- (a) Details of a communications strategy to inform the relevant communities of the programme of abnormal load deliveries;

(b) Details of any accommodation measures required for the local road network including the removal of street furniture, junction widening and traffic management;

(c) Any additional signing or temporary traffic control measures deemed necessary on the trunk road network due to the size or length of any loads being transported must be undertaken by a recognised QA traffic management consultant, to be approved by Transport Scotland.

(d) Details of the route for abnormal loads on the local and trunk road networks and any recommendations for delivery of abnormal loads;

(e) An assessment of the capacity of any bridge crossings on the route to cater for abnormal loads, and details of proposed upgrades and mitigation measures required for any bridge crossings; and

(f) A plan for access by vehicles carrying abnormal loads, including but not limited to the number and timing of deliveries and the length, width and axle configuration of all such traffic associated with the Development.

Prior to the first delivery of an abnormal load, a programme for abnormal load deliveries shall be submitted to, and be approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland.

Prior to any movement of abnormal loads (including trial runs) the Company must complete any mitigation works set out in the scheme approved under this condition, and maintain such measures during the period of abnormal load deliveries.

The trial-run shall be undertaken in accordance with the details approved under this condition prior to the movement of any abnormal loads.

The details in the approved report shall thereafter be implemented in full prior the first delivery of an abnormal load.

Reason: In the interest of road safety and to ensure that abnormal loads access the site in a safe manner.

11. Radio and Television Reception

(1) No development shall commence unless and until a baseline Television and Radio Reception survey has been undertaken.

(2) In the event of a claim by any individual person regarding TV picture loss or interference, including radio reception, at their house, business premise or other building, this shall be investigated by an independent qualified engineer, appointed by the Company, and the results, including any mitigation measures, shall be submitted to the Planning Authority, alongside a copy of the results of the baseline survey undertaken under the terms of part (1).

(3) Should any impairment to the TV signal or radio reception be attributable to the Development, the Company shall remedy such impairment so that the standard of reception at the affected property is equivalent to the baseline TV or radio reception

as relevant. For the avoidance of doubt, the resolution of disputes shall be determined by an independent arbiter e.g. OFCOM or other professional body as appropriate.

Reason: To ensure local radio and television services are sustained during the construction and operation of the Development.

12. Aviation Lighting

Prior to commencing construction of any wind turbine generators, or deploying any construction equipment or temporal structure(s) 15.2 metres or more in height (above terrain features) the undertaker must submit an aviation lighting scheme for the approval of The Highland Council in conjunction with the Civil Aviation Authority and the Ministry of Defence defining how the development will be lit by non-visible (infra-red) aviation lighting throughout its life to maintain civil and military aviation safety requirements as required under the Air Navigation Order 2016 determined necessary for aviation safety by the Civil Aviation Authority.

This should set out:

- a. details of any construction equipment and temporal structures with a total height of 15.2 metres or greater (above terrain features) that will be deployed during the construction of wind turbine generators and details of any aviation warning lighting that they will be fitted with; and
- b. the locations and heights of all wind turbine generators and any anemometry mast featured in the development identifying those that will be fitted with aviation warning lighting identifying the position of the lights on the wind turbine generators; the type(s) of lights that will be fitted and the performance specification(s) of the lighting type(s) to be used.

Thereafter, the undertaker must exhibit such lights as detailed in the approved aviation lighting scheme. The lighting installed will remain operational for the lifetime of the development.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

13. Aviation Charting and Safety Management

The undertaker must notify the Ministry of Defence, at least 14 days prior to the commencement of the works, in writing of the following information:

- a. the date of the commencement of the erection of wind turbine generators;
- b. the maximum height of any construction equipment to be used in the erection of the wind turbines;
- c. the date any wind turbine generators are brought into use;
- d. the latitude and longitude and maximum heights of each wind turbine generator, and any anemometer mast(s).

The Ministry of Defence must be notified of any changes to the information supplied in accordance with these requirements and of the completion of the construction of the development.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

14. Drainage

No development shall commence until a Drainage Impact Assessment (DIA) has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The DIA shall include full details of all surface water drainage provision within the application site (which shall accord with the principles of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and be designed to the standards outlined in Sewers for Scotland Third Edition, or any superseding guidance prevailing at the time). The DIA shall show:

- how the SUDS has been designed to restrict surface water runoff from all new hardstanding to minimise erosion to existing watercourses;
- that the post-development runoff rate will be no greater than the pre-development runoff rate for all return periods up to the 1:200 year plus climate change flood events; and,
- details of the design of new and upgraded tracks, including floating tracks, along with proposed drainage details showing Natural Flood Management Techniques to: retain the existing drainage network where possible; reduce surface water runoff; and, demonstrate that tracks will not be used as preferential runoff pathways.

Thereafter, only the approved details shall be implemented, and all surface water drainage provision shall be completed prior to the first occupation of any of the development.

Reason: To ensure that surface water drainage is provided timeously and complies with the principles of SUDS; in order to protect the water environment.

15. Culverts and Bridges

All new and upgraded culverts and bridges within the development site shall be designed to accommodate a 1 in 200 year flood event.

Reason: To ensure that all water crossings are free from flood risk and do not exacerbate flood risk elsewhere.

16. Design of Wind Turbines

(1) No turbines shall be erected until details and specification of the proposed wind turbines, (including the size, make and model, power rating and sound power levels, nameplate generating capacity, type, external finish and colour) any anemometry masts and all turbine associated apparatus have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

(2) For the avoidance of doubt the scale of the turbines shall not exceed the parameters set out in the description of the Development.

(3) The submission shall demonstrate that all wind turbine blades shall rotate in the same direction.

(4) Thereafter the wind turbines, any anemometry masts and all associated apparatus shall be constructed and operated in accordance with the details approved under part (1) and shall be maintained in the free from external rust, staining or discolouration, until such time as the Development is decommissioned unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the environmental impacts of the turbines forming part of the Development conform to the impacts assessed in the EIA Report and in the interests of the visual amenity of the area.

17. Design Ancillary Development

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development any ancillary development until final details of the location, layout, external appearance, dimensions, and surface materials of any building, any above ground electrical equipment, associated compounds, construction compound, boundary fencing, external lighting and parking areas have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

(2) Thereafter, the substation and control room buildings, any above ground electrical equipment, associated compounds, fencing, external lighting and parking areas shall be constructed in accordance with the details approved under part (1).

Reason: To ensure that the environmental impacts of any ancillary development are acceptable in the interests of the visual amenity of the area.

18. Micro-siting

The wind turbines, electrical housing unit, areas of hardstanding and tracks shall be constructed in the location shown on approved Location Plan drawing reference EW/58/01, received on 4th April 2025. Wind turbine, buildings, masts, areas of hardstanding and tracks may be adjusted by micro-siting within the site. However, unless otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority, micro-siting is subject to the following restrictions:

- a. the wind turbine shall not be moved more than 25m from the position shown on the original approved plans;
- b. the wind turbine shall not be positioned closer to any watercourse than the approved distances shown on the original plans;
- c. the access track shall not be moved more than 5m from the position shown on the original approved plans;
- d. No micro-siting shall take place within areas of peat of greater depth than the original location;

- e. No micro-siting shall take place within areas hosting Ground Water Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems;
- f. No element of the proposed development should be located closer than 50m to the top of the bank of any watercourse with the exception of the infrastructure related to watercourse management, allowed under this permission; and,
- g. All micro-siting permissible under this condition must be approved in advance in writing by the Environmental Clerk of Works (ECoW).

No later than one month after the date of First Commissioning, an updated site plan must be submitted to the Planning Authority showing the final position of all wind turbines, masts, areas of hardstanding, tracks and associated infrastructure forming part of the Development. The plan should also specify areas where micro-siting has taken place and, for each instance, be accompanied by copies of the ECoW or Planning Authority's approval, as applicable.

Reason: To control environmental impacts while taking account of local ground conditions.

19. Signage

No part of the Development shall display any text, logo, sign or advertisement (other than health and safety signage as required by law) or be illuminated [with the exception of aviation safety lighting]) unless otherwise approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of health and safety on site and the visual amenity of the area.

20. Construction Noise

The development shall progress in accordance with the approved Construction Noise Management Plan and all approved mitigation measures shall be in place prior to construction commencing or as otherwise may be agreed in writing by the Planning Authority. For the avoidance of doubt, a Construction Noise Assessment shall be required in relation to any works proposed to take place, audible from the curtilage of any noise sensitive receptor, outwith the hours of:

- Monday – Friday – 8:00am to 7:00pm
- Saturday – 8:00am to 7:00pm

Or; Where noise levels during the above periods are likely to exceed 75dB(A) for short term works or 55dB(A) for long term (more than 6 months) works. Both measurements to be taken as a 1hr LAeq at the curtilage of any noise sensitive receptor.

Reason: In the interests of residential amenity.

21. Operational Noise

The rating level of noise emissions from the turbine (including the application of any tonal penalty) when determined in accordance with ETSU-R-97 and the Institute of Acoustics Good Practice Guides shall not exceed the levels stated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Location	Grid reference	Noise Limit
Turbine 1	NGR 315715, 952417	35dB LA90
Turbine 2	NGR 315782, 952021	35dB LA90
Achlachan Windfarm – 17/02176/FUL + Extension – 25/01306/FUL (Cumulative Noise)	N/A	35dB LA90

Noise limits expressed in dB LA90,10 minute as a function of the standardised wind speed (m/s) at 10 metre height as determined within the site averaged over 10 minute periods

- a) Within 21 days from receipt of a written request of the Local Authority, following a complaint to it alleging noise disturbance at a dwelling, the wind farm operator shall, at its expense, employ an independent consultant approved by the Local Authority to assess the level of noise emissions from the wind farm at the complainant's property (or a suitable alternative location agreed in writing with the Local Authority).
- b) The written request from the Local Authority shall set out at least the date, time and location that the complaint relates to. From this the operator can identify the range of prevailing weather conditions at these times.
- c) Prior to the commencement of any measurements by the independent consultant to be undertaken in accordance with these conditions, the wind farm operator shall submit to the Local Authority for written approval the proposed measurement location and monitoring methodology. Monitoring must be carried out during a similar range of conditions which prevailed when the complainant alleges there was disturbance due to noise.
- d) The wind farm operator shall provide to the Local Authority the independent consultant's assessment of the rating level of noise emissions within 2 months of the date of the written request of the Local Authority.

Reason: In the interests of residential amenity.

22. Dust

The development shall progress in accordance with an approved dust management plan and all approved mitigation measures shall be in place prior to construction commencing or as otherwise may be agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of residential amenity.

23. Archaeology

No development or work (including site clearance) shall commence until proposals for an archaeological watching brief to be carried out during site clearance and excavation works, has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. Thereafter, the watching brief shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: In order to protect the archaeological and historic interest of the site.

24. Construction Environment Management and Pollution Protection Plan (CEMPPP) and River Thurso SAC Mitigation

Before any works commence on site, a Construction and Environment Management Plan/Pollution Prevention Plan, in accordance with SEPA guidance, shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The Plan shall include site specific measures to avoid the risk of impacts on Atlantic salmon, in the River Thurso Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and shall include details of the construction of the watercourse crossings designed to ensure the water flow will not be impeded (particularly during the salmon spawning and hatching period) and there is no risk of sediments and/or other pollutants entering the River Thurso SAC. Thereafter the construction of the development shall only be carried out in accordance with the approved CEMPPP, subject to any variations approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The CEMPPP shall also include:

- a) details of the phasing of construction works;
- b) details of any temporary site construction compound including temporary structures/buildings, fencing, parking and storage provision to be used in connection with the construction of the development;
- c) details and implementation and a timetable for post construction restoration/reinstatement of the temporary working areas, and the construction compound;
- d) details of the method of construction and erection of the structures and any underbuilding/platforms;
- e) details of pollution control: protection of any private water supplies / protection of the water environment, bunding of fuel storage areas, surface water drainage, sewage disposal and discharge of foul drainage;
- f) details of temporary site illumination during the construction period;

- g) details of timing of works;
- h) details of surface treatments and the construction of all hard surfaces and access tracks between each element of the proposed development This shall include details of the tracks in a dark, non-reflective finish with details of the chemical properties of any and all imported stone provided;
- i) details of routeing of onsite cabling;
- j) details of emergency procedures and pollution response plans;
- k) siting and details of wheel washing facilities;
- l) cleaning of site entrances, site tracks and the adjacent public highway and the sheeting of all HGVs taking spoil or construction materials to/from the site to prevent spillage or deposit of any materials on the highway;
- m) details of working practices for protecting nearby residential dwellings, including general measures to control noise and vibration arising from on-site activities, to be adopted as set out in British Standard 5228 Part 1: 2009;
- n) a Species Protection Plan;
- o) details of measures to reduce the risk of invasive non-native species being introduced/spread, such as via SUDs or contaminated vehicles from other sites;
- p) details of areas on the site designated for the storage, loading, off-loading, parking and manoeuvring of heavy duty plant, equipment and vehicles; and,
- q) details of how the best practicable measures will be implemented to reduce the impact of construction noise at noise sensitive locations.
- r) details of any impacts on private water supplies.

Reason: To ensure that construction works are undertaken in accordance with applicable standards in the interests of environmental protection, amenity, and safety, and in order to protect the integrity of the River Thurso SAC.

25. Private Water Supply

A private water supply risk assessment which identifies any supply, including pipework, which may be adversely affected by the development shall be submitted for the approval in writing of the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of development. A report which includes details of the measures proposed to prevent contamination or physical disruption shall thereafter be submitted for the written approval of the Planning Authority. The report shall include details of any monitoring prior to, during and following construction and proposals for contingency measures in the event of an incident. Highland Council has some information on known supplies which can be provided on request however, it is not definitive. An on-site survey will be required.

Reason: To ensure that an adequate water supply can be provided to meet the requirements of the proposed development and, where relevant, without compromising the interests of other users of the same or nearby private water supplies.

26. Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan

(1) There shall be no Commencement of Development until a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) has been submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

(2) The HMP shall set out proposed habitat management of the site during the period of construction, operation, and decommissioning, restoration and aftercare, and shall provide for the maintenance, monitoring and reporting of peatland habitat on site.

(3) The HMP shall provide provision and details for regular monitoring and review to be undertaken against the HMP objectives and reasonable measures for securing amendments or additions to the HMP in the event that the HMP objectives are not being met.

(4) Until otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority, the approved HMP (as amended from time to time with written approval of the Planning Authority) shall be implemented in full in line with the timescales set out in the approved plan.

Reason: In the interests of good land management and the protection of habitats.

27. Socio-Economic Benefit

Prior to the commencement of envelopment, a Local Employment Scheme for the construction of the development shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Planning Authority. The submitted Scheme shall make reference to the supporting Social Value Charter Statement (dated December 2024). The Scheme shall include the following:

a) details of how the initial staff/employment opportunities at the development will be advertised and how liaison with the Council and other local bodies will take place in relation to maximising the access of the local workforce to information about employment opportunities;

b) details of how sustainable training opportunities will be provided for those recruited to fulfil staff/employment requirements including the provision of apprenticeships or an agreed alternative;

c) a procedure setting out criteria for employment, and for matching of candidates to the vacancies;

d) measures to be taken to offer and provide college and/or work placement opportunities at the development to students within the locality;

e) details of the promotion of the Local Employment Scheme and liaison with contractors engaged in the construction of the development to ensure that they also apply the Local Employment Scheme so far as practicable having due regard to the need and availability for specialist skills and trades and the programme for constructing the development;

f) a procedure for monitoring the Local Employment Scheme and reporting the results of such monitoring to the Council; and

g) a timetable for the implementation of the Local Employment Scheme.

Thereafter, the development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved scheme.

Reason: In order to ensure compliance with NPF4 Policy 11c) and to maximise the local socio-economic benefits of the development to the wider community. To make provision for publicity and details relating to any local employment opportunities.

REASON FOR DECISION

All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal accords with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations

INFORMATIVES

Initiation and Completion Notices

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) requires all developers to submit notices to the Planning Authority prior to, and upon completion of, development. These are in addition to any other similar requirements (such as Building Warrant completion notices) and failure to comply represents a breach of planning control and may result in formal enforcement action.

1. The developer must submit a Notice of Initiation of Development in accordance with Section 27A of the Act to the Planning Authority prior to work commencing on site.
2. On completion of the development, the developer must submit a Notice of Completion in accordance with Section 27B of the Act to the Planning Authority.

Copies of the notices referred to are attached to this decision notice for your convenience.

Flood Risk

It is important to note that the granting of planning permission does not imply there is an unconditional absence of flood risk relating to (or emanating from) the application site. As per Scottish Planning Policy (paragraph 259), planning permission does not remove the liability position of developers or owners in relation to flood risk.

Scottish Water

You are advised that a supply and connection to Scottish Water infrastructure is dependent on sufficient spare capacity at the time of the application for connection to Scottish Water. The granting of planning permission does not guarantee a connection. Any enquiries with regards to sewerage connection and/or water supply should be directed to Scottish Water on 0845 601 8855.

Septic Tanks and Soakaways

Where a private foul drainage solution is proposed, you will require separate consent from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA). Planning permission does not guarantee that approval will be given by SEPA and as such you are advised to contact them direct to discuss the matter (01349 862021).

Local Roads Authority Consent

In addition to planning permission, you may require one or more separate consents (such as road construction consent, dropped kerb consent, a road openings permit, occupation of the road permit etc.) from the Area Roads Team prior to work commencing. These consents may require additional work and/or introduce additional specifications and you are therefore advised to contact your local Area Roads office for further guidance at the earliest opportunity.

Failure to comply with access, parking and drainage infrastructure requirements may endanger road users, affect the safety and free-flow of traffic and is likely to result in enforcement action being taken against you under both the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

Further information on the Council's roads standards can be found at: <http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/roadsandtransport>

Application forms and guidance notes for access-related consents can be downloaded from:

http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/20005/roads_and_pavements/101/permits_for_working_on_public_roads/2

Mud and Debris on Road

Please note that it is an offence under Section 95 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 to allow mud or any other material to be deposited, and thereafter remain, on a public road from any vehicle or development site. You must, therefore, put in place a strategy

for dealing with any material deposited on the public road network and maintain this until development is complete.

Construction Hours and Noise-Generating Activities

You are advised that construction work associated with the approved development (incl. the loading/unloading of delivery vehicles, plant or other machinery), for which noise is audible at the boundary of the application site, should not normally take place outwith the hours of 08:00 and 19:00 Monday to Friday, 08:00 and 13:00 on Saturdays or at any time on a Sunday or Bank Holiday in Scotland, as prescribed in Schedule 1 of the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 (as amended).

Work falling outwith these hours which gives rise to amenity concerns, or noise at any time which exceeds acceptable levels, may result in the service of a notice under Section 60 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 (as amended). Breaching a Section 60 notice constitutes an offence and is likely to result in court action.

If you wish formal consent to work at specific times or on specific days, you may apply to the Council's Environmental Health Officer under Section 61 of the 1974 Act. Any such application should be submitted after you have obtained your Building Warrant, if required, and will be considered on its merits. Any decision taken will reflect the nature of the development, the site's location and the proximity of noise sensitive premises. Please contact env.health@highland.gov.uk for more information.

Protected Species – Halting of Work

You are advised that work on site must stop immediately, and NatureScot must be contacted, if evidence of any protected species or nesting/breeding sites, not previously detected during the course of the application and provided for in this permission, are found on site. For the avoidance of doubt, it is an offence to deliberately or recklessly kill, injure or disturb protected species or to damage or destroy the breeding site of a protected species. These sites are protected even if the animal is not there at the time of discovery. Further information regarding protected species and developer responsibilities is available from NatureScot: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-species>

Signature:	Dafydd Jones
Designation:	North Area Manger
Author:	Grant Baxter
Background Papers:	Documents referred to in report and in case file.
Relevant Plans:	Plan 1 – EW/58/01 Location Plan - Plan 2 - EW/58/04A Site Layout Plan Plan 3 - EW/58/02A Site Layout Turbine 1

- Plan 4 - EW/58/03A Site Layout Plan Turbine 2 I
- Plan 5 - Figure 24 Involved Properties
- Plan 6 - EW/58/09 Shadow Flicker Plan
- Plan 7 - EW/58/08 Access Route Plan
- Plan 8 - EW/58/06 Site Section Candidate Turbine
- Plan 9 - EW/58/05 Swept Path Analysis
- Plan 10 - Figure 4.8 Typical Trench X-Section
- Plan 11 - Figure 4.5 Typical Water Crossing Detail
- Plan 12 - Figure 4.4 Typical Access Track X-Section
- Plan 13 - Figure 4.3 Foundation Plan, Candidate Turbine

**Appendix 2 - Assessment against Landscape and Visual Assessment Criteria
contained within Section 4 of the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance**

Review of Design against Criteria in THC Onshore Wind Energy SG		
1	Relationship between Settlements/Key locations and wider landscape respected.	<p>Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/key locations, but are visible from A9 road and A870 close to the site.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The two turbines are generally seen as a small addition to the wider wind turbines developments south and west of the site.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
2	Key Gateway locations and routes are respected.	<p>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The key route that the turbines would be visible from is the A9 between Latheron and Halkirk. In any views from this road, the two turbines are not seen in isolation but either behind or with a backdrop of much larger wind farm development.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
3	Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected.	<p>The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Again, as the turbines are not viewed in isolation, but as a small northern extension to a larger cluster of turbines, they do not significantly impact on natural landmarks. HES have confirmed that the</p>

		<p>proposals do not detrimentally impact on nearby cultural heritage assets, such as nearby brochs (Scheduled Ancient Monuments)</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
4	The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.	<p>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>There are no nearby recreational routes or ways that would be impacted by the development.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
5	The amenity of transport routes is respected.	<p>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The two turbines will be close to and visible from the A9 road ,as well as smaller local roads in the nearby vicinity. However, their appearance would not overwhelm or detract from the visual appeal of these transport routes due to their setting within the wider cluster of wind turbines in the area.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
6	The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.	<p>The degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development, considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • turbine height and proportions, • density and spacing of turbines within developments, • density and spacing of developments, • typical relationship of development to the landscape, • previously instituted mitigation measures, and • Planning Authority stated aims for development of area

		<p>-----</p> <p>The location represents a logical and proportionate extension to the existing wind farm cluster in this location, with regards to siting, spacing, density and relationship with wider landscape. The turbines would be taller than those in the surround cluster. Whilst the increased height is discernible, the two turbines would still visually assimilate with the wider cluster, however due to their height, aviation lighting would be required.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
7	The need for separation between developments and/or clusters is respected.	<p>The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The distance between the two turbines, and between them and the nearby Achlachan Wind Farm, which they extend is appropriate and visually acceptable, allowing the 5 turbines plus additional 2 to be seen as one suitably laid-out development. Similarly, the distances from and relationship with the larger cluster to the south are considered acceptable.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
8	The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected.	<p>The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Again, the visual assimilation with the existing cluster and small degree of increased development arising from this proposal ensures perception of the landscape is respected.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>
9	Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected.	<p>Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The two turbines will read visually as a logical and appropriate extension to the Achlachan Wind Farm.</p>

		The threshold is met.
10	Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected.	<p>Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The two turbines, set within this landscape and the wider intervention of the wind farm cluster to the south and west, will not create further detrimental impact to the distinctiveness of this landscape's character.</p> <p>The threshold is met.</p>

Appendix 3 – Viewpoint Visual Impact Appraisal

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major & Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 1: Garage carpark on edge of Spittal looking southeast towards the proposed site (2.3km from site)	App	Medium/High	-	-	Significant	-	-	Not significant
	THC	Medium/High	Medium/Small	Moderate	Not significant	Negligible	Negligible	Not significant
	<p>Wireline and photo montage (presented as VP22).</p> <p>Baseline is as described in Supporting Statement accompanying application.</p> <p>Location on southern edge of Spittal and representative of views from A9, approaching the site from south. Views dominated by Bad a Cheo Wind Farm. Achlachan extension would appear behind these and Causeymire turbines and appear as part of larger cluster. The proposed turbines appear immediately in front of the existing operational Achlachan and Causeymire turbines from this location.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u></p> <p>Represents views experienced those travelling on the A9 and residents at Spittal and surrounds.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium/High (residential)</p> <p>Value: not within any scenic designations but does encompass expansive views towards The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast SLA, the value of the view is Medium/High</p> <p>Overall sensitivity of Medium/High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u></p> <p>Views dominated by Bad a Cheo Wind Farm. Achlachan 2 turbine extension would appear in front of and larger than those behind but would appear as part of larger cluster with T2 notably further obscuring the distant lone mountain Morven, with both turbines bringing turbine development closer to visual receptors within the settlement. Nevertheless, the visualisations illustrate that the proposed turbines</p>							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major & Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>located on the B874 at an open area adjacent to Dunbar Hospital on the southern edge of Thurso. The viewpoint lies 15.5km to the north of the proposed turbines and is representative of views towards the site from the southern edge of Thurso.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium although medium/high for cyclists and passengers of vehicles.</p> <p>Value: Medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u></p> <p>The view is dominated by the large group of turbines which together form the Causeymire Cluster.</p> <p>The Achlachan Extension would lie within and towards the rear (north) of the cluster, appearing as an integral part of it. The magnitude of change is small/negligible leading to a minor and not significant level of effect.</p> <p>No significant additional effects are predicted and no significant cumulative effects are predicted noting the already significant cumulative effects in total.</p>							
Viewpoint 4: View from B874 south of Thurso in open area after Dunbar Hospital (15.57km from site)	App		-	Minor	Not significant	-	-	Not significant
	THC	Medium/High	Negligible	Minor	Not significant	Negligible	Negligible	Not significant
	<p>Wireline only</p> <p>Baseline is as described in Supporting Statement accompanying application.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u></p> <p>Represents views experienced those living in or travelling around the southern edge of Thurso</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium/High</p> <p>Value: Medium</p>							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major & Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>Value: High Sensitivity is High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u></p> <p>The existing and consented turbines making up the Causeymire Cluster, in combination with the two additional turbines of the Achlachan Extension form a clear and extensive group from this location, with the Achlachan Extension turbines lying within the visual envelope of the cluster to the viewers left and more distant of a larger group of existing turbines. The taller tip height of the proposed turbines is not discernible, and they appear in scale with the adjacent existing turbines. The magnitude of change is negligible but with the high sensitivity of the view leads to a minor level of effect on the amenity of the receptor, which is not significant. The proposal is not predicted to result in additional significant effects in future scenarios.</p>							
Viewpoint 15: View from A9 just south of Georgemas Junction Station looking south towards site (7km north of site)	App		-	Moderate	Not significant	-	-	Not significant
	THC	Medium	Small	Moderate/Minor	Not significant	Negligible	Negligible	Not significant
	<p>Wireline only. Baseline is as described in Supporting Statement accompanying application.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u></p> <p>Represents views experienced by a small cluster of residents and those using road and rail line north and of views towards the site from the rolling landscape east of Halkirk at a distance of 6 to 7 km from the site. The views in theory extend to the Flow Country and Berriedale Coast SLA but on the ground the SLA does not exert much influence due to screening.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium/High for tourists using the railway line</p> <p>Value: Medium</p> <p>Overall Medium sensitivity is reasonable.</p>							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major & Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>The existing and consented turbines making up the Causeymire Cluster are visible along and above the horizon, forming a cohesive horizontal linear feature. The two additional Achlachan Extension turbines are visible at the northern (right) end of the group but do not extend it laterally (within the visual envelope of the wider cluster). The fact that the blade tips are taller is barely discernible.</p> <p>Small/negligible magnitude of change, leads to a minor and not significant level of effect or cumulative effects. The proposal is not predicted to result in additional significant effects in future scenarios.</p>							
Viewpoint 18: View north east from remains of Smerary farmstead near local road overlooking the River Thurso (4.65km to SW)	App		-	Minor	Not significant	-	-	Not significant
	THC	Medium	Small/Negligible	Minor	Not significant	Negligible	Negligible	Not significant
	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 6.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 6.2.2 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint :</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u></p> <p>Represents views experienced by occasional recreational walkers accessing a remote area, outside of the SLA.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium/High</p> <p>Value: Medium (largely inaccessible and not promoted paths)</p> <p>Medium sensitivity overall is reasonable.</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u></p> <p>The two additional Achlachan Extension turbines are visible at the northern (left) end of the visible cluster, behind the existing Achlachan turbines but would not appear out of scale with the surrounding turbines. The taller tip height of the proposed turbines is not apparent at this distance, and they would appear to lie within and to the rear of the cluster, appearing as a part of it. Small/negligible magnitude of change, minor and not significant level of effect. The proposal is not predicted to result in additional significant effects in future scenarios.</p>							
	App		-	-	Not significant	-	-	Not significant
	THC	High	Negligible	Minor	Not significant	Negligible	Negligible	Not significant

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major & Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 19: Viewpoint description: View from Scaraben peak looking north towards Causeymire Wind Farm and proposed site (26km from site)	<p>Wireline only.</p> <p>Baseline is as described in Supporting Statement accompanying application.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u></p> <p>Represents views experienced by hill walkers on the lone mountain peaks in southern Caithness within the Flow Country and Berriedale Coast SLA.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High</p> <p>Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u></p> <p>The two additional turbines of the Achlachan Extension would lie within the western (left) part of the cluster. The taller tip height of the proposed turbines would not be discernible, and they appear in scale with the surrounding existing turbines. The Achlachan Extension project would appear as an integral part of the existing group.</p> <p>Negligible magnitude of change, coupled with a high sensitivity leads to a minor and not significant effect. The proposal is not predicted to result in additional significant effects in future scenarios.</p>							

Appendix 4 : Appropriate Assessment

River Thurso Special Area of Conservation

Application under Regulation 62 of The Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 for Achlachan Wind Farm 2 Redesign - Erection and operation of a wind farm for a period of 40 years, comprising of up to 2 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 149.9m, access tracks, hardstandings and ancillary infrastructure - Achlachan Windfarm, Watten

25/01306/FUL

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS AFFECTING EUROPEAN SITES

The status of River Thurso Special Area of Conservation (SAC) means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') or, for reserved matters the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended apply.

This means that where the conclusion reached by the Council on a development proposal unconnected with the nature conservation management of Natura 2000 sites is that it is likely to have a significant effect on those sites, it must undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications for the conservation interests for which the areas have been designated. The need for Appropriate Assessment extends to plans or projects outwith the boundary of the sites in order to determine their implications for the interests protected within the sites.

This means that the Council, as competent authority, has a duty to:

- Determine whether the proposal is directly connected with or necessary to site management for conservation; and, if not,
- Determine whether the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on the site either individually or in combination with other plans or projects; and, if so, then
- Make an Appropriate Assessment of the implications (of the proposal) for the site in view of its conservation objectives.

The competent authority can only agree to the proposal after having ascertained that it will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the site. If this is not the case and there are not alternative solutions, the proposal can only be allowed to proceed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, which in this case can include those of a social or economic nature.

Screening in Likely Significant Effects

It is evident that the proposal is partly connected with or necessary to site management for conservation, hence further consideration is required.

The proposed development has the potential to have a likely significant effect on Atlantic Salmon. The Council is therefore required to undertake an appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposal on the SAC site.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

While the responsibility to carry out the Appropriate Assessment rests with the Council, advice contained within Circular 6/1995 (as amended June 2000) is that the assessment can be based on the information submitted from other agencies. In this case, the Appropriate Assessment is informed by information supplied by NatureScot.

Appraisal Summary

The proposal site lies 2.4km from the River Thurso Special Area of Conservation (SAC) protected for its Atlantic Salmon population. It is hydrologically connected to the River Thurso by the Achlachan Burn, which drains the site.

NatureScot has advised that the proposal could affect natural heritage interests of international importance on the site, specifically that it could have a likely significant effect on Atlantic Salmon of the SAC. As the proposed mitigation measures below are considered to be feasible and would be implemented, then it is concluded that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC site:

The application site is close to and drains to the River Thurso SAC, and therefore NatureScot advises that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site, provided it is carried out strictly in accordance with a Construction and Environment Management Plan/Pollution Prevention Plan, which is in accordance with SEPA guidance (available on the SEPA website: <https://www.netregs.org.uk/environmental-topics/guidance-for-pollution-prevention-gpp-documents/>) and includes site specific measures to avoid the risk of impacts on Atlantic salmon, is produced and the measures are implemented in full. The construction of the watercourse crossings must follow best practice and SEPA guidance. These measures should ensure the water flow will not be impeded (particularly during the salmon spawning and hatching period) and there is no risk of sediments and/or other pollutants entering the River Thurso SAC.

HIGHLAND COUNCIL APPRAISAL OF THE PROPOSAL

- Parts of the proposal are not connected with or necessary for site management for conservation;
- The proposal is likely to have a significant effect on the site either individually or in combination with other plans or projects; therefore;
- An appropriate assessment of the implications of the proposal in views of the site's conservation objectives is provided below
- The impacts on the river Thurso SAC during construction, operation and de-commissioning have been considered.

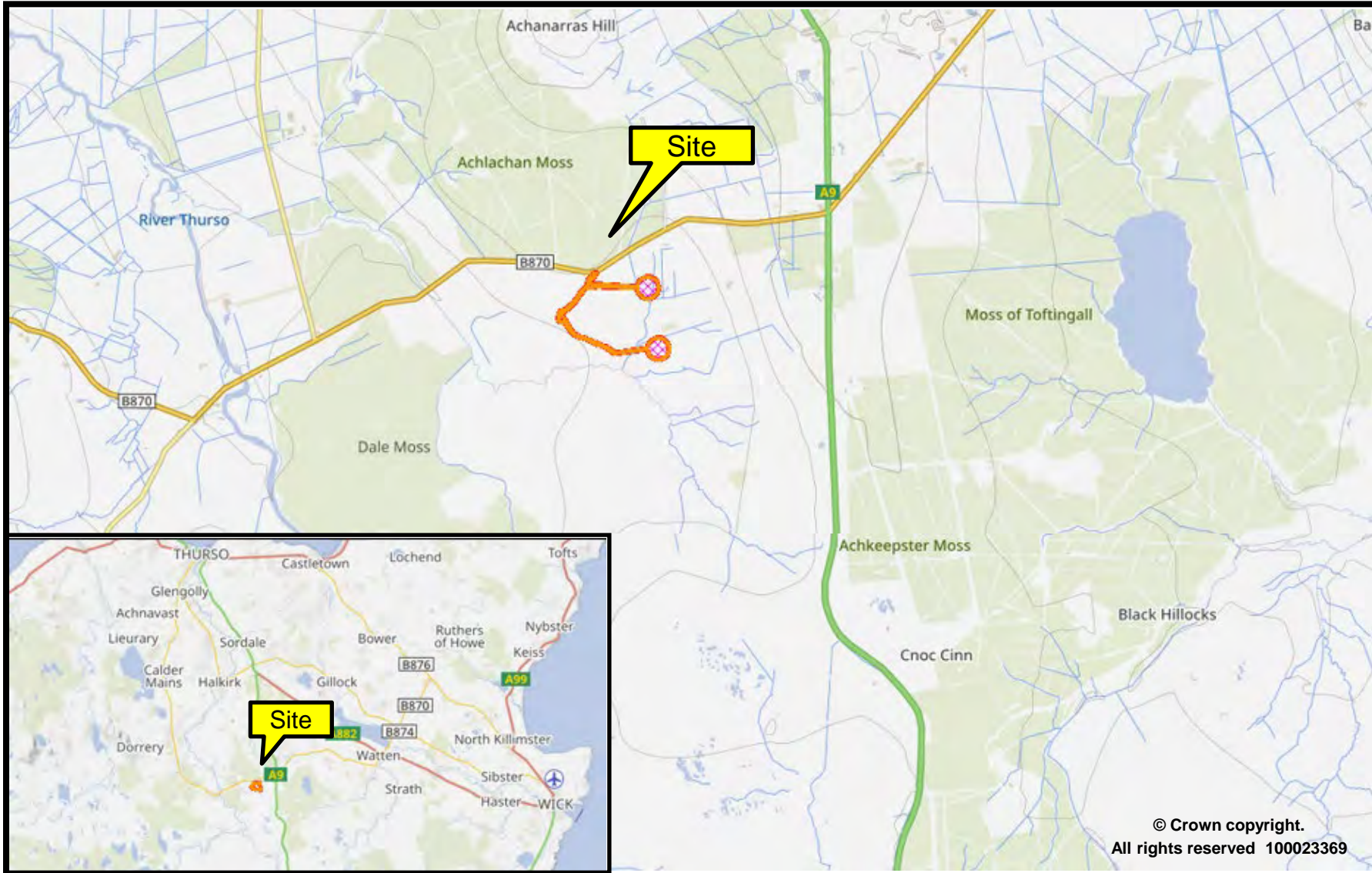
The proposed wind turbines are 2.4km from, and hydrologically connected to, the River Thurso and likely to have a significant effect on Atlantic Salmon of the SAC. As the proposed mitigation measures below are considered to be feasible and would be implemented, then it is concluded that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC site. The application is connected to the River Thurso SAC, and therefore conditions have been attached to ensure:

Mitigation measures would ensure the construction of the watercourse crossings must follow best practice and SEPA guidance. These measures should ensure the water flow will not be impeded (particularly during the salmon spawning and hatching period) and there is no risk of sediments and/or other pollutants entering the River Thurso SAC of site-specific pollution related effects on this SAC.

In order to protect the SAC, a condition is proposed has been imposed requiring a Construction and Environment Management Plan/Pollution Prevention Plan to be provided as part of planning conditions (by the successful contractor), to be approved by NatureScot and Highland Council.

Overall, it can be therefore concluded that while likely significant effects have been identified, there will not be an adverse effect on site integrity of the River Thurso SAC providing the mitigation set out within this appropriate assessment are applied.

The Highland Council, 24 September 2025



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The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd
Planning, Infrastructure
Environment & Economy

25/01306/FUL

Achlachen Wind Farm 2 Redesign - Erection and operation of a wind farm for a period of 40 years, comprising of up to 2 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 149.9m, access tracks, hardstandings and ancillary infrastructure at Achlachen Windfarm, Watten

