Agenda Item	3.2
Report No	PLN/076/25

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: North Planning Applications Committee

Date: 17 December 2025

Report Title: 24/01643/S36: Shinness Wind Farm Ltd.
Land 2290M SE Of Aultnacoarach, Shinness, Lairg

Report By: Area Planning Manager - North

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Shinness Wind Farm - Erection and operation of a wind farm for a period of 40 years, comprising of 15 (as amended) wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 200m, battery energy storage system (BESS), access tracks, borrow pits, substation, control building, and ancillary infrastructure

Ward: 01 – North, West And Central Sutherland

Development category: National Development (Application under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989)

Reason referred to Committee: National Development

All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal does not accord with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is unacceptable in terms of applicable material considerations.

Recommendation

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

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

1.1 The Highland Council has been consulted by the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (ECU) on an application made under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended) for the construction and operation of Shinness Wind Farm with Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and associated infrastructure. The indicative generating capacity of the wind farm is 99MW while the indicative storage capacity of the BESS facility is 105MW meaning the anticipated combined capacity of the scheme would total 204MW.

1.2 The proposed development comprises:

- 15 turbines up to 200m to blade tip and an indicative combined generating capacity of 99 MW. Six turbines (T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15) would be fitted with aviation lighting;
- permanent and temporary crane hardstanding areas totalling 210m long and up to 65m wide with a 4.5m wide track running along the hardstanding length. Of this area, permanent hardstanding areas would measure 70m x 40m and temporary hardstanding areas (to be removed and restored following construction) would measure 80m x 30m;
- battery energy storage system (BESS) facility compound, measuring 78m x 90m with a storage capacity of 105MW;
- onsite substation compound measuring 92m x 57m;
- electrical and communication underground cables running along sections of the access track;
- one permanent anemometer mast up to 120m;
- three onsite borrow pits to be restored following construction;
- 7.22km of access track of which 0.28km would be upgraded existing track 5.5m with localised widening for passing places, laydown areas and turning heads for articulated vehicles; and
- temporary construction compound measuring 80m x 146m would accommodate a concrete batching plant.

1.3 The applicant anticipates the off-site point of grid connection to be via Dalchork Substation however details of this are not included with the application as they are not required for the assessment of a wind farm. Grid connection would be subject to a separate application process under Section 37 of the Electricity Act should this be via an overhead line.

1.4 A micrositing allowance of 50m is requested for turbines, BESS, and ancillary infrastructure, which would be used to avoid or minimise environmental or

engineering constraints identified during pre-construction ground investigation or construction phase excavation works. These constraints may include any areas of deeper peat, higher elevations of ground, watercourse buffers, Ground Water Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems and cultural heritage assets. However, delivery of the turbines would require the felling of 1.15ha of commercial forestry along the existing forestry track from the A838 and 1.8ha compensatory planting is proposed.

1.5 The final design of the turbine (colour and finish), infrared aviation lighting, ancillary electrical equipment, landscaping and fencing etc. would also be agreed with the Planning Authority at the time of project procurement, which can be secured by condition. While indicative drawings for these elements are set out in the application, turbine manufacturers regularly update the designs that are available, thereby necessitating the need for some flexibility in the approved design details.

1.6 Permission is sought to operate the wind farm for 40 years; a further application would be necessary to determine any future re-powering proposal. If the decision is made to decommission the wind turbines, all components and above ground infrastructure would be removed. Any such turbine foundation retention would however need to be agreed via a decommissioning method statement. Retention of tracks would require separate planning application at the time of decommissioning. Any application for retention of such infrastructure will be determined in line with the Development Plan in place at that time.

1.7 Whilst public consultation for Section 36 applications is not mandatory, the applicant has held two rounds of public consultation events at Larig Community Hall in January and February 2024, with materials also being made available online through a dedicated webpage. Feedback including the applicant's response to the feedback provided through the consultation period is contained within the submitted Pre-Application Consultation Report (PAC).

1.8 The Applicant also attended a Pre-application Advice Service for Major Developments meeting hosted by the Council with other statutory consultees in attendance (THC ref. 21/03922/PREMAJ), as well participating in a wind farm design workshop, for a proposal of 28 x 180m maximum tip height turbines. The advice provided by the Council and consultees noted concerns regarding the scale of turbines, their proximity to important transport routes (A836 and A838), proximity to wild land areas to north, east, and west as well as to natural, historic and cultural sites in the area including the then tentative Flow Country World Heritage Site (FCWHS) but since inscribed, in addition to wider landscape and visual effects such as encirclement of the setting of Lairg and Loch Shin and the requirement for aviation lighting. The submission sets out how the applicant has sought to address these matters through the design of the proposal.

1.9 The application is supported by an EIAR, the contents of which has been informed through EIA Scoping. The EIAR contains the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction;
- Chapter 2 – EIA Approach and Methodology;
- Chapter 3 – Description of Development;
- Chapter 4 – Climate Change, Energy and Planning Policy Framework;
- Chapter 5 – Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment;
- Chapter 6 – Ecology;
- Chapter 7 – Ornithology;
- Chapter 8 – Freshwater Ecology;
- Chapter 9 – Hydrology, Geology and Hydrogeology;
- Chapter 10 – Cultural Heritage;
- Chapter 11 – Traffic, Access and Transport;
- Chapter 12 – Noise and Vibration;
- Chapter 13 – Socio-economics, Recreation and Tourism; and,
- Chapter 14 – Other Issues.

1.10 The application is also accompanied by Figures and Visualisations, Technical Appendices, a Pre-Application Consultation Report, an EIA Non-Technical Summary (NTS), a Design and Access Statement, and a Planning Statement.

1.11 Since the initial submission to the ECU in April 2024, the proposal has been amended through Additional Environmental Information (AI) in accordance with the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 in response to issues raised by the following consultees:

- NatureScot - on the grounds of impacts on peatland habitats within the FCWHS:
    - removal of Anemometer Mast 2;
    - removal of T16 and its associated access track (1 km); re-siting of T12 and T14, along with their connecting tracks (there is now no floating track proposed);
    - changes to the Outline Biodiversity Enhancement and Habitat Management Plan (OBEHMP) to protect blanket bog within FCWHS, including removal of proposals for 2km of riparian woodland planting along the River Tirry and proposals for bog pool creation within the FCWHS;

- SSEN - on the grounds of potential wake effects to an existing overhead transmission line (OHL), T13 has been re-located northeast; and
- Historic Environment Scotland - who advised on securing mitigation to the settings of Cnoc Olasdail, hut circles and field systems (SM4375) and The Ord, chambered cairns, cairns, settlements and field systems (SM1812). As a result, the orientation of the substation and battery storage infrastructure have been amended to now face end-on across the Tirry valley towards the Cnoc Olasdail scheduled monument, while bunding is also proposed to screen these elements within the temporary construction compound area. These amendments do not change the proposal's impact on the setting of The Ord Chambered Cairns SAM. It is also noted that HES did not object.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The Site is located to the north of the small settlement of Shinness, 15km northwest of Lairg and to the north of Loch Shin between the A838 and A836 public roads within Caithness and Sutherland. The 556ha site is primarily open undifferentiated heather moorland over blanket peatbog used for livestock grazing by a local crofting association and takes in a section of commercial forestry to its southwest, through which the site would be accessed from the A838.

2.2 The topography of the site rises relatively steeply from Loch Shin to the west and the River Tirry to the west to form a whaleback ridge between the water features over which the turbines would be sited. The highest point within the site is a small rise towards the northwest at 237m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) while turbines are positioned between 190m and 220 AOD.

2.3 The largest waterbody within the site is Loch an Staing, which, along with other watercourses including peatland improvement drainage ditches to the site's east, drains to the River Tirry, which drains to Loch Shin as do other watercourses including the Allt na Caorach to the west of the ridgeline. All watercourses and waterbodies within the site ultimately drain to the North Sea via the Kyle of Sutherland and the Dornoch Firth.

2.4 There are several properties at West Shinness, Shinness, and Achnairn to the south of the applications site with the nearest property being the unoccupied Alltnacaorach at 940m, while the nearest occupied property is Burnside being within 1.4km southwest of the southernmost turbine.

Environmental Designations and Habitats

2.5 The northern part of the site lies within the Flow Country World Heritage Site, which is designated for its blanket bog and peatland habitats. There is a total of eleven designated sites with ecological and ornithological qualifying features within a 10km

radius of the site, the closest being the Cnoc an Alaskie SSSI part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC and Ramsar site.

2.6

Designation	Distance to Site Boundary	Qualifying Interests
Flow Country World Heritage Site	0m	Peatland habitats including blanket bog
Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC, SPA, and RAMSAR. Also – Cnoc an Alaskie SSSI (0.9km) Strath an Loin SSSI (3.7km west) Grudie Peatlands (3.5km southwest) Strath Duchally SSSI (6.2km northwest) Druim nam Bad SSSI (15km north) Loch Meadie Peatlands SSSI (16.5km north) Skinsdale Peatlands (17.5km east)	0.9km north	Blanket bog; Acid, peat-stained lakes and ponds; Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath; Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels; Marsh saxifrage; and Very wet mires often identified by an unstable `quaking` surface; Otter; Black-throated diver; Red-throated diver; Common scoter; Wigeon; Hen harrier; Merlin; Short-eared owl; Dunlin; Golden eagle; Golden plover; Greenshank; and Wood sandpiper
Ben Klibreck SSSI	4.3km east	Alpine heath; Blanket bog; Oligotrophic loch; and

		Upland birch woodland
River Naver SAC	6.9km north	Atlantic salmon; and Freshwater pearl mussel
Lairg and Strath Brora Lochs SPA and SSSI	6.5km northwest	Breeding birds; and, Black-throated diver
Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA and SSSI	9.8km	Breeding birds; and, Hen harrier

2.7 The site comprises blanket bog, wet modified bog and wet heath. High-quality blanket bog (M17) is present in patches to the north and central areas of the site between Ts 9 and 10 northwards with the majority laying within the boundaries of the FCWHS (EIAR Volume 3a Figure 6.5 Peatland Condition Assessment). Other habitats present include marshy grassland and conifer plantation.

2.8 Class 1 and 2 peatlands, which are defined as nationally important carbon rich soils, deep peat, and priority peatland habitat of high conservation value are present within the site, with class 2 soils covering the larger part and class 1 soils present in the site's western area. Class 5 non-priority peatland is also well represented being more prevalent than Class 1. Peat depth surveys across the site recorded varying depths of less than 0.5m to up to 7m.

2.9 Evidence of badger, pine marten, and otter were recorded within the site, while bats were recorded in low numbers with no evidence of roosts surveyed despite there being suitable habitat. Invertebrates such as dragon and damsel fly as well as great yellow bumblebee were also surveyed. Additionally, the site and surrounds have been surveyed for ornithological interests with several sensitive species recorded breeding on or near the site including black-throated diver, red-throated diver, barn owl, osprey, merlin, black grouse, greenshank, and wood sandpiper. Collision risk modelling has also been undertaken for pink foot goose, kestrel, golden eagle, white tailed eagle, hen harrier, and lapwing.

Landscape Designation, Wild Land, and Landscape Character

2.10 The proposed development is not located within any landscape designations or Wild Land Areas (WLA). Landscape designations within 45km are tabled below.

Designated Landscape	Distance and Direction from the Proposed Development
National Scenic Area (NSA)	
Assynt - Coigach	16km
Kyle of Tongue	24km
Dornoch Firth	26km
North-West Sutherland	27km
Special Landscape Area (SLA)	
Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire	5.8km
Ben Griam and Loch nan Clar	24.7km
Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie	25.8km
Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth	26.2
The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast	39.5km
Ben Wyvis	42.4km
Wild Land Areas (WLA)	
WLA37 Foinaven – Ben Hee	1km
WLA34 Reay – Cassley	3.4km
WLA35 Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest	6.5km
WLA38 Ben Hope – Ben Loyal	18.6km
WLA29 Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis	25.3km
WLA32 Inverpolly – Glencanisp	27km
WLA33 Quinag	29.4km
WLA36 Causeymire Knockfin Flows	37km

2.11 The host landscape character Area is Sweeping Moorland and Flows - Caithness and Sutherland LCT134, which would be directly affected by the development. Surrounding LCTs with views of the turbines include:

- 135 - Rounded Hills - Caithness and Sutherland LCT;
- 138 - Lone Mountains LCT;
- 139 - Rugged Mountain Massif;
- 142 - Strath - Caithness and Sutherland LCT; and,
- 145 - Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting LCT.

2.12 Key recreational and tourist activities in the wider area include, but are not limited to, walking, bird watching / birding / twitching, stalking / hunting / fishing, climbing and mountaineering, paragliding, horse riding, and mountain biking.

Built Heritage

2.13 There are no designated cultural heritage assets onsite although there are five scheduled monuments within the 6km study area including the Cnoc Olasdail, hut circles and field systems (SM4375), less than 1km east of the site, while further distant is at around 14km south of the site is The Ord, chambered cairns, cairns, settlement and field systems (SM1812). Historic Environment Scotland has focussed its assessment on both of these assets. Additionally, there is a high density of undesignated assets relating to the prehistoric and post-medieval periods. at the periphery of the 6km study area with the site considered to have high archaeological potential. There are no Listed Buildings, Conservation Areas, Garden and Designed Landscapes, Battlefields, or Marine protected areas within the Study Area However the Rhian Bridge, the Feith Osdail Bridge Over Feith Osdail Burn, and the Shinness Murray Memorial are all Category C Listed Buildings.

Cumulative Development

2.14 Appendix 2 of this report provides details of operational, consented and under construction, and in planning wind farm projects within the 45km landscape and visual impact assessment study. The cutoff date for the applicant's LVIA was 05 January 2024 (EIAR Volume 1 Chapter 5: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment) however the cutoff date for the Additional Information (AEI) has not been stated.

2.15 The status of several schemes in the cumulative study area has changed since both the LVIA's cutoff date and the submission of the AEI to the ECU (19 May 2025); namely, Creag Riabhach Extension, Garvary, Strath Oykel, and Bettyhill Phase 2 Wind Farms have been consented, although the decision on Strath Oykel Wind Farm has since been quashed. Applications Coille Linne (formerly Fiag), Coille

Beith, Acheilidh, Balblair, and Alt an Tuir Wind Farms have been submitted and are now in the 'in planning' stage, while several newer wind farm schemes are at the pre-application Scoping stage.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

3.1	27 Oct 2022	22/03915/SCOP: Shinness Wind Farm - Erection and Operation of a Wind Farm, comprising of up to 19 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 200m, battery energy storage system, green hydrogen production plant, access tracks, borrow pits, substation, control building, and ancillary infrastructure	Scoping Response Issued

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Advertised: EIA Development advertisements:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report advertisements:
  - Northern Times: 19th and 26th April 2024;
  - The Herald: 19th April 2024; and
  - Edinburgh Gazette: 22nd April 2024.
- Additional Information Report advertisements:
  - Northern Times: 30th May 2025; and
  - Edinburgh Gazette: 30th May 2025.

The deadline for representations was 28 May 2024 and 02 July 2025 for the EIA Report and Additional Information Report respectively.

3 objections received by the Highland Council.

24 objections and 7 support representations received by the ECU.

4.2 Material considerations raised are summarised as follows:

a) Conformity with the Electricity Act (1989), the Development Plan, and other related national energy policy documents.
b) Whether the EIA has assessed the project as a whole or if the project has been split between the wind farm and the grid connection, which is not assessed as part of the EIA ('salami slicing').
c) Residential and community amenity impacts including from noise and shadow flicker as well as risk to community health and safety from pollution events.
d) Siting, layout, and design considerations including proximity to communities.

e) Landscape and visual impacts including cumulative impacts and effects on NSAs, WLAs, effects from specific viewpoints, and concerns with red aviation safety lighting.
f) Ecological effects including cumulative effects on ornithological interests, biodiversity, habitats including peatland habitats, and habitat management.
g) Impacts on designated sites for natural heritage including the FCWHS.
h) Impacts on crofting.
i) Socio-economic impacts including employment opportunities, and effects on tourism and recreational interests.
j) Contribution to national and international renewable energy targets.

4.3 Non-material considerations raised are summarised as follows:

a) The need for the development.
b) The profile of the applicant/developer (it is noted that despite local crofters and residents having an interest in the proposal, this is not a community led scheme).
c) The profile of the contributor submitting a representation.
d) Pre-application consultation process for nearby residences and workplaces as this is a procedural rather than a matter for the planning assessment.
e) Community benefit funding.
f) Incidences at other developments of a similar nature and specifically, management of peat resources at Creag Riabhach.
g) Curtailment.
h) Preference for other types of energy generation.

4.4 All letters of representation made directly to the Council are available for inspection via the Council's eplanning portal which can be accessed through the internet www.wam.highland.gov.uk/wam. All letters of representation made directly to the ECU are available for inspection on the ECU's website at the following link

https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00004597andT=4.

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 **Lairg Community Council (host)** did not respond to the consultation request.

5.2 **Bettyhill Community Council** did not respond to the consultation request.

5.3 **Creich Community Council** did not respond to the consultation request.

5.4 **Rogart Community Council** did not respond to the consultation request.

5.5 **Access Officer** does not object subject to pre-start condition for a Recreational Access Management Plan to ensure public access rights to and across the site are maintained favourably.

5.6 **Archaeology Officer** does not object subject to conditions that all works and development are undertaken in accordance with an approved Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) to include a watching brief. The AO notes that the area has a high density of upstanding prehistoric remains and advises that a Lidar Survey and Paleoenvironmental Survey should be undertaken to inform the baseline conditions of the site, and that cultural heritage issues should be included in any CEMP should the proposal be approved.

5.7 **Ecology Officer** does not object subject to conditions to secure its prior approval of mitigation measures informed by pre-construction surveys in respect of protected species and their habitats; its prior approval of species protection plans and breeding bird protection plans; its prior approval of a finalised biodiversity enhancements and habitat management plan (BEHMP) (to include GIS data files of the HMP area); to secure that the Construction Environment Management Plan includes measures to protect ecological interests; and to ensure that all works are carried out under the supervision of an Ecological Clerk of Works (although officers would request an Environmental Clerk of Works who would have a larger remit to oversee works impacting more environmental interests).

5.8 **Environmental Health Officer** has withdrawn its objection following the submission of additional information demonstrating that there are no cumulative noise impacts to be considered. However conditions are required to secure its prior approval of a scheme to limit noise and dust from construction activities following best practice, as well as for an updated private water supply risk assessment to identify the source of supply to Alltnacaorach, and a condition to limit operational noise emissions.

5.9 **Flood Risk Management Team** does not object and has no specific comments.

5.10 **Forestry Officer** does not object subject to a condition to secure compensatory planting and advises that any proposed compensatory planting requires the approval of Scottish Forestry.

5.11 **Landscape Officer (Ironside Farrar)** provided comments advising of likely significant impacts on landscape character in particular to LCTs Sweeping Moorland and Flows: East of Loch Shin LCA, Strath - Caithness and Sutherland Strath Tirry LCA, and Rounded Hills - Caithness and Sutherland specifically as it relates to the setting of Loch Shin, but that the special qualities of the Ben Klibreck and Loch Coire SLA would not be significantly affected.

5.12 **Transport Planning Officer** does not object subject to conditions to secure its prior approval of a construction traffic management plan, any pre-construction improvements to Council adopted roads and structures, finalised details of the site access junction with the A838, and the completion of a Section 96 wear and tear agreement prior to works commencing on site.

5.13 **British Telecom** does not object as the proposal is not anticipated to not cause interference to BT's current and presently planned radio network.

5.14 **The British Horse Society** does not object but advises that vehicles travelling to and from the site are likely to meet equestrians on the road and that drivers should be aware of this risk and take note of its published "Guidance to drivers of large vehicles".

5.15 **The Crown Estate** does not object and confirms that the assets of Crown Estate Scotland are not affected by the proposal.

5.16 **Defence Infrastructure Organisation** does not object subject to conditions to secure its prior approval of an appropriate aviation lighting scheme as well as details of turbine locations and height, construction equipment heights, and the dates of development commencing and the first operation of the development for aviation charting purposes in the interests of aviation safety.

5.17 **Fisheries Management Scotland** does not object and advises the decision maker to seek the views of the Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Boad as the local district salmon fisheries board.

5.18 **Historic Environment Scotland** does not object. It has considered the proposal's impacts on the setting of several scheduled monuments (SAM) but has focussed on Cnoc Olasdail, hut circles and field systems (SM4375) and The Ord, chambered cairns, cairns, settlements and field systems (SM1812). It considers impacts on the setting of both SAMs to be significant but it does not consider them to reach the threshold of national significance.

5.19 **Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.** does not object as the development would not infringe the safeguarding criteria and operation of Inverness Airport.

5.20 **Ironside Farrar (peat advisor)** does not object on the grounds of peat landslide hazard risks. It considers the applicant's Peat Landslide Hazard Risk Assessment (PLHRA) to be satisfactory and sufficiently robust in all respects, and although some recommendations are suggested for clarity, no further revisions are required.

5.21 **Joint Radio Company** does not object as the development has cleared, subject to a 50m micrositing limit, with respect to radio link infrastructure operated by local energy networks.

5.22 **Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board** does not object but advises on the requirement to mitigate potential adverse impacts on the River Tirry catchment from construction activities.

5.23 **National Air Traffic Services** does not object as the proposal does not conflict with its safeguarding criteria.

5.24 **NatureScot** does not object subject to conditions. It has considered the proposal's impacts in relation to the FCWHS, the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA), Lairg and Strath Brora Lochs SPA, wider countryside birds and protected species, priority peatland, and deer management. It advises that the Scottish Government as the competent authority is required to undertake Habitats Regulations Appraisals (Appropriate Assessments) in respect of the SAC and SPAs.

5.25 **Office of Nuclear Regulation** does not object and has no specific comments.

5.26 **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds** maintains its **objection** on the grounds that the proposal will result in adverse impacts on the peatland habitat outstanding universal value of the FCWHS that cannot be offset. The RSPB has also considered the proposal's impacts in relation to golden eagle, golden plover, black grouse but has not objected on these grounds.

5.27 **Scottish Environmental Protection Agency** does not object subject to conditions to secure a finalised peat management plan, that micrositing does not movie infrastructure onto peat deeper than currently shown, appropriate design of watercourse crossings, appropriate management of the proposed borrow pit 2 (which should not be opened unless absolutely necessary in order to protect a sensitive area of wetland), and that works are undertaken in accordance with the good practice methods and outline construction environmental management plan submitted with the application.

5.28 **Scottish Forestry** does not object and is supportive of proposals for 1.8ha of compensatory planting to offset the removal of small part of a commercial plantation to allow for access to the site. It advises on the nature of the planting and regulatory environment.

5.29 **Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Plc.** Advises that the relocation of T13 means that all turbines would be set far enough away from the Cassley-Dalchork 132kV overhead transmission line so as not to cause wake effects on the asset. It also requests its prior approval of the finalised construction traffic management plan to ensure that construction traffic does not hinder access the overhead to the line during the construction phase of development.

5.30 **Scottish Water** does not object and advises that there are no Scottish Water drinking water catchments or water abstraction sources in the area that may be affected by the development.

5.31 **Transport Scotland** does not object. It notes that the construction of the proposed wind farm would have a minimal impact on the A9(T) subject to three conditions to secure its prior approval of the scheme for delivery of abnormal indivisible loads including the route and any accommodation measures, and any additional signage and temporary traffic control measures required for the development's construction.

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY AND OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Appendix 3 of this report provides details of the documents which comprise the adopted Development Plan, including details of pertinent planning policies as well as adopted supplementary guidance, and other material policy considerations which are relevant to the assessment of the application.

7. PLANNING APPRAISAL

7.1 This application has been submitted to the Scottish Government under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended). Should Ministers approve the development, it will receive deemed planning permission under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended). Although not a planning application, the Council processes Section 36 applications in a similar manner given that planning permission may be deemed to be granted.

7.2 Schedule 9 of The Electricity Act 1989 contains considerations in relation to the impact of proposals on amenity and fisheries. These considerations mean the developer requires to:

- have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and,
- reasonably mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects.

7.3 It should be noted that for applications under the Electricity Act 1989 that the Development Plan is just one of several considerations, and therefore Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 which requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, is not engaged. That said, the application still 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.

Planning Considerations

7.4 The key considerations in this case are:

a) Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy
b) Energy and Economic Benefits
c) Construction Impacts
d) Siting, Layout, and Design
e) Landscape and Visual Impacts
f) Natural Heritage (including ornithology)
g) Built and Cultural Heritage
h) Roads, Transport and Access
i) Water, Flood Risk, Drainage and Peat
j) Noise and Shadow Flicker
k) Telecommunications
l) Aviation and Radar
m) Decommissioning and Aftercare
n) Planning Compliance and Monitoring, and,
o) Other Material Considerations.

Compliance with the Development Plan and Other Government Policy

7.5 Appendix 4 of this report provides an assessment of compliance with the Development Plan / Other Material Policy Considerations. In summary, the Development Plan comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the adopted Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan), and all statutorily adopted supplementary guidance, including the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG).

7.6 The principle of wind farm development is established in national policy, with the proposed development being of national importance for the delivery of the national Spatial Strategy. NPF4 considers that Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure will assist in the delivery of the Spatial Strategy and Spatial Priorities for the north of Scotland, and that Highland can continue to make a strong contribution toward meeting Scotland's ambition for net zero. 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.

7.7 The above is also reflected within other material policy considerations, with Government policy giving significant weight to the importance of achieving net zero through the deployment of onshore wind at pace. Government legislation and policy maintains the commitment to attaining net zero by 2045, with the Onshore Wind Policy Statement requirement for 20GW of onshore wind to be deployed by 2030, and the Climate Change Committee Report to UK Parliament (July 2024) explaining that onshore wind installations will need to double by 2030. The UK Government Clean Power Action Plan has also recently set a more ambitious target of 27-29 GW of onshore wind by 2030. When determining renewable energy proposals, the ability to meet these targets therefore demands substantial weight when undertaking the planning balance exercise.

7.8 At the regional level, HwLDP also offers support for renewable development proposals where they are located, sited and designed such as they will not be significantly detrimental overall, individually or cumulatively with other developments. To inform this assessment, the OWESG provides a methodology for a judgement to be made on the likely impact of a development on assessed "thresholds" listed in its 10 criterion, which are designed to assist the application of HwLDP policy in judging the final balance of benefits versus disbenefits of any given scheme. Appendix 7 provides an assessment against the ten Landscape and Visual Assessment Criteria contained within Section 4 of the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance.

Energy and Economic Benefits

7.9 The Council continues to respond positively to the Government's renewable energy agenda. Installed onshore wind energy developments within Highland account for around 30% of the national installed onshore wind energy capacity, with a substantial number of onshore wind farm applications pending consideration at present.

7.10 Notwithstanding any impacts that this proposal may have upon the landscape resource, amenity and heritage of the area, the development could be seen to be compatible with Scottish Government policy and guidance and increase its overall contribution to the Government, UK and European energy targets. The proposed development would provide 99MW of installed capacity in addition to 105MW of battery energy storage capacity. Based on a typical capacity factor, the development is likely to generate enough renewable electricity each year which would be expected to power the equivalent of 70,000 homes on average each year. These figures have been updated through the AEI and are reflective of a 15 turbine, rather than 16 turbine, development.

7.11 Wind turbines provide an important mechanism for the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO2), and other greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions into the atmosphere by reducing the consumption of fossil fuel generated mains electricity. However, during their manufacture, construction and decommissioning, wind farms can result in the emissions of GHGs, particularly where natural carbon stores, such as forestry or peat, are present and potentially impacted by the development, often termed "carbon balance".

7.12 The applicant's assessment of the carbon losses and gains estimates a total loss of between 61,000 tonnes of CO2e, this is mainly due to lifecycle emissions of the turbines and the batteries including embodied losses from the manufacture of the turbines and provision of backup power to the grid, which should be minimised through the provision of on-site energy storage. Ecological carbon losses during the construction phase of development are predicted to represent 1.1% of these total losses. The scheme is estimated to produce annual carbon savings of 50,000 tonnes of CO2e per year. The maximum estimated payback time of the proposed development, is estimated at 0.1 years (updated from 0.2 years through the AEIR), with a maximum range of up to 1.1 years. These figures have been updated through the AEI Volume 3 Technical Appendix 6.4 Carbon Balance Assessment and so are reflective of the 15 turbine scheme.

7.13 The proposed development anticipates a construction phase of 23 months and an operational period of 40 years. There are likely to be some adverse effects caused by construction traffic and disruption, particularly when abnormal loads are being delivered to site. However, such projects can offer investment/opportunities to the local, Highland, and Scottish economy, including businesses ranging across the construction, haulage, electrical and service sectors.

7.14 As detailed in EIAR Chapter 13 and updated in the AEIR, the applicant has estimated that the construction cost of the development is over £207.6 million (not updated in the AEIR). The AEIR calculates that the development will result in the following socio-economic benefits:

- Construction Phase:
  - £34.7 million Gross Valued Added (GVA) and 510.6 job years in Scotland;
  - £10.4 million GVA and 136.8 job years in the Highlands; and
  - £2.1 million GVA and 31.2 job years in Caithness and Sutherland.
- Operational Phase:
  - £100.2 million GVA and 1487.6 job years in Scotland;
  - £68.7 million GVA and 1032.5 job years in the Highlands; and
  - £25.2 million GVA and 377 job years in Caithness and Sutherland.

These economic contributions are positive and beneficial, but are not significant overall.

7.15 Since the application was submitted, the Council has published the Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment in June 2024, which has been brought to the applicant's attention. The Council's newly established Community Wealth Building Team has been notified of the proposal who will liaise with the applicant directly to maximise community wealth building opportunities as established under NPF4 Policy 25, as well as the community benefits as per the applicant's stated commitment within the submission as updated in the AEIR (see Volume 1 Main Text page 31), however, as Members are aware, community benefits are not material to this assessment.

Construction

7.16 The applicant anticipates that the wind farm construction period will be 23 months. There are likely to be some adverse impacts caused by construction traffic and disruption, particularly when abnormal loads are being delivered to site. A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) can be secured by condition to manage the impacts upon the local road network throughout the construction period. EIAR Chapter 11: Traffic, Access and Transport outlines the mitigation measures that would be included with the finalised CTMP, which should be secured by conditions prior to construction works commencing on site. The CTMP should be reviewed throughout the works and informed by feedback from ongoing engagement with the community through a Community Liaison Group to ensure that the community council and other stakeholders are kept up to date and consulted before and during the construction period.

7.17 Pre-construction road and structure upgrades for Council maintained roads would also be required to be agreed prior to commencement of development along with a completed management plan for the delivery of turbine components and any other abnormal load (AIL). These matters are considered in more detail in the Roads, Transport and Access section below.

7.18 A finalised Construction and Environment Management Plan (CEMP) would be in place during the construction phase; an outline CEMP has been provided (EIAR Volume 4, Technical Appendix 3.1). The CEMP would control potentially polluting activities and prevent adverse impacts on river catchments, water supply catchments, and the environment during construction. The Principal Contractor would implement measures outlined within the CEMP, including the Schedule of Environmental Commitments (Appendix A of the Outline CEMP and updated as AEIR Volume 3 Technical Appendix 6.5), as agreed with consultees including SEPA, NatureScot and THC. The CEMP will also be amended to incorporate information obtained during detailed ground investigations which will be undertaken post consent and prior to construction activities.

7.19 Along with the CEMP, construction must also comply with finalised and agreed plans and strategies for pollution prevention; construction methods; peat and soil

management; site waste management; construction dust management; water quality management and fish monitoring; species protection; breeding bird protection; construction traffic management; biodiversity enhancement and habitat management; historic environment enhancement; and site restoration and aftercare. Compliance with the CEMP and other plans and strategies will be overseen by a suitably qualified and experienced Environmental Clerk of Works (EnvCoW) and any other qualified Clerks of Work or consultants as required, which should be secured by condition.

7.20 The anticipated construction hours would be from 08:00 - 19:00 Monday to Friday and Saturday 08:00 to 13:00. No working is proposed on Sundays and public holidays although the applicant proposes exceptions for works that would not result in noise at sensitive properties while delivery of AIL may require flexibility due to logistical factors outwith the applicant's control (scheduling controls imposed by Police Scotland and weather constraints for example). The Council also acknowledges that foundation pours and turbine erection, where both activities need to be continuous, may also be required to be undertaken outwith normal construction hours.

7.21 In any case, developers must comply with reasonable operational practices regarding 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. Environmental Health has no objection and consider that construction noise is unlikely to be a significant issue. However, it is expected that the developer/contractor will employ the best practicable means to minimise construction noise, which should be included as part of the CEMP.

7.22 The AEI amendments have removed 1km of new access track associated with T16 while the locations of Ts 12 and 14 as well as their linking track are realigned away from deep peat such that floating track is no longer required and is removed from the proposal. Consequently, all new track will be constructed using cut and fill methods. These amendments have been secured following discussions with NatureScot in respect of the proposal's impact on the peatland habitat outstanding universal value (OUV) of the FCWHS, which is discussed later in this report. SEPA has no remit with regard the FCWHS and has not objected to the proposal subject to standard conditions to limit micrositing away from deeper peat than that shown, to secure the management of all peat disturbed by construction activities, and to ensure that the mitigation measures included in the Outline CEMP and the Schedule of Environmental Commitments contained within and updated in the AEIR.

7.23 As detailed in EIAR Volume 4, Technical Appendix 9.5: Watercourse Crossing Inventory, up to three new watercourse crossings and the re-use of an existing

crossing, which may require upgrading, are proposed over unnamed watercourses within the site. SEPA has not objected and has advised that these proposals are likely to fall in to Category 1 – capable of being authorised under the Controlled Activities Regulations (CAR) noting that since 01 November 2025, water management is now regulated under the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations 2018 (EASR), as governed by SEPA.

7.24 The applicant has requested a micrositing allowance of up to 50m for wind turbines and associated infrastructure including tracks and other hardstanding. Micrositing is acceptable within reason to address unforeseen onsite constraints. To that end, the requested 50m limit is standard for turbines to ensure that the final installation does not deviate substantially to what has been assessed, in particular with regard to landscape and visual impacts, meaning that turbines should also not be microsited on to noticeably higher elevations of ground (no more than 5m AOD).

7.25 However there may be more flexibility for ground based infrastructure provided it avoids moving infrastructure into watercourse buffers, Ground Water Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTE), and does not disturb additional peat resources to that shown in the EIAR, or increase impacts on natural or cultural heritage assets including unknown archaeology. All of these limits should be controlled through condition along with are requirement to ensure that any movement from the consented locations are subject to approval by the Environmental Clerk of Works (EnvCoW).

7.26 Once the turbines have been installed, the access tracks, substation and hardstanding areas around the turbines would remain in place for the operational lifetime of the development. Restoration of the temporary construction compound areas, verges, turbine base edges and the site borrow pit areas can be secured through the CEMP. SEPA has requested a condition to secure that borrow pit 2 is only excavated if it is clearly demonstrated that other borrow pits cannot provide all the material required for development in order to protect a sensitive wetland feature. SEPA also states that borrow pit reinstatement should generally match surrounding habitats and peat depths. In addition, the Council will require the applicant to provide a financial bond regarding final site restoration (restoration bond) in the event of non-operation.

7.27 Should the development be granted consent, a Community Liaison Group (CLG) should be set up to ensure that the community council and other stakeholders are kept up to date and consulted before and during the construction period.

Siting, Layout and Design

7.28 The EIAR describes how a local crofting group with rights on the application site, within the Shinness Estate, are seeking to developing the site for a wind farm. In that regard, the site has been selected by a group already with a private interest on

the land and as such alternative locations have not been explored for the proposal. Nevertheless, Volume 2, Chapter 3 of the EIAR: Description of Development, sets out that the site benefits from high average wind speeds at hub height, which puts the development close to the primary renewable resource.

7. 29 To that end, Chapter 5: Landscape and Visual cites the advantages of siting the wind farm wholly within LCT385 Sweeping Moorland and Flows landscape character type (LCT), as the LCT is generally considered suitable for accommodating largescale turbines due to its vast, simple landform and landcover, which means that, in general terms at least, the sense of scale and distance in the landscape is at less risk of being diminished by wind farm development.

7.30 Further stated advantages include the turbines' siting on a 'whale back' ridge that offers some screening of more distant turbines from close range views; presence of existing energy related infrastructure such as overhead transmission lines (OHL); its relative remoteness; and that it is not designated for natural heritage or scenic qualities (the FCWHS was not inscribed at the time the application was submitted to the ECU).

7.31 In terms of layout, the EIAR advises that the site's southeast – northwest orientations allows turbines to be oriented to maximise capture of the main south-westerly winds and that the positioning of turbines has followed a constraints based approach in order to embed mitigation in the design. For example, turbines and infrastructure were located to avoid areas of deep peat and potential peat slide risk, while landscape and visual, as well as natural and cultural heritage considerations were also taken into account.

7.32 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 3: Description of Development describes the scheme's evolution from an original scheme of 28 turbines of 230m tip height to maximise energy yields, scaled down to 19 turbines of 200m tip height at the scoping stage whereby turbines were positioned loosely following the perimeter of the site. Changes were made to the layout at the design workshop stage showing a 19 turbine array of two, more distinct, lines. The number of turbines was reduced to 16 at the gatechecking stage following further survey work and feedback from consultees and the Council with the EIAR submission for the same turbine layout but with amended borrow pit locations. In this instance, the two lines of turbines are designed to follow the 'grain of the landscape. The layout has changed once more through the AEI, which sees the deletion of T16 from the array and some repositioning of Ts 12, 13, and 14 and associated infrastructure.

7.33 Chapter 5 also lays bare the applicant's design principles including to reduce the overall horizontal extent of the array, reduce incidences of overlapping turbines that would otherwise cause visual clutter, and avoid incidences of dominant turbines in views. the height reduction from 230m turbines to 200m turbines is also stated as mitigation to avoid turbines appearing 'over dominant' in the landscape noting that

the candidate turbine model has an indicative hub height of 112.5m and rotor diameter of 155m. These principles are intended to create a more cohesive development with the EIAR advising that the experience of the proposal for travellers using the A836 and A838 was a key design consideration of both the wind farm and the site overall, including proposals for roadside planting along the A838 to screen the development.

7.34 In addition to the above, the proposal's fit with existing, approved, and proposed wind energy development in the surrounding area is also a key consideration. Wind farm siting, layout, and design principles should consider the proposal's relationship with other wind energy developments in its wider context given the ever increasing presence of turbines in the landscape. In that regard, the design principles should take into account the baseline and potential additional changes to the current baseline.

7.35 With the above in mind, factors such as the degree to which nearby developments follow similar 'development patterns' in terms of siting, layout, and design can determine the degree to which schemes sit harmoniously or discordantly together in the landscape. Therefore, similarities and differences between receiving landscapes and Landscape Character Types; the degree to which the size and scale differences between the schemes and individual components, especially turbine proportions such as relative tip and hub heights, rotor diameters, and direction of rotor spin, are experienced by receptors and what effects these factors have on landscape resources and receptors' enjoyment of landscape and view qualities, amongst other things, are key in the assessment of landscape and visual effects.

7.36 As noted, the receiving LCT already hosts several wind farms, notably in its northeastern section along the A9(T) in Caithness outside of the study area, although the cluster at Strathy Wood and Strathy South, both under construction, and the existing Strathy North is another case in point at the northern section of the LCT. The turbines of the operational Creag Riabhach Wind Farm to the north of the application site, and those of the approved Chleansaid and Strath Tirry Wind Farms to the east and southeast respectively, do and would straddle the boundary of the sweeping moorland and flows and the neighbouring LCT135 Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland.

7.37 This pattern of development is repeated in the north by the aforementioned cluster, although Strathy South does extend deeper in to the LCT. Gordonbush and Gordonbush Extension as well as Kilbraur and Kilbraur Extension Wind Farms also repeat the pattern to the LCT's southeast however the Causeymire cluster at the northeast of the LCT straddling the A9(T), and Camster Wind Farm further east, are also sited deeper into the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT.

7.38 This proposal would bring turbine development to a more central location within the LCT for the hosting Sweeping Moorland and Flows: East of Loch Shin landscape character area (LCA), the actual part of the LCA that would be hosting the turbines, which, as mentioned, is to the southwest of the LCT. However, the proposal would not be a new development type in wider views. The nearest operational wind farms are Creag Riabhach Wind Farm to the north, Lairg I Wind Farm is south-southeast of the application site, and Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms to the south. These schemes are each within the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT (LCT135). Consented wind farms such as Achany Extension and Sallachy reinforce this development pattern within the rounded hills to the west and southwest as do the consented Lairg II and Garvary Wind Farms to the southeast.

7.39 With the exception of Strath Tirry, which brings (much smaller 135m tip height) turbine development ahead of ridgelines to within the landscape basin, and Sallachy, which is approved for a linear turbine development on the exposed but more remote northeast facing slopes west of Loch Shin, the wind farms sited within the rounded hills are generally set back well within their moorland settings. The advantages of these locations is that the moorland provides expansive backdrops to the large-scale structures and that the undulating rounded hills provide natural screening that reduces the full exposure of the turbines and exposure of the of the lower ground level infrastructure, particularly from public locations such as roads and settlements. These locations are generally more remote and separate from settled areas.

7.40 The difficulty with the application site is that it is located on a low rising ridge of land within the open ‘basin’ type landscape containing Loch Shin and close to the more settled ‘Strath’ farming landscape at Achnairn. Consequently, the application turbines would be exposed to sensitive public receptors for distances surrounding the proposal site. This is because the rounded hills that otherwise offer moorland covered backdrops to, and screening of, other schemes approved for similarly scaled turbines, are much more distant from the application turbines.

7.41 This locational context means that turbines are more likely to appear skylined rather than backdropped, and large-scaled and prominent when experienced from lower areas within the landscape ‘basin’. Moreover, there is limited natural screening of the scheme from sections of the A836 and A838, the southwest slopes above Loch Shin, and higher summits of rugged mountain massifs and lone mountains to the west, north, and northeast of the application site, as well as sensitive locations in the north of the Achany Glen such as The Ord and Torroble. These considerations are assessed in more detail in the landscape and visual impact appraisal.

7.42 In addition to the above, proposals for new and repowering schemes in the study area continue to come forward and are at various stages of pre-application and application stages, including the now in-planning stage Coillie Linne (formerly Fiag)

Wind Farm for 15 x 250m turbines a little over 5km to the northwest and several more at scoping stage within the 45km study area. As such, the future cumulative baseline scenario remains uncertain at this stage, with each proposal to be determined on its own merit.

7.43 The cumulative effects of the proposal scheme with these newer schemes at the scoping stage have not been assessed as part of the EIAR or AEI, while some schemes have moved from the scoping to the application stage since the application was submitted (see Appendix 2). For the purposes of this assessment, a consideration of the total cumulative effects of the application proposal with wider future schemes is avoided in favour of the additional cumulative effects of the proposal, that is those effects attributable to the scheme, so that that this scheme's contribution to cumulative landscape and visual effects can be better understood and to avoid making undue judgements on schemes yet to be determined.

7.44 Not only is consideration of how the siting, design of multiple developments relate to each other and the cohesiveness of their relationship to their surroundings from fixed viewpoints important, but also how wind farms relate to each other in terms of their frequency when moving through the landscape. Such consideration includes understanding the visual separation between schemes, which is important in order to allow receptors to experience and appreciate the character of the landscape and any special natural, architectural, cultural, and historic features in between. Care and attention are therefore required regarding design, siting and location to avoid detrimental sequential impacts on important routes in the wider area.

7.45 As with all wind farm development, there remains potential for significant residual landscape and visual effects that require further consideration even though mitigation is, or should be, embedded into the design. Any assessment must pay particular attention to the specific hosting and neighbouring Landscape Character Areas (LCAs) of the receiving landscape along with the landscape composition they engender, as well as any landscape designations in the wider area, susceptible receptors, as well as public views and the amenity of residents, recreational, and road user receptors.

7.46 The implications of the application proposal on the physical and perceptual experience of the landscape and the visual experience of the receptor are considered in the respective Landscape Impact and Visual Impact sections below. These assessments set out that officers' maintain significant concerns regarding the host site's ability to host turbines of the proposed scale due to its specific locational context. As such, officers do not consider the mitigation through design sufficient to counter these concerns without significantly altering the structure and experience of the landscape and experience of the landscape for resident, recreational, and road user visual receptors living in and moving through it.

Ancillary Infrastructure

7.47 The applicant has identified that a grid connection will be required and has applied for a substation. The siting for the substation compound and adjacent BESS facility compound within the site are shown on AEI Volume 2 Figure A1.3 Site Layout. The drawing shows the reorientation of both compounds so that they present a smaller perimeter edge to the Cnoc Olasdail, hut circles and field systems SAM. This amendment does not change the basic indicative layout of either compound as presented in the EIAR (Volume 3a, Figures 3.6, 3.7 (BESS), and 3.10 (substation).

7.48 The final layouts, component designs and external material finishes, together with the compounds and perimeter fencing can be secured by condition. For the BESS facility a condition should be imposed to secure the proposal is reasonably sited to demonstrate compliance with Health and Safety Guidance for Grid Scale Electrical Energy Storage Systems, National Fire Chiefs Council's Guidance - Guidance on Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage System Planning, and Draft Guidance National Fire Chiefs Council on Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage Systems and/or any or any superseding guidance prevailing at the time.

7.49 It should be noted however that fire safety and fire risk management are covered by other legislation and therefore are not matters for the planning authority. That said, water supply, drainage including segregation, containment, and safe disposal of expended fire suppression agent and / or water from the water environment are relevant to the consideration of the BESS facilities and as such, details of these matters should also be secured by condition.

7.50 Similarly, the final colour/finish of the turbines can be secured by a planning condition. The EIAR also advises that turbine transformers will be located within the turbine towers so there would be no requirement for additional external buildings at turbine locations. The development will also require high voltage electrical and fibre optic communications cabling across the site, which should be so installed so as the cabling trenches follow the course of the access tracks from each turbine to the on-site substation in order to minimise ground disturbance.

7.51 Connection to the grid from the substation will be the subject of a separate application and consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 and will require its own assessment. That assessment must consider the cumulative effect of the grid connection with the wind farm development.

7.52 Once the wind farm has been commissioned, the site restoration would involve landscaping and replanting disturbed areas that are not required for the ongoing operational phase of the development. This will include the landscaping and re-profiling of the access track verges and reinstatement of disturbed areas adjacent to the substation, the temporary construction areas and around the crane hardstandings and turbine foundations. A programme of reinstatement monitoring

will be implemented in the first few years of operation to document the success of revegetation of these areas. In relation to the proposed borrow pits, a restoration scheme can be secured by condition. Additional landscaping in the form of tree and shrub planting is proposed along the A838 to screen the turbines from the public road.

Landscape Impacts

7.53 There are several aspects to consider in determining whether this development represents an acceptable degree of impact on landscape character, including:

- impacts on the Landscape Character Type (LCT) as a whole, specific units of the LCT, that is Landscape Character Areas (LCAs), and on neighbouring LCT/LCAs;
- impacts on landscape composition; and,
- impacts on landscape designations.

7.54 These considerations inform an assessment of the proposal's compliance with THC Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) as it relates to landscape sensitivity.

7.55 The proposal's specific effects on landscape character will result from the insertion of large-scale moving turbines into the landscape and, to a lesser degree, the associated tracks and other infrastructure, contrasting with the existing colour and texture of the hosting simple moorland cover, and interaction with the colour, textures, and associations of the surrounding LCTs/LCAs that combine to produce the landscape context that the development is experienced in.

7.56 In this instance, the turbines would be wholly located within LCT385 Sweeping Moorland and Flows landscape character type (LCT), a gently sloping or undulating simple landform and landcover of moorland and forestry, which lies generally below 350m. The LCT also generally only accommodates low levels of settlement or other types of development.

7.57 The EIAR advises that the site's location is within a relatively isolated section of the sweeping moorland and flows and therefore describes the specific hosting landscape character area as the Sweeping Moorland and Flows: East of Loch Shin LCA. The site lies on an elongated ridge of higher ground between Strath Tirry and Loch Shinn that is oriented northwest to southeast following with the 'grain' of the wider landscape. The A838 and an overhead electricity transmission line (OHL), along with pockets of forestry, pass close to the site to the west and south, while the A836 and forestry pass the site to its north and east.

7.58 The sweeping moorland of the LCA extends north-westwards and is surrounded by LCT135 Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland, which also includes Loch Shinn

and comprises smooth rounded moorland hills generally no higher than 500m AOD (with some exceptions such as Ben Armine). Much of the surrounding rounded hills is within Wild Land Areas 34 (Reay – Cassley), 35 (Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest), and 37 (Foinaven – Ben Hee). LCT138 Lone Mountain, specifically the Ben Klibreck LCA, lies around 7km to the north east of the application with its summits rising above the lower rounded hills to 961m AOD. The more rugged and elevated landscape of LCT139 Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness and Sutherland, which includes Ben More Assynt, lies around 15km to the north west.

7.59 The LCA is also hemmed in to the southeast, a short distance from the turbines, by the smaller LCT142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland where Strath Tirry meets Loch Shin. This strath LCA is one of the more open straths that borders the lower and more gently undulating Sweeping Moorland and Flows and is associated with a larger loch basin (Loch Shin). The LCA is more settled than the hosting LCT and characterised by small scale farming and crofting, which also extends into the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT.

7.60 As described, the LCA is a relatively open, broad shallow basin, with the wider basin contained by low rounded hills with a wider context of mountainous terrain to the north and small-scale settlement to the south. The turbines themselves would be located towards the centre of this relatively open, broad shallow basin albeit on an elongated ridge of slightly higher ground as described above.

7.61 Given its vastness and the existence of turbine developments within the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, the effect of the proposal as a single development on the character of the LCT as a whole will not be significant. The EIAR has focussed its assessment on the specific LCA therefore, with no change to the assessment through the AEI.

7.62 The EIAR assesses the susceptibility of the LCA as medium-low, which appears to be largely based on an assessment of the LCT overall (EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 5 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Table 5.7). However, the landscape context of smaller scaled farms and crofts, the proximity to key transport routes (A836/ A838), and its central position within a broad ‘basin’ type landscape, which tends to promote visibility, are factors that increase the LCA’s susceptibility to large scale wind energy development despite the influence of existing and approved turbine developments (Creag Riabhach and extension, Chleansaid, Strath Tirry, and Sallachy Wind Farms for example).

7.63 Nevertheless, a medium sensitivity for the LCA overall is not disputed, nor is the conclusion that significant effects on this landscape resource are likely to occur for up to 5km from the turbines where the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT extends for that distance. Given the extents of the LCT, the extent of the zone of theoretical

visibility (ZTV) within it, and the screening effects of forestry, the conclusion is considered reasonable.

7.64 With regard LCT135 Rounded Hills - Caithness and Sutherland, the EIAR advises that the nearest turbine would be around 3.4km from the LCT with visibility of the development being on facing slopes and summits within the LCT between 3.4km and 10km. This visibility breaks up somewhat at around 8km from the turbines due to additional screening afforded by the summits of rounded hills.

7.65 The EIAR notes that existing and consented wind energy developments already have a characterising effect on this LCT with wind farms located on the remoter lower hill slopes of the LCT to the north east, on the hills above Lairg, and southwest beyond the enclosing ridge of high ground west of Loch Shin that includes Beinn Sgeireach. It concludes that there will not be a significant effect on this landscape resource However, within the part of the LCT most affected by the Proposed Development, around Loch Shin, there is only the scheme at Sallachy that has so far been consented.

7.66 The LVIA assessment doesn't appear to recognise that the boundary of the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherlands: Loch Shin and southwest of Loch Shin LCA, southwest of the Proposed Development, includes Loch Shin itself, the shores of which are within 2km of the nearest turbines. From VP8 (Sallachy), the Proposed Development appears more associated with the landscape north of the loch, however the sense of separation from VP9 (Beinn Sgeireach) is more limited, and likely to be even less from lower elevations where the loch is less visible. For these reasons, there would be significant effects to the character of Loch Shin, including its setting of Rounded Hills, extending at least 5km from the Proposed Development.

7.67 For LCT142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland, the assessment is logically limited to the Strath Tirry LCA, south of the application site. The EIAR cites the approval of Strath Tirry Wind Farm (not constructed) on the LCA's eastern boundary with the Rounded Hills LCT, along with the approval of Chleansaid Wind Farm (also not constructed) outwith the Strath Tirry LCA, as producing the LCA's medium susceptibility to wind farm development, with the LCA ascribed a medium sensitivity overall.

7.68 The assessment of a 'Medium' sensitivity appears low given the smaller scale of this landscape and its proximity to the Proposed Development. While the EIAR identifies partially significant effects to parts of the LCA within 4km, there would be hub height visibility of most turbines from the majority of the LCA and VP7 (A836 North of Dalchork RSPB) demonstrates that the proposal would be a material influence of the LCA's character from its more distant areas. Effects to the Strath

Tirry Strath – Caithness and Sutherland: Strath Tirry LCA are likely to be significantly adverse across the whole LCA unit.

7.69 The EIAR has also assessed landscape character effects for LCT138 Lone Mountains, specifically the Ben Klibreck LCA, and LCT145 Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting for the Lairg and surrounds LCA. The key characteristics of the lone mountain LCTs such as their landmark quality, distinctive profiles, and relative heights to lower-lying sweeping moorland and flows, are best experienced from outwith the LCTs. However, it is agreed that the scheme would not wholescale interfere with these LCA characteristics, as they can still be appreciated from the majority of public areas. From within the LCA, Creag Riabhach is already a characterising feature while the vast panorama experienced from higher slopes and summits would also still be appreciable.

7.70 For LCT145 Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting for the LCA encompassing Lairg and surrounds LCA, the proposal would have greater influence from around 5km south of the turbines in the north area of the Achany Glen, which includes The Ord (VP11), where views over Loch Shin can be appreciated. Where visible, the turbines would be an additional large-scale feature backdropping and enclosing the intervening loch and distant views. However, the proposal would not disrupt its key characteristics or result in a significant effect on this landscape resource.

7.71 The EIAR has not included Coille Linne Wind Farm in the assessment of cumulative landscape effects but nevertheless notes that additional and combined (total) cumulative effects would be significant on LCT134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows as a result of the application turbines' interactions with Strath Tirry, Chleansaid, Creag Riabhach and Extension Wind Farms, which is agreed. While officers agree that there would be a significant combined effect on LCT135 Rounded Hills - Caithness and Sutherland, officers also consider the proposal to contribute an additional significant effect on the LCT in particular where the proposal interacts with other wind farms to change the setting of Loch Shin. Similarly, due to the proximity of the turbines with LCT142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland at the Strath Tirry LCA and their characterising effect throughout the LCA, it is considered the proposal likely to result in additional cumulative significant landscape effects in future scenarios also.

7.72 The above appraisal sets out that the proposal's location within an open 'basin' type landscape context means that there is limited topography that would otherwise provide containment and screening within circa 7km. This locational context means that the proposal would be highly prominent in the landscape resulting in significant effects on the landscape characters of: 1) the hosting LCT134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows for up to 5km from the proposal (as agreed with applicant); 2) LCT135 including on the setting of Loch Shin for at least 5km east of the proposal (not acknowledged in the EIAR); and, 3) LCT142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland for

the majority of the Strath Tirry LCA. These considerations are based on, and consistent with, the initial advice provided to officers by an external Landscape Architect.

7.73 However, officers are not only concerned that the proposal will result in significant effects on the individual LCAs as described above, but also that the proposal would have significant effects on the landscape composition formed by the combination of LCTs described. These LCTs coalesce to create a complex interplay of landscape character types and it is this interplay that engenders the distinctive local character composition and the sense of place that is the northern hinterland of Lairg, the setting of Loch Shin, as well as the hosting LCA as described.

7.74 For example, as described by NatureScot, the Sweeping Moorland and Flows contribute an important landscape function of 'providing a simple foreground to views of distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness and Sutherland, complementing the distinctive form of these mountains and accentuating their height and prominence'. Similarly, the surrounding Rounded Hills provide an attractive backdrop to the LCA, as well as the Strath Tirry LCA and its small-scale settlements, and are integral to the diverse scenic landscape. Indeed, the Council's previous Landscape Officer considered the presence of forestry along the boundary between Sweeping Moorland and Flows and the Strath Tirry LCA, blurred the distinction between the LCTs such that they the LCA as described for Sweeping Moorland and Flows: East of Loch Shin may well subsume the Strath Tirry LCA.

7.75 Nevertheless, officers consider that the addition of 200m to tip height moving turbines within the LCA would disrupt the relationship and interactions between these different LCTs; they would confuse the sense of scale and distance in this landscape and disrupt its composition by changing the important landscape functions of providing the setting to distant mountains and enclosure of the low lying sweeping moorland and flows, particularly where turbines are viewed ahead of the mountains and rounded hills, see VPs 4 (A836 South of Crask), 7 (A836 North of Dalchork RSPB), 8 (Sallachy), 9 (Beinn Sgeireach), and 10 (The Ord) for example).

7.76 Moreover, officer concerns extend to a consideration that an appreciation of landscape qualities and composition in the area is already compromised by roadside forestry and planting. Additional planting to screen the turbines from important routes as mitigation would further change the experience and appreciation of the landscape whereby roadside planting away from strath floors/side slope, or loch edges and watercourses would not correspond with landscape character.

7.77 Officers consider that the above would likely result in a significant effect on the transitional experience through landscapes along key routes that emerge from the south and east from strath landscapes and converge into northwards routes. North

of Lairg, travellers heading northwards transition through the treelined A836 Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting landscape into Strath Tirry LCA emerging from the trees out on to the more expansive and wilder moorland and rounded hills and lochs landscapes to the north and west, which become increasingly remote as the traveller journeys north. As noted by the Council's previous Landscape Officer in their advice for the Strath Tirry Wind Farm, the frequent changes of landscape character within this area makes the landscape particularly sensitive to issues in relation to perception of scale and distance in the landscape.

Designated Landscapes – Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire Special Landscape Area (SLA)

7.78 The SLA is 6km from the turbines but stretches further northeast meaning that the proposal will not have a direct physical impact on the designation but will have indirect effects due to the visibility of the turbines within it. It is centred around Loch Choire but wraps around the massifs of Ben Klibreck and the lower summits of Ben Armine. Its special qualities (SQ) describe its Distinctive Mountains, its Secluded Glen with Network of Tracks, the Extensive Views from Peaks and Summits, and an Historic Landscape.

7.79 There is potential for the 'Distinctive Mountains' SQ to be affected by the development in locations where views from the surrounding landscape towards the SLA massifs that are important to their appreciation are disrupted by turbines. However, the larger part of this effect would most likely occur along the forested slopes above the west side of Loch Shin, which are remote and less accessible. From the majority of public views where the turbines will be experienced in combination with the SLA massifs, they will be a distracting and prominent new feature but the distinctiveness of the mountain forms will remain appreciable above or beside the turbines in views (see VPs 8 (Sallachy) and 9 (Beinn Sgeireach) for example). The EIAR concludes that no SQs for the Ben Klibreck and Loch Coire SLA would be significantly affected, which is not disputed.

Visual Impacts

7.80 EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 provides the applicant's assessment of what the visual impact from the development would be at each viewpoint (VP), including a judgement up to the level of significance of effect. These findings are largely upheld in the AEIR. Unsurprising, there is some difference between the applicant's assessment and the appraisal undertaken by officers, which is to be expected given the assessments are dependent on the application of professional judgement.

7.81 Nevertheless, the officer appraisal has agreed with the applicant's assessment of significance of visual effects at all viewpoints (VPs). The difference in judgement of visual sensitivity is explained by the officers considering road users travelling at

slower speeds such as cyclists, and passengers travelling in vehicles to have a higher susceptibility (high-medium) to wind farm development. Therefore, the appraisal has given an overall sensitivity of high-medium for VPs on public roads that do not form part of a designated route such as the Moray Firth Tourism Route or the Inverness to John O'Groats Sustrans Cycle Network, for which the high sensitivity is agreed excepting locations with less scenic value such as VP 2 (A836 North of Rhian Bridge). This sensitivity is a half-bracket higher than the applicant's judgement and is applied to VP1 (A838 near West Shinness), VP3 (A838 Cnoc an Laoigh), and VP6 (A838 North of Dalchork RSPB).

7.82 Otherwise sensitivity is agreed, whereby VPs taken from locations with designations such as the aforementioned route designations, Special Landscape or Wild Land Areas, and VPs representing residential receptors are considered of high sensitivity.

7.83 Also at VPs 1 (A838 near West Shinness) and 3 (A838 Cnoc an Laoigh) the appraisal considers the proposal to result in a half-bracket higher magnitude of change, both high against the applicant's high-medium (although this may be agreed and the description in the EIAR and AEI is contradictory). The appraisal also judges a half-bracket higher magnitude of change at VPs 10 (The Ord) and VP11 (Ben Klibreck), both medium-low against the applicant's low, and VP14 (Ben More Assynt) where the appraisal judges a low rather than a low-very low magnitude of change.

7.84 At VP1 (A838 near West Shinness), it is the relationship of the nearside turbines with the whaleback hosting feature that makes them appear to loom large and stark over the lower-lying road that increases the magnitude of change, especially as these towers are only partially screened.

7.85 While it is acknowledged that the array would appear to logically follow the hosting topography from VP1 (A838 near West Shinness), the same is less true at VP3 (A838 Cnoc an Laoigh), where turbines appear even more exposed, large, and the array appearing notably wide with turbines sited behind and over smaller intervening scale indicators such as OHL towers, forestry and hillocks on the nearside. It is acknowledged that the removal of T16 means the worst of the visual effects are pushed further from receptors to the right of the with Ts 11 and 13 being the main offenders however there remains some visual clutter in this section of the array. These factor increase the magnitude of change for the appraisal.

7.86 VPs 10 (The Ord), 11 (Ben Klibreck), and 14 (Ben More Assynt) are all summits and while The Ord is a low summit in the settled hinterland of Lairg, the scale and exposure of the turbines would appear stark towering above the smaller scale indicators on the northeast shore of Loch Shin and ahead of the characterising distant rugged mountain massif in the most valued part of the 360° view. These factors have led to a higher judgement of magnitude of change for VP10. For VP11 (Ben Klibreck), it is the immediacy of the turbines to the SLA due to the hill summits

in the foreground screening intervening lower ground as well as the perceptible width of the array, which is also the case for VP14 (Ben More Assynt), that increases the magnitude of change for the appraisal.

7.87 The above combination of higher sensitivity and magnitude of change has led to the appraised level of effect being a half-bracket higher than the applicant's assessment at VP1 (A838 near West Shinness), VP3 (A838 Cnoc an Laoigh), VP6 (A838 Fiag Bridge), VP10 (The Ord), VP11 (Ben Klibreck), and VP 14 (Ben More Assynt) albeit agreed as not significant at this last VP.

7.88 The above means that the extent of significant visual effects of the proposal when considered as an 'in-solus' development is more or less agreed (VPs 1 to 11 inclusive), that is within around 9km, where visible, and on the high sensitivity Ord (VP10) and Ben Klibreck (VP11) summits. As described then, within these limits the turbines will appear exposed, very large and indeed over-scaled for their receiving landscape, especially where experienced against smaller scale indicators within the settled landscape (such as in relation to Strath, and Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting Landscapes). Significant effects will occur where the array appears perceptibly wide as a result of landscape features, with the larger part of that effect occurring where the spread of turbines is most apparent. The wind farm will compete with distant mountain landmarks for prominence from many locations and reduce the sense of scale and distance in the landscape for visual receptors

7.89 VPs 1 – 11 inclusive also represent the extent of the assessed additional significant cumulative visual effects in the EIAR and AEIR when considered against potential future baseline wind farms under two scenarios; Scenario 1 being existing and consented turbines plus the proposed development, and Scenario 2 being Scenario 1 plus application wind farm proposals 'in planning'.

7.90 Although various schemes that were in the 'in planning' stage have been consented within the study area since the initial EIAR was submitted, and more have been submitted as applications, there has been little change in terms of built and under construction wind farms that would influence the cumulative picture as it pertains to the LVIA. That means that the existing schemes in the rolling hills to the southwest (Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms), southeast (Lairg I Wind Farm), and sweeping moorland and flows / rolling hills to the north (Creag Riabhach) still exert the greater influence.

7.91 Since the EIAR was submitted, Strathrory Redesign, Strathy South, and Strathy Wood Wind Farms are under construction and/or nearing completion but would have minor to negligible influence on the cumulative picture except for potential long distance sequential effects on routes. Garvary Wind Farm and Creag Riabhach Extension Wind Farm have been approved and are now Scenario 1 Wind Farms considered in the AEIR. The decision to approve Strath Oykel Wind Farm however, has been quashed by the Court of Sessions and a decision on whether to proceed

with the scheme is yet to be made. As such, it is prudent to consider Strath Oykel Wind Fam as an in-planning Scenario 2 scheme along with several others, most notably Coille Linne (formerly Fiag) Wind Farm, which is less than 6km from the current application turbines.

7.92 In terms of interactions with existing, consented, and proposed wind Farms, the application scheme would bring turbines significantly closer to the visual receptor at several VPs and dramatically increase the prominence and influence of wind farm development in sections of the view. The proposal would present wind farm development in a new landscape setting for the area as they would appear ahead of ridgelines and horizons with development of a contrasting scale, colour, texture, and character to its receiving landscape of traditional rural activities, see VPs 4 (A836 South of Crask), 7 (A836 North of Dalchork RSPB), 8 (Sallachy), and 10 (The Ord) for example.

7.93 The reduction in the sense of scale and distance in the view is notable at VPs 3 (A838 Cnoc an Laoigh), 4 (A836 South of Crask), 6 (A838 Fiag Bridge), 8 (Sallachy), 9 (Beinn Sgeireach), and 10 (The Ord), while the scale difference of the application turbines in comparison with existing and consented schemes such as Creag Riabhach and Strath Tirry would be stark in VPs 8 (Sallachy), 9 (Beinn Sgeireach), 10 (The Ord), and 11 (Ben Klibreck) due to their exposed position and lack of screening. The scheme will also combine with others to increase horizontal spread (see VPs 8 (Sallachy), 9 (Beinn Sgeireach), 10 (The Ord), and 11 (Ben Klibreck), for example) and increase vertical spread such as from higher summits, see VP11 (Ben Klibreck).

Hours of Darkness – Effects of Aviation Lighting

7.94 Further to the above, the turbines will require to be lit for aviation safety on account of being over 150m in height, with any proposed lighting scheme extending visual effects into hours of darkness. The proposed lighting strategy must accord with the requirements of the Civil Aviation Authority and MOD's Article 222 of the UK Air Navigation Order (ANO) 2016 to ensure aviation safety. The applicant has specified that six cardinal turbine hubs, Ts 1, 2, 7, 10, 13, and 15, would be fitted with red 2000 / 200 candela aviation lights, which is a reduction from 15 (previously 16) turbine hub lights, while the need for additional mid-tower lighting to provide 360° coverage has been removed.

7.95 The proposed lights operate via a visibility sensor and will operate at a reduced intensity of 200cd during periods of clear visibility of greater than 5 km (anticipated to be the majority of the time), and only using the greater intensity of 2000cd when the visibility sensors detect poor visibility of less than 5 km. The light's intensity also falls at angles below 0° of the horizontal from the light, meaning that lower lying areas, which tend to be more populated, experience reduced intensities but higher

ground levels such as hill sides and summits experience higher intensities, however these areas are less frequented in the hours of darkness.

7.96 Using data from Inverness Airport, the applicant predicts that the worst case scenario when visibility is less than 5km would occur around 6% of the time with the lighting programmed to switch off 30 mins before sunrise and switch on 30 mins after sunset.

7.97 There is theoretical visibility of the aviation lighting over the 45km study area albeit fragmented beyond 8-9km from which distances it would be limited to higher summits. From these summits however, the lighting would be experienced at its most intense due to their relative ground level heights AOD (see AEI Volume 3 Figure A5.4.3a).

7.98 The EIAR and AEI advises that lighting from the maximum six nacelles would theoretically be visible at VPs – 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 14, three to five nacelles at VPs 1, 4 (with the remainder screened by self-seeded roadside trees), 6, and 13, one nacelle at VP 5 (subject to tree cover). From no viewpoint would zero nacelle cell aviation lighting be visible while for VP4 (A836 South of Crask), which is not a static VP, lighting from all six nacelle cells would soon become visible just a short distance south of the VP location. Similarly, lighting from two nacelle cells may be apparent at VP5 (Achnairn) as receptors move northeast and south-westwards along the C1078, and certainly an additional hub or two would be visible to the southwest nearer the junction with the A838.

7.99 Viewpoint analyses have been undertaken for VPs 4 (A836 South of Crask), 5 (Achnairn), and 6 (A838 Fiag Bridge) for both full and reduced intensity lighting (2000 cd / 200 cd). The locations were selected as being places where people are most likely to be during the hours of darkness, and to represent residential and road user receptor groups (and potentially tourist and recreational receptors if overnight parking is not discouraged at the promoted Crask car park (VP4)), viewing from different directions over varying distances. For safety reasons, hours of darkness photography at remote and mountainous locations is not generally undertaken for such assessments.

7.100 There is no street lighting in the area surrounding the development, the nearest being in Lairg, so the main sources of light during the hours of darkness would be from residential properties, local businesses, and moving vehicles. However, there is likely to be aviation safety lighting form approved schemes in the wider area in the future including from Chleansaid, Lairg II, and Garvary Wind Farms, and potentially Scenario 2 Wind Farms.

7.101 Notwithstanding the above, no significant visual effects have been found within the EIAR assessment for any of the three assessed viewpoints nor for any of the residential receptor including for Lairg and all 18 properties assessed within the

RVAA, nor any tourist / visitor, recreational, or transport route user receptor (A836, A838 Dalchork to Overscraig, and the A839).

7.102 However, consistent with the Reporters' finding for Strath Oykel Wind Farm, these conclusions may be disputed. Aviation safety lighting is designed to be visible for aviation safety purposes; they are not single points of colour in the sky but sources of intense light that produce their own glow effects in different atmospheric conditions. Indeed, as the Reporters found on their visit to Longhill Wind Farm in West Lothian, such lighting is very obvious and even prominent including in more urbanised and busier locations such as West Lothian on starry nights, which are reduced lighting mitigation conditions.

7.103 The proposed aviation safety lighting will occur in a rural area currently with darker skies. Predictable effects include aviation lighting disrupting the sense of remoteness experienced during hours of darkness from many locations across the area. While during the day one's eye would be drawn to the moving blades of the turbines, in hours of darkness one's eye would be drawn toward the red aviation lighting, which can flatten the sense of distance in the landscape, particularly when experienced in combination and successively with aviation safety lighting from other sources.

7.104 Depending on the position of the receptor to the lighting, the lights may appear to flash as a result of the turning of the turbine blades, passing between the light and the viewer. This may be a visually confusing effect for the receptor unless they were aware of the reason for the lights. If aviation lighting is fitted at different hub heights, the lights would likely be at differing heights as well, which again may present a confusing image as in hours of darkness as one does not have the benefit of being able to relate the lighting to physical features.

7.105 As the Reporters found for Strath Oykel Wind Farm, it is likely that the effects of aviation safety lighting on the amenity of the wider area have been understated and that the proposal is likely to result in significant visual effects during the hours of darkness.

Residential Receptors

7.106 With regard residential receptors and impacts on views from settlements, the applicant has scoped in an assessment of visual effects on residential receptors within the settlement of Lairg only as a settlement defined in the Local Development Plan. For smaller settlements along the Achany Glen, Strath Fleet, Kyle of Sutherland, and Strath Oykel, there would be little to no visibility of the proposal. Visibility within Lairg would be limited to the western side of the River Shin at Ord Place and to the southeast for housing near the Gunn's Plantation. Due to the screening offered by buildings and planting, the greater part of the influence from the development around Ord Place would likely be experienced at the playing field

north of the Ferrycroft Visitor Centre, and would have limited influence in Lairg's southeast. Resultantly, the conclusion is that the proposal will not significantly impact the visual amenity of views for the Lairg community, which is not disputed.

7.107 Regrettably, no assessment has been made on the visual effects for residents of the dispersed community south and southeast of Lairg from Torroble to Tomich, a location on elevated ground that has wide and distant views, where not interrupted by vegetation, towards Ben Hee and Ben Klibreck and where there would be visibility of the turbines. The views from here are emblematic of the complex interplay of Strath, Rounded Hill, Sweeping Moorland, Farmed and Forested Plain with Crofting LCTs that confluence at Lairg with the visual baseline being very different to that of central Lairg. From here, the simpler landcover of the higher distant peaks and limited views of rounded peaks offer respite from the visual clutter of manmade elements including OHL (and future consented turbines) in nearer views that characterise Lairg and its hinterland, despite limited pockets of commercial forestry on their slopes. The positioning of the turbines relative to views towards Ben Hee, for example, may disrupt this amenity.

7.108 Moreover, the nearby presence of Lairg I, and the future baseline Scenario 1 consented schemes of Lairg II and Garvary Wind Farm, as well as the influence of wind farms along the Glen Cassley to the west and northwest, and Strath Tirry and Chleansaid Wind Farms to the north, speak to the need to understand the cumulative picture from this location. On that basis, it is considered that there is potential for significant visual effects at this location from the proposal, including potential for additional cumulative effects given that the proposal would extend the horizontal spread of turbines so they occupy a section of the view currently free of turbines.

7.109 These effects would be experienced by residents as they go about their day to day lives in their homes, gardens, and travelling through their community, both during the hours of daylight and the hours darkness. However, it is not possible to conclude on the significance of visual effects at this location from the information submitted with the application and therefore this aspect of the assessment and appraisal remains incomplete.

7.110 Similarly there is no assessment of the visual effects for residents of the dispersed community of Achnairn, although a significant visual effect is agreed for the corresponding VP5 (Achnairn), which would translate to a higher likelihood of residents experiencing significant visual effects from locations along and around the southwest-northeast oriented section of the C1078. For residents living along the southeast-northwest oriented section of this road, views of the turbines would likely be screened by roadside planting, shelter belts and forestry to the southeast of Cnoc Na Callich (18 Achfrish), from where views to the northwest towards the turbines would open up. Given the extensive ZTV in this area, there is potential for residents

to experience significant visual effects in and around this location, although it is acknowledged that houses are not generally oriented in the direction towards the turbines.

7.111 The applicant has also undertaken a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) (EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.3) that focuses on 18 properties within 2.5km of the turbines covered by the ZTV, which are located in the dispersed settlement of West Shinness along the A838 and the West Shinness Road (U2112). Each of these properties has been assessed for further consideration within the RVAA with nine of these properties having been carried through for a full residential visual amenity assessment by virtue of having an identified significant visual effect at the location.

7.112 None of the RVAA properties however, are assessed as reaching the threshold that would result in an 'overbearing' and / or 'dominating' effect resulting in unsatisfactory living conditions, leading to a property being regarded, objectively, as an unattractive (as opposed to a less attractive) place in which to live. The conclusion is reached based on a consideration of factors such as the intervening distance, partial screening, and use / orientation of the property, relative to the turbines.

7.113 However, as noted by the Reporters for the Strath Oykel Wind Farm inquiry, the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance for Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) does not advise that unsatisfactory living conditions is the relevant test but whether the visual amenity of a residential property is adversely affected to the extent it may become a matter of residential amenity. Under such circumstances, the guidance advises that effects on residential amenity should be assessed within the overall planning balance along with other effects on residential amenity. It should be noted however that this threshold is still much higher than the threshold of significance for LVIAs undertaken as part of an EIA.

7.114 A judgement on whether the residential visual amenity of each property would be so adversely affected that it would be a matter of residential amenity has not been made explicit in the submission. Nor have Council officers received such advice from a landscape professional. However, concerns about the proposal's impact on residential visual amenity have been raised in objections to the application from residents of West Shinness. Officers also consider there is potential for the proposal to appear dominant and inescapable from within several of the RVAA assessed properties, including Properties 1, noting that Property 1: Alltnacaorach is not occupied, 2: Burnside, 3: 6 West Shinness, 4: 7 West Shinness, 6: The Craggan if trees within the curtilage are removed, 7: 8 West Shinness although partially screened by Property 4, and 10: Aird View (9 West Shinness) if trees within the curtilage are removed..

7.115 The overall planning balance is a matter for the decision maker with proper input from a landscape professional, which has not been provided for the Council's own assessment. However, given the above potential and likelihood of the development resulting in effects on the residential visual amenity of nearby properties that would be a matter of residential amenity, a discussion of this matter is included in the overall conclusion.

Recreational Receptors

7.116 The applicant has assessed impacts at several tourist attractions and key visitor locations with theoretical visibility including the Woodend Caravan and Camping Site at Achairn (no corresponding VP), Pondside Camping and Accommodation, Dalchork and, RSPB Dalchork Bird Hide, which have no direct corresponding VPs. The summits of Beinn Sgeireach (VP9), The Ord (VP10), Ben Klibreck (VP11), Ben Armine (VP13), and Ben More Assynt (VP14). The applicant's assessment is set out in EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Table 5.12: Visual Effects on Views from Recreational and Tourist Destinations

7.117 In summary, there would be significant visual effects on the RSPB Bird Hide where the proposal would be a prominent feature within the northward section of the view, with skylining turbines being experienced in the central part of the landscape basin for the first time and ahead of defining distant landmark mountains. It would be viewed in successive views with Sallachy, Creag Riabhach (increasing the prominence of more distant turbines), Strath Tirry, and Chleansaid Wind Farms to change the character of the view to one of a landscape increasingly dominated by wind farms. Additionally, significant effects would be experienced within Pond Side Accommodation and Campsite for those areas where turbines are visible, which is not disputed, as well as The Ord and Ben Klibreck consistent with the VP appraisal for these viewpoints (see Appendix 6).

7.118 For Woodend Caravan and Camping Site, the EIAR advises that wirelines used for the assessment demonstrate that the turbines would appear as partial blades or blade tips over forestry, however officers have not been able to locate these wirelines within the EIAR.

7.119 Table 5.11 Visual Effects on Views from Recreational Routes of EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment sets out the applicant's finding on the visual impacts from Core Paths SU16.01 - Ferry Wood Forest located to the west of Little Loch Shin and accessed from the Ferrycroft Visitor Centre (2.15km in length); SU16.02 – Gunn's Wood to the southeast of the settlement (incorporating SU16.07 Balloan – Lairg) (2.19km / 1km in length); and SU16.03 – Ord Hill from Ord Place to the west of the settlement accessed from the Ferrycroft Visitor Centre (2.24km in length). The effect at Core Path SU16.05 Loch Shin Hide,

can be assumed as reaching the same significant level of effect as that of RSPB Loch Shin Hide above where turbines are visible along the route.

7.120 Scottish Hill Track 341: Crask Inn to Strath Tirry Wind Farm by Loch Choire (Overlapping with Scottish Hill Track 342: Crask Inn to Badanloch Lodge / The Heritage Path: Strath Tirry to Badenloch Tracks) is also assessed with the applicant's judgement being that significant visual effects would be experienced for 4.5km of the route at Srath a' Chraisg (1.5km) near the Crask Inn, and Feith Os Dail (3.5km) near the consented Strath Tirry Wind Farm / A836. It is acknowledged however that these significant visual effects would not overwhelm or significantly detract from the Core Paths and Scottish Hill Track's overall appeal.

7.121 In summary, the applicant has judged that there would be significant visual effects at SU16.01: Ferry Wood, where they would be experienced for 0.5km of the route in open areas overlooking Loch Shin, and SU16.03: Ord Hill, where they would be experienced for 1.6km of the route on the shoulder and summit of The Ord, consistent with the assessment of VP10 (The Ord). From both locations the turbines will change the character of the view with prominent skylining turbines being experienced centrally within the landscape basin for the first time and ahead of defining distant mountains, rather than behind ridgelines of the containing rounded hills in north facing views.

7.122 The visual effects on the amenity of views from the Moray Firth Tourist Route, as a national recreational route, have also been assessed. At its nearest, the route follows the A836 and A839 south, through, and East of Lairg respectively with the closest point being 11.2km from the development. Due to these factors and the limited visibility from these roads, the proposal is not predicted to result in any significant visual effects on the resource, noting that recreational users of the route would experience greater levels of visual effects from wind farms southeast of Lairg and Easter Ross. The visual effect on the Inverness to John O'Groats Sustrans Network is assessed through Transport Route A836 in the EIAR.

Transport Route Based Receptors

7.123 Table 5.10: Visual Effects on Views from Transport Routes of EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 5 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment sets out the applicant's assessment of impacts on transport routes within 12km of the proposed development, namely the A836, A838, and the A839. The assessment is updated in AEIR Volume 3, Appendix 1 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (page 16), and is accompanied by revised wirelines Figures A5.18a-p and A5.19a-r/s-x as well as VPs 1, 3, and 6, and, VPs 2, 4, and 7 for the A838 and A836 respectively.

7.124 The visual effects of the proposal on the A839, which is over 10km away, are assessed in the EIAR as not significant due to limited visibility in the section of the road west of Achany Glen between the A837 and the A836 as well as limited

visibility in the eastern Strath Fleet section. Consequently the proposal would not contribute to the overall cumulative effect on the visual amenity of travellers on the A839 itself,

7.125 However, the proposal would contribute to significant sequential cumulative visual effects over long distances for travellers entering the A836 and A838 to travel northwards from these routes. This is because the proposal places very large turbines in a gap that currently provides respite from wind farms and allows for a greater appreciation of the landscape qualities of the areas as described previously, between the wind farm clusters at Glen Cassley and southeast of Lairg up to Creag Riabhach.

7.126 Specifically for travellers along the A836, the applicant's sequential assessment advises that there would be theoretical visibility for 20km between Lairg Lodge just north of the Lairg settlement, and the Crask. The aforementioned wirelines provide more detail on visibility of the proposal along this section of the long distance regional route, south to north:

- Between Wirelines 1- 3 (Figures A5.18b-c) views of the turbines would be screened by forestry and woodland planting west of the road between Lairg Lodge and the A836/8 junction at Dalchork (Wireline 2 corresponds to VP7 (A836 North of Dalchork RSPB) where woodland is established).
- Open views from A836/8 junction to just north of Dalchork substation (Figures A5.18c- Wirelines 3-5)
- Screened views between north of Dalchork substation site entrance to where River Tirry meets and runs parallel with A836 the Wirelines 6
- Open views between Wireline 6 and 14 near Rhian Bridge although a section of forestry screens views for a short distance at Wireline 11 (Figures A5.18d-i), which corresponds to VP2 (A836 North of Rhian Bridge).
- Topography to the west of the road rises and, along with plantation forestry, screens the proposal north of Rhian Bridge for almost 3km (Figures A5.18h-k Wirelines 15 and 19)
- Extensive and mostly open views between Wireline 19 to South of Crask (Figures A5.18k-p Wirelines 19-29) although a small section where topography and forestry combine to screen turbines at Wireline 21 (Figure A5.18l)

7.127 Based on the sequential assessment, the EIAR advises that there would be significant visual effects for northbound travellers for 2.5km with forestry in situ, 5km without forestry between Blarbuie (Figure A5.18d Wireline 9) and Cnoc Olasdail (Figures A5.18j-k Wirelines 18 – 19).

7.128 However, based on the VP Appraisal (Appendix 6), officers consider that significant visual effects would be experienced from the A836/8 junction (Figure A5.18c Wireline 4) given that woodland now screens the view of the turbines north of

Dalchork RSPB (VP7, and Figure A5.18b Wireline 2). This assessment adds an additional 3.8km of significant effects to the southern extent of the A836 compared to the applicant's assessment.

7.129 Similarly, officers consider that there would be additional significant effects for passengers in vehicles and cyclists up to Wireline 23 given that the northwest direction of the road here would keep the turbines in sideward views. This assessment adds an additional 1.5km of significant effects to the northern extent of the A836 compared to the applicant's assessment.

7.130 For southbound travellers the EIAR advises that there would be significant visual effects for 3.5km with forestry in situ and 8.25km without forestry between Crask Hill (Figure A5.18p Wireline 29, which corresponds with VP4 (A836 South of Crask)) and Cnoc Olasdail (Figure A5.18k Wirelines 20). This judgement is not disputed as forestry and topography would screen the proposal from views for road users, including the sideward views of vehicular passengers and cyclists, while southbound travellers remain level with the wind farm.

7.131 for travellers using the A838, the applicant's sequential assessment advises that there would be theoretical visibility for 17.5km between Dalchork at its junction with the A836 and Fiag Bridge. Again, wirelines provide more detail on visibility of the proposal along this section of the long distance regional route, south to north:

- Extensive visibility between junction with A836 to Colaboll (Figures A5.19b-c. Wirelines 1 – 4).
- Screened by housing at Colaboll (Figure A5.19b Wirelines 4-5).
- Roadside planting intermittently screening turbines between Colaboll and beyond Wireline 6 (A5.19d).
- Topography, roadside vegetation and commercial forestry screen views between Wirelines 6 and 12 past the junction with the C1078 to Achnairn (Figures A5.19d-g Wirelines 6 – 12)
- Turbines appear on the ridgeline (whaleback feature) intermittently screened by woodland but most notably at Wirelines 16 and 17 beyond the junction with West Shinness Road (U2112) (Figures A5.19g-j Wirelines 12 – 18).
- Small pocket of woodland screening the development (A5.19j Wireline 18).
- Turbines appear large over the ridgeline with some woodland screening (Figures A5.19j-m Wirelines 18 – 23).
- Turbines exposed on and over the horizon forming ridgeline (Figures A5.19m-q Wirelines 24 – 30).
- Turbines completely screened by topography briefly southeast of Fiag Bridge (Figure A5.19q Wireline 31).
- Turbines appear behind, on and over the ridgeline in forward views at and northwest of Fiag Bridge (Figures A5.19q-r Wirelines 32 – 33).

- Turbines screened by forestry and topography between Overscaig Hotel and west-northwest of Fiag (Figure A5.19r Wirelines 33-34).

7.132 Based on the sequential assessment, the EIAR advises that there would be significant visual effects for northbound travellers for 5.5km between Shinness (Figures A5.19f-g likely between Wirelines 10 and 11) and Cnoc Ramascaig (Figure A5.19k Wireline 20).

7.133 However, based on the VP Appraisal (Appendix 6), officers consider that significant visual effects would be experienced from the A836/8 junction (Figure A5.19b-c Wirelines 1-3) given that this section of the road is open to the turbines, for vehicular passengers and cyclists especially. This assessment adds the 850m southern stretch of the route to the consideration of significant effects on the A838.

7.134 Similarly, officers consider that there would be additional significant effects for passengers in vehicles and cyclists up to Alltnacaorach (Figure A5.19m Wireline 24) with turbines appearing large in side views. This assessment adds an additional 2.7km of significant effects to the northern extent of the applicant's assessed significant effects along the A838 compared to the applicant's assessment.

7.135 For southbound travellers the EIAR advises that there would be significant visual effects for 3.5km between Fiag Bridge (Figure 5.19r Wireline 33) to Cnoc Ramascaig (Figure A5.19k Wireline 19), which is agreed.

7.136 The applicant is also proposing extensive native, riparian, and roadside woodland planting along the A838 and the northeastern shores of Loch Shin between Fiag Bridge and a pocket of commercial forestry southeast of Alltnacaorach as part of the biodiversity enhancement proposals to strengthen wider nature networks (EIAR Volume 4, Technical Appendix 6.10 Shinness Outline Biodiversity Enhancement and Habitat Management Plan, Figure 1: Overview of the Shinness Wind Farm OBEHMP).

7.137 This planting will take about 10-15 years to establish. Once established, it is anticipated that the visibility of the turbines would be substantially reduced such that the visual effects of the wind farm along the A838 between Fiag Bridge and the pocket of commercial forestry for road users in both directions will no longer be significant. Consequently, there would be significant visual effects occurring along this route over a period of several years until such time as roadside planting screens the proposal.

7.138 The Far Borth Railway Line has not been included in the assessment however the ZTV shows visibility in north facing views ahead or behind the train through the Achany Glen that would not affect the amenity of passengers. There is a small

section southeast of Lairg where passengers would have visibility of the turbines however it is not anticipated that this would detract from the overall amenity of the route.

Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal Summary

7.139 The specific locational qualities of the application site being on a low rising ridge of land within the open 'basin' type landscape containing Loch Shin and surrounded by higher hills, that characterises the hosting LCA, poses a problem for the wind farm designers. This is because these factors would make the proposed development very prominent within the landscape and views, with very limited topographic containment and localised opportunities for screening.

7.140 At 200m to tip height and with rotor diameters exceeding 150m, the turbines would be of a design, scale, and texture that would appear incongruous within its locational context. It would outcompete important landscape features for prominence, tower above smaller landscape and manmade features of traditional rural life, which, when viewed together, exacerbate its incongruous scale and texture of the proposal in views with the development with significantly reducing the sense of scale and distance in the landscape.

7.141 As set out, the proposal would have direct and indirect effects on landscape resources including the character of the receiving and surrounding LCTs, while officers are also of the view that effects on landscape composition including the interactions between and across LCTs and LCAs will also be significantly adversely affected. As such, it would contribute to a significant change in landscape character and the character of the wider area.

7.142 The VP visual impact appraisal (Appendix 6)has concluded that all VP locations within the hosting LCA experience significant visual effects, that there are more significant effects in its surrounds, and in fact there may be more sensitive locations within the LCA that may equally experience significant effects such as at Torroble. These effects will extend into the hours of darkness with the requirement for aviation safety lighting, which officers contend, will result in significant visual effect for residents and road users alike.

7.143 Taken together, it is not considered that the proposed reduction of turbine numbers and turbine heights undertaken at the design and application stages is sufficient to mitigate significant landscape or visual effects. Nor do officers consider the proposal for roadside planting along the A838, which appears to acknowledge the scheme's significantly detrimental visual effect along this section of the route, sufficient mitigation. This judgement is reached, not only because the planting would take years to establish, but also because once the turbines are experienced along routes, they are associated with that section of the route even if they drop in and out of travellers' views. As such, the proposal will result in significant effects across

a broad area and a broad range of receptors that are not sufficiently mitigated by the design.

Natural Heritage (including ornithology)

7.144 The applicant's assessment in relation to ecology, ornithology, and freshwater ecology are set out in EIAR Chapters 6 (including for impacts on peatland habitats and the FCWHS), 7 and 8 respectively. Chapter 9 for Hydrology, Geology and Hydrogeology sets out the assessment of peat impacts when considered as a material that 'needs to be avoided and managed appropriately if extracted' rather than as a habitat. These chapters are supported by several technical appendices, including surveys on habitats and vegetation, protected species, birds, and freshwater habitat. An Outline Biodiversity Enhancement and Habitat Management Plan (OBEHMP) has also been submitted while Additional Information (AEI) has been submitted that updates the Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) following the amended layout (AEIR Volume 3 Technical Appendix 2.1).

7.145 Overall, the EIAR together with the AEI submission conclude that subject to the recommended mitigation measures there will be no significant residual effects during the construction, operation, or decommissioning phases of the development, either individually or cumulatively with other developments. The applicant has committed to ensuring that construction practices will be in line with best practise guidance. Site specific environmental protection measures will also be fully detailed in the final CEMP, Peat Management Plan (PMP), pre-construction surveys will also be undertaken including for bats, badger, otter and pine marten (and any other protected species identified on site during the pre-construction surveys), along with biodiversity and habitat enhancement measures to be detailed through the finalised OBEHMP. A condition can be used to ensure that all works are overseen by an Environmental Clerk of Works (EnvCoW).

Designated Sites

7.146 As detailed in Section 2 above, the proposal lies partially within the Flow Country World Heritage Site and there are several designations within 10km of the site including Natura2000 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The status of the sites means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') apply. Consequently, the Scottish Ministers are required to consider the effect of the proposal on SACs and SPAs, through Appropriate Assessments where required, before the proposal can be consented.

7.147 **The Flow Country World Heritage Site** (FCWHS) is protected for its globally important blanket bog ecosystem with the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) encompassing several attributes relating to the blanket bog habitat and ecosystem processes. In its initial response, NatureScot advised that the proposal will

significantly impact the extent of blanket bog, the diversity of the peat body, the actively sequestering carbon (due to permanent loss of Sphagnum cover), the connectivity of the blanket bog cover (due to infrastructure fragmenting the peat body), the water filtration of the site, the archive it contains (due to excavation and moving peat soils), and the natural laboratory attributes that contribute to its OUV.

7.148 As such, NatureScot required Ts 12, 14, 15, and 16 and their associated tracks and infrastructure be removed from the FCWHS boundary, along with a requirements for an updated OBEHMP to exclude proposals for riparian planting within the WHS as well as roadside planting on or within 100m of peatland habitat within the WHS. The response also advised that pool creation within the FCWHS would result in the loss of peatland habitat and so required that it was removed from the OBEHMP, and that the submitted deer management plan (DMP) should be updated to consider deer related impacts on the FCWHS.

7.149 In response to NatureScot's concerns the applicant has removed Anemometer Mast 2 and T16 along with its associated track, realigned the track between Ts 10 and 12, and microsited the track between Ts 12 and 15 to avoid impacts on blanket bog within the FCWHS boundary. Additionally, the applicant has provided an assessment of the impacts on the OUV through the AEI (Volume 3: Technical Appendices – Technical Response to NatureScot's Objection to Shinness Wind Farm on OUV of the FCWHS).

7.150 Following these amendments, NatureScot now advises that the revised scheme would not have a direct impact on the blanket bog habitat OUV within the FCWHS and that any indirect impact on the OUV would be negligible provided that the micrositing of Ts 12, 14, and 15 is strictly controlled through condition and adhered to during construction works to ensure that no infrastructure is moved any closer to blanket bog within the FCWHS.

7. 151 Based on the above, NatureScot has not objected to the application on the grounds of impacts to the FCWHS' peatland habitat OUV subject to the strict conditions as already outlined. The decision to not object is despite wind farm infrastructure being located within the designation. NatureScot's position may be explained in the summary of the Council's updated Flow Country Planning Position Statement 2, published in July 2025, which states that:

> 'World Heritage inscription for The Flow Country does not present a ban or moratorium on development. Each planning proposal that comes forward will be assessed and considered on its merits. In seeking to fulfil the international obligations for protection and management of the Site, which it can be anticipated will carry significant weight in decisions, the focus will be on seeking to protect the Site's Outstanding Universal Value. This will include taking into account Site integrity, including its wholeness, and setting. Positive and

negative, individual and cumulative effects will be taken into account, together with appropriate mitigation proposals in a World Heritage context.'

7.152 However it is also noted that the boundary of the FCWHS has been set to include areas adjacent to blanket bog to provide protection and support the integrity of more pristine habitats and to allow for degraded peatland habitat to be restored. These factors have been highlighted in the RSPB's latest response to the ECU, which also sets out that '[o]ne of the priority objectives of the FCWHS Management Plan is to identify and support restoration schemes in order to get the whole site into good condition'. Based on these factors and as set out in its response, it is the RSPB's contention that the impact of the development on non-pristine habitats within the FCWHS adjacent to blanket bog will adversely impact the OUV and, given that OUVs are a 'whole site' concept whereby impacts cannot be offset, that no part of the development should take place within the FCWHS boundary.

7.153 In addition to the above, Members will be aware that the designation is still recent and that work is underway with respect to other matters of consideration and potential protection for the FCWHS. These considerations include the FCWHS' setting and experiential qualities, which relate to the obligation of state signatories to the World Heritage Convention to 'present the site for people now and in the future'. However, the national position on setting and experiential matters is yet to be settled as we are still some time away from receiving published guidance specific to the FCWHS.

7.154 Nevertheless, Members are reminded that since its inscription, the statutory duty to 'protect, conserve, and present the site for people now and in the future' is held at the national level. It is therefore the remit of NatureScot and not the Council to advise the Scottish and UK governments on impacts from development on the FCWHS as a natural heritage designation. As such, it is not the recommendation of this report that the Council Raise an Objection against the application on these grounds.

7.155 Ultimately then, it will be for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether negligible indirect impacts on the peatland habitat OUV are deemed sufficient reason to determine against the application, or indeed, if NPF4 Policy 4 e) 'the precautionary principle' should be applied to the proposal's impacts on the setting and experiential qualities of the designation in the absence of published guidance. It should also be acknowledged that Scottish Ministers may feel that allowing the proposal would optimise the designation's potential to contribute to sustainable development as set out in the UNESCO Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context. However, the policy grounds for taking this tack are not clear as NPF4 Policy 7 l), which deals directly with World Heritage Sites, makes no mention of their contribution to sustainable development but that '[d]evelopment proposals

affecting a World Heritage Site or its setting will only be supported where their Outstanding Universal Value is protected and preserved'.

7.156 **Caithness and Sutherland Special Area of Conservation (SAC)**: the application site is located 0.9km south of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC. The SAC is protected for its blanket bog habitat, marsh saxifrage, and population of otter with the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on the otter qualifying interest as otters using the site may be linked with the SAC. NatureScot advises that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the designation provided works are undertaken strictly in accordance with the following mitigation:

- An otter survey is carried out; which should inform,
- A Species Protection Plan (SPP) for otter to be produced and agreed to by NatureScot and THC prior to the construction of the wind farm and prior to any peatland restoration works.

7.157 NatureScot also advises that the SPP should be implemented during all works from initial construction through post construction restoration works as well as peatland restoration.

7.158 **Caithness and Sutherland Special Protection Area (SPA)**: the boundary is coterminous with the SAC and is protected for its important populations of breeding upland birds. In its response, NatureScot advised that the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on the designation's golden plover and golden eagle qualifying interests. For golden plover, the site is within core foraging range with the proposal having the potential to displace an SPA population. However, NatureScot does not consider the displacement of one territory likely to be significant given the large SPA population availability of alternative habitat within the SPA and wider area. Similarly, the application site is within core foraging range for golden eagle with the juvenile/immature birds surveyed having potential to be future SPA breeding birds. However, NatureScot does not consider the predicted mean collision risk mortality of one bird per 145 years sufficient by itself, or cumulatively, to affect the conservation status of this species within the SPA.

7.159 **Lairg and Strath Brora Lochs SPA**: the application site is located 6.5km from Loch Beannach, which is a component part of this SPA and which hosts its breeding black-throated diver qualifying interest. Given that no breeding black-throated diver were recorded during surveys including flying over the site during vantage point surveys, as well as the site's distance from the SPA, it is not considered that the proposal will impact the SPA population through collision or displacement.

Other Ornithology Impacts (Wider Countryside Birds)

7.160 There are several sensitive species breeding on-site or in the vicinity: black-throated diver, red-throated diver, barn owl, osprey, merlin, black grouse, greenshank, and

wood sandpiper. Greenshank breeds within 500m of the infrastructure so there is potential for disturbance and/or loss of breeding territories. Collision risk modelling (CRM) was carried out for pink foot goose, kestrel, golden eagle, white tailed eagle, hen harrier, and lapwing. For golden eagle, CRM estimated a mortality of 1 bird per 21 years.

7.161 NatureScot is content that the proposal will not have an adverse impact on bird species populations at the Natural Heritage Zone (NHZ) level and acknowledges that measures to safeguard breeding birds during construction will be detailed in the final Beeding Bird Protection Plan (BBPP). To inform the BBPP, pre-construction checks must inform the mitigation measures detailed in the BBPP which must cover all proposed works associated with this development including, but not necessarily limited to, wind farm construction, post construction reinstatement, forestry operations, and biodiversity enhancement works. The BBPP can be secured by condition. With regard golden eagle, the Council's Ecologist recommends that the development is regularly checked for deer carcass so that they are removed to areas away from turbines to avoid additional collision risk.

7.162 The applicant has clarified its commitment to undertaking ongoing ornithological monitoring during the lifetime of the wind farm, which is welcomed by the RSPB.

Species Protection

7.163 Protected species surveys have identified the likely presence of badger, pine marten, and otter within the site, while bats were recorded in low numbers across the site with the exception of the area near Cnoc Ramascaig where the access track is proposed. The upgraded access track means that there will be a small loss of bat habitat at this location but not bat roosts as no evidence of bat roosts was recorded during the survey despite the suitability of the habitat. The overall impact from the development on bats however is deemed to be negligible. Invertebrates such as dragon and damsel fly as well as great yellow bumblebee were also surveyed. The EIAR also includes a separate chapter for freshwater species and habitats (EIAR Volume 2, Chapter 8: Freshwater Ecology) with works being found to have potential to impact spawning Atlantic salmon, trout, and lamprey although there were no recordings of freshwater pearl mussel.

7.164 The Council's Ecologist is content with the proposed embedded mitigation, which includes pre-construction surveys (table 6.27 of the EIAR), which should include checks for pine marten dens and bat roosts prior to any tree felling in the woodland by access track. NatureScot and the Council's preapproval of site specific species protection plans (SPPs) for otter, badger, pine marten and bats should also be secured by condition with the SPPs also requiring to be implemented during the wind farm construction, post construction reinstatement, forestry operations, and biodiversity enhancement works. The proposal is designed with embedded mitigation for freshwater habitats such as 50m development free buffer strips from

watercourses, while environmentally sensitive construction practices will be employed during the construction and decommissioning phases of development, with the developer undertaking ongoing monitoring of sensitive receptors during the wind farm's operational phase.

Habitat Loss and Biodiversity Enhancement

7.165 The majority of the site is classed as blanket bog with the Phase 1 Habitat and National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey also reporting areas of wet modified bog and wet heath, as well as small areas of dry heath, fen, marshy grassland, flush, and semi-natural broadleaved woodland habitats. The best quality blanket bog habitat is located within the FCWHS to the northwest of the site which is characterised by pools and a rich bog-moss layer considered to be in near-natural condition. Impacts on these features have already been discussed in the FCWHS section. The submission has assessed that much of the blanket bog to be modified through grazing and likely historic management practices such as burning and draining, particularly in the southeast of the application site. A small amount of peatland habitat was assessed to be actively eroding.

7.166 NatureScot's consideration of impacts to priority peatland relates solely to the application site area outwith the FCWHS boundary. In its initial response, NatureScot noted that the mitigation hierarchy appears to have been well applied in the design of the wind farm in terms of avoiding blanket bog habitats and locating tracks and infrastructure on areas of extensively drained peatland or areas of heath, or wet grassland. However, NatureScot did raise concerns regarding the 25.27ha figure for anticipated priority peatland losses included in the EIAR as this was calculated in terms of direct losses only. This figure was therefore required to be updated through the AEI include indirect losses as well to inform the area of peatland restoration that would be required in order to reflect the 1:10 (lost:restored) offsetting ratio in line with its priority peatland guidance. The figure is revised to 24.5ha for the whole development and 22.9ha outside the FCWHS following the design amendments, with NatureScot agreeing to the proposal to restore 418ha of peatland as this is a large enough area to accommodate the 1:10 ratio for offsetting impacts on priority peatlands and an additional 10% for enhancement (1:11 ratio overall).

7.167 The updated Outline Biodiversity Enhancement and Habitat Management Plan (OBEHMP) includes a range of measures designed to create and strengthen nature networks, restore degraded peatlands, reduce grazing and browsing pressures, and target priority species. These measures include roadside and riparian native woodland planting along the A838 and River Tirry respectively, noting that 1.8ha of riparian planting along a tributary burn from Loch an Staing to the River Tirry is proposed to compensate for the removal of 1.4ha of Sitka spruce commercial forestry at the site access; blocking of historic drains within peatland, restore

actively eroding peatland, and create new ponds and pools; control deer and sheep numbers and grazing; protect black grouse from deer fencing through marking and provide nesting boxes for goldeneye.

7.168 NatureScot has agreed to the above subject to the following controls set out in the updated OBEHMP: that that no bog pools will be created within the FCWHS; removal of the northern 2km proposal for riparian woodland planting along the River Tirry; that roadside and riparian planting will be undertaken in accordance with the measures specified on page 10 of the OBEHMP to ensure no impact to blanket bog within the FCWHS; and, the monitoring and removal of any tree seedling growth on blanket bog within 100m of the planting for the duration of the wind farm lifetime. The proposed compensatory riparian planting along the River Tirry tributary will also be subject to the measures, meaning that should the proposal be approved, careful consideration of alternative compensatory planting will be required if the area is found to be unsuitable following further survey work. New woodland planting is also subject to the Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 as controlled by Scottish Forestry and should follow the Scottish Forestry Guidance: Woodland Creation Application Guidance while Scottish Forestry advises that new areas of woodland should be protected by deer fencing.

7.169 In addition to the above, the Council's Ecologist has advised that the following additional species targeted enhancement measures should be incorporated with OBEHMP, which can be secured by condition:

- Install artificial rafts for divers in some of the lochans;
- install bat and pine marten boxes in the woodland near Cnoc Ramascaig; and,
- monitor wood sandpiper population (because the species is regionally important with one breeding pair equalling 2% of national breeding population).

7.170 Along with the biodiversity enhancement and habitat management objectives of the OBEHMP, there will be a series of monitoring objectives to evaluate the effectiveness of the habitat management measures and also to evaluate the effects of the wind farm on key receptors.

Ground Water Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems

7.171 Some of the vegetation communities within the Study Area were defined as wetlands and potential ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTE). NVC communities W4, M6, M9, M10, M15a and M23 are considered to be potentially highly groundwater dependent, depending on the hydrological setting (SEPA, 2017a; SEPA, 2017b). The areas of highest potential for GWDTE are generally located to the southwest of the site near the site access junction with the A838, with a small area to the southeast avoided by the infrastructure. Some track

and turbine locations will impact areas of low potential for GWDTE but the majority of the development would be sited in areas of no potential. The EIAR has concluded that upgrades to the existing track and junction is unlikely to disrupt ground water flows and therefore unlikely to result in anything above negligible effects on GWDTE, which has not been disputed by SEPA. As mentioned however, there is a GWDTE sensitive wetland area on the down gradient of the borrow pit 2 search area and as such SEPA has requested a condition to control its excavation only where it has been clearly demonstrated that other borrow pits cannot provide all the material required for development.

Built and Cultural Heritage

7.172 EIAR Chapter 10 considers the archaeological and historic environment value of the site and assesses the potential for both direct and setting effects on archaeological features and heritage assets. The chapter is supported by a walkover survey, wireframes, and visualisations.

7.173 No direct effects on designated features are predicted however Historic Environment Scotland (HES) did express concern regarding setting effects on Scheduled Monument (SAM) Cnoc Olasdail, hut circles and field systems (SM4375), and SAM The Ord, chambered cairns, cairns, settlements and field systems (SM1812). HES did not object to the proposal however but did recommend the removal of Ts 2, 4 and 6, and the relocation of the borrow pit as well as the BESS and substation compound, which would have a larger mitigating effect on the Cnoc Olasdail SAM.

7.174 In the above respect, the deletion of T16 only has had little to no effect of mitigating the setting of either SAM. Additionally, rather than relocating any borrow pits or the BESS and substation compound, the applicant has committed to restoring the former and has reoriented the latter so would face end on across the valley of the River Tirry towards the Cnoc Olasdail SAM. The changes are acknowledged and welcomed by HES as reducing effects on the SAM.

7.175 In terms of non-designated historical features, 45 features were identified during the walkover survey including ten hut circles, eleven banks/walls, at least ten other structures as well as three sheepfolds, three enclosures and a possible crannog. The EIAR advises that the embedded design mitigation means that the wind farm infrastructure avoids any upstanding and buried features by a minimum of 50m, making it extremely unlikely that upstanding or buried archaeological features will be impacted by construction activities.

7.176 The Council's Archaeologist has identified the potential for additional direct impacts on unrecorded and buried features within the site and therefore a watching brief for all ground-breaking works would be required to be set out along with all mitigation measures in a Written Scheme of Investigation to be secured by condition. The

Archaeologist advises that the proposed lidar survey, in addition to a palaeoenvironmental survey, should be completed prior to the development commencing on site to inform the site's baseline condition so that any additional features that may be identified can be appropriately avoided or recorded in advance works.

7.177 Subject to the above mitigation being secured by condition, and subject to cultural heritage matters being included with the finalised CEMP to ensure contractors are adequately informed, the Council's Archaeologist does no object to the proposal on built and cultural heritage grounds.

Roads, Transport and Access

7.178 EIAR Chapter 11: Traffic, Access and Transport assesses the anticipated traffic impacts of this development, particularly during the 23-month construction period. The assessment is supported by a Transport Assessment (TA) (EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 11.1) including an assessment of the abnormal loads delivery route (Appendix A: Route Survey Report).

7.179 The applicant aims to source materials on site via borrow pits but has assumed that 50% of materials will be imported as a worst-case scenario to assess the construction traffic impacts of the development. The assessment also includes the import of concrete and water although it may be economically viable to have onsite concrete batching.

7.180 The TA projects that the proposal would result in a daily increase 108% for cars (staff accessing the site) and 406% for HGVs on the A838, the largest increases of any Council adopted road. The increase in HGV movements would be 90% on the A836 north of Lairg, on the A836 49% south of Lairg, 36% on the A836 North of Bonar Bridge, and 30% on the A836 south of Ardgay. For the A839, the development would increase HGV movements by 55% west of Rogart.

7.181 Transport Planning's response notes that the methodology used in the EIAR averages down HGV movements (around 6 per hour) to assess the construction traffic impacts with a focus on 'environmental impacts with the busiest periods predicted to be months 10 and 12. While important, an assessment of environmental impacts does not provide a practical evaluation or understanding of how the Council's road network will perform, structurally, physically and in terms of road safety, primarily during the construction phase of the development. This kind of assessment is especially important for the A838, which is an evolved road where construction traffic may damage the carriageway, verges, and associated structures, which would impact other road users and adjacent communities.

7.182 As such, further detail that addresses the physical characteristics of the Council adopted road network will be required to be secured by condition for Transport

Planning's prior approval before the commencement of development. This assessment is required in order to understand whether the road network can safely and suitably accommodate development and construction traffic, without detriment to either the structural integrity of the road or other road users, and outline any pre-commencement improvements such as upgrading or installing new passing places, that may be required. The assessment should also be informed by up to date road safety data.

7.183 In terms of the transport of turbine components and any other abnormal indivisible loads (AIL), the anticipated Port of entry is Nigg, with components being transported along the B9175 to the Nigg Roundabout from where they will head north along A9(T) up to the junction with the A839, at which point they will travel westward to Lairg where they will join the A836 to Dalchork before joining the A838 from where they head northwest up to the site entrance beyond West Shinness Lodge.

7.184 The TA predicts that the number of AIL two-way trips on the network for months 14, 15, 16, and 17 of the construction period. It estimates that during each of these months there will be 135 AIL two-way movements to the development site which is averaged to 8 per day. A swept path analysis is included in the Route Survey Report, which shows that the majority of mitigation required to facilitate the AIL will be relatively minor such as the trimming of vegetation and relocating street furniture.

7.185 However more substantial mitigation will be required including removing a rock face along the A839 (which would likely require separate planning permission and is not included in the EIAR), as well as the removal of trees from third party land and the public amenity space at the junction of the A839 with the A836 at Lairg (already authorised through THC ref. 22/01412/FUL for Lairg II Wind Farm), reprofiling of third party land, and upgrades to road structures with the Tirry Bridge on the A838 deemed unsuitable for AIL (and therefore requiring strengthened or replaced, which would also likely require planning permission and is not included in the EIAR), road base structure and surfaces. Transport Scotland has advised that the proposal would have a minimal impact on the A9(T) subject to conditions.

7.186 In addition to the aforementioned condition to secure mitigation on the construction traffic routes, conditions will also be required to secure both the Council's and Transport Scotland's prior approval of a finalised Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) and Abnormal Indivisible Load Route Assessment Report, both of which should have the support of Police Scotland. These documents should include details of risk assessments for transport of construction materials and AIL both during daylight hours and hours of darkness, along with proposed traffic management and mitigation measures along access routes as required such as temporary speed limits, suitable temporary signage, and road markings, and any accommodation measures.

7.187 In the event that the construction of other consented developments using the same public road network takes place at the same time, the applicant is proposing that the cumulative construction traffic would be required to be controlled through an 'overarching Traffic Management and Monitoring Plan (TMMP). A TMMP may introduce a phased delivery plan for all developments to be agreed with the local roads departments and Police Scotland however it is not clear who would be responsible for developing it.

7.189 The applicant will be required to finalise a legal Section 96 Agreement under the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 (as amended) to adequately compensate the public purse in the event of addition damage to Council maintained roads that can be attributable to the associated construction traffic.

7.190 A condition for the upgrading of the junction between the site access and the A838 is also required. The design of the access must be as per the Council guidance document 'Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments' and include suitable drainage measures, geometry and construction, and the provision and maintenance of appropriate visibility splays.

7.191 In terms of wider public access, the Council's Access Officer notes that there is currently very limited recreational access taken at the proposal site but that a Recreational Access Management Plan would still be required prior to the start of construction to ensure the installed access tracks and access points can be used by the public for recreation once the development is operational.

Water, Flood Risk, Drainage and Peat

7.192 The results of the applicant's hydrological, flood risk, drainage and peat (in relation to peat excavation, reuse, and landslide hazard risk) assessments are outlined in Chapter 9 of the EIAR and have been updated in the AEIR as presented in Technical Appendix 6.2, which is supported by an updated Outline Peat Management Plan (AEIR Technical Appendix 6.3).

7.193 The site is located within the Loch Shin catchment, with landform falling to the southwest towards Loch Shin and northeast towards the River Tirry, which also drains to Loch Shin in central Sutherland. With the exception of watercourse crossings, all infrastructure has been designed to maintain a minimum 50m development free buffer zone around watercourses and water bodies. The updated development has not resulted in any change in the location of infrastructure outside previously assessed catchments, and there are no new watercourse crossings, or additional encroachments on these buffers.

7.194 Scottish Water has confirmed that the site does not lie within a Drinking Water Protected Area (DWPA) with the nearest being Loch Beannach 4.7 km east of the site, which is an active drinking water catchment operated by Scottish Water

supplying Lairg. The EIAR confirms that there are no hydrological connections to the Loch Beannach or any other public water supply.

7.195 However, the applicant has noted a potential private water supply for the currently unoccupied Alltnacaorach, West Shinness from the Allt na Caorach watercourse however this is still uncertain. The amended scheme has reduced the risk of pollution impacts to the watercourse however the EHO requests a condition to secure an updated private water supply risk assessment that confirms the source of fresh water supply to the property and its prior approval of a Water Quality Management Plan that details protection and monitoring measures of the source.

7.196 The site is not within a mapped floodplain, the nearest being the Strath Tirry floodplain outside of the site's eastern boundary. However, the site's elevation a means there is the potential for localised flooding particularly at watercourse crossings and access tracks on lower elevations. To that end, all watercourse crossings will be designed as bottomless arch culverts to accommodate a 1 in 200-year flow event plus climate change allowance and freeboard, in line with SEPA guidance (outlined in Appendix 9.5 Watercourse Crossing Inventory). These structures would also be required to allow fish migration and otter passage and will be subject to SEPA CAR licensing. Should the application be granted consent these details can be controlled by condition. The Council's Flood Risk Management Team and SEPA have not raised any concerns regarding flooding.

7.197 Post construction, the EIAR proposes an Operational Environmental Management Plan (OEMP), which can also be secured by condition should the application be granted consent. The OEMP would detail site drainage design, soft engineering, maintenance of drainage and SUDS and measures proposed to control operational surface water runoff from hardstanding, along with detailing how the storage of fuels and pollution prevention measures would follow best practice.

7.198 As detailed in Outline Peat Management Plan (OPMP) (EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 9.3), the peat depth surveys recorded varying depths of peat of less than 0.5m up to 7m. The layout of the scheme has sought to avoid deeper pockets of peat, defined as being greater than 1m in depth, with the amended layout requiring less peat excavation. Overall, 33,134m^3 of peat is expected to be excavated including a 10% bulking factor (AEIR Technical Appendix 9.3: Outline Peat Management Plan). The majority of extracted peat relates to access tracks, the temporary construction compound, borrow pits (with Borrow Pit 2 the largest if required) turbine hardstandings and the BESS.

7.199 All excavated peat is intended to be reused on site for reinstatement of temporary hardstandings, borrow pits, track verges, and habitat restoration. The reuse capacity exceeds excavation volumes with the estimated reuse potential considered to be 67,522m^3, therefore, no off-site disposal is expected.

7.200 SEPA has broadly welcomed the amended layout although notes that the proposed bunds to screen the BESS would be located within an area previously proposed for peatland restoration. It therefore requests that the detailed design of the bund is secured by condition and that the intended reuse of peat to form the bund is included within the finalised Peat Management Plan, which should also be secured by condition, while advising that the excavated peat may be classed as waste if the intended reuse is determined to not be appropriate. SEPA's response to the AEI includes additional wording to conditions as per the new process for agreeing Section 36 approvals with the ECU. This wording requests its prior approval of watercourse crossings and details of peat management in the event of the developer requiring to undertake enabling works then SEPA, notification of incidences of peat land slips that pose a direct risk to the water environment, and, as mentioned, to secure that Borrow Pit 2 is only excavated if absolutely necessary and that mitigation measures are in place to avoid a sensitive GWDTE wetland area.

7.201 A Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment (PLHRA) (Technical Appendix 9.4) has been submitted with the application which states there the risk of a peat landslide at the turbine locations and associated infrastructure is not significant. The majority of the site was assessed as having low to negligible likelihood of peat landslide and therefore there is no requirement for site specific mitigation.

Noise and Shadow Flicker

7.202 EIAR chapter 12 outlines the applicant's assessment in relation to the potential construction and operational noise on nearby residential receptors. An updated noise assessment is contained within AEIR Volume 3 Technical Appendix 4.1. Third parties have raised concerns in relation to noise and shadow flicker.

7.203 In terms of operational noise, the predicted noise levels from the development will meet the simplified ETSU-R-97 standard of 35dB LA90 at all noise sensitive locations apart from Alltnacaorach where levels will be marginally higher at 35.4dB, which is currently unoccupied. The updated noise assessment includes an assessment of cumulative operational noise impacts with Strath Tirry Wind Farm and concludes that there would be none. Similarly, operational noise from the substation and energy storage facility, which are adjacent to each other within the site, is expected to be negligible at the nearest noise sensitive dwellings 2.5km from the compounds, and further assessment having been scoped out of the EIAR with the agreement of the Council's Environmental Health who have no objection to the proposal subject to a condition to secure that operational noise is within the 35dB LA90 limit at any noise sensitive receptor at wind speeds up to and including 10m/s.

7.204 12 nearby properties have been identified as being within the 11 rotor diameters distance requiring detailed assessment for shadow flicker (EIAR Chapter 14 Other Issues). 11 of these properties were subsequently found to be at locations south

and southeast of the development where the turbines would not cast shadows (outside of 130° of north from the turbines), leaving only the property 1, the unoccupied Alltnacaorach requiring further assessment.

7.205 This property has a single upper storey (assumed) bathroom window facing the turbines however in a worst case scenario without screening, the property would experience a significant shadow flicker effect exceeding 30 hours per year with a maximum 30 minutes per day. The modelled 'realistic scenario' based on Met Office data for cloud cover shows that Alltnacaorach would experience minor shadow flicker effects of less than 30 hours per year with a maximum of 0.5 hours (30 minutes) per day. The EIAR advises that mitigation in the form of providing screening (outdoor planting and or indoor blinds) as well as implementing a shutdown scheme for the offending turbines in certain light conditions. In any case a standard condition can be included to secure a scheme for the avoidance or mitigation of Shadow Flicker at affected properties as a belt an braces approach.

Telecommunications

7.206 There is an existing microwave link off the A836 near Loch Naver 13.7km north-northeast of the turbines and a mast north of Loch a' Mhòld over 22.km also north-northeast. With regard the microwave link, a separation distance of 100m from the centre line of the link, has been applied during the site design to comply with the operator's guidance. There are no issues with interference with the mast. No concerns have been raised in relation to potential interference with radio/television networks. However, a condition would nonetheless be sought to secure a scheme of mitigation should an issue arise.

Aviation and Radar

7.207 There are no unresolved objections from aviation interests, with no outstanding concerns raised. The MOD requests a condition which secures submission of an aviation safety lighting scheme detailing how the development would be lit throughout its operational life to maintain civil and military aviation safety; and aviation charting and safety management measures which request specified information is submitted to the MOD 14 days prior to commencement of works.

Decommissioning and Aftercare

7.208 The applicant has sought permission to operate the windfarm for 40 years. At the end of its operational life, usual decommissioning and restoration requirements should therefore be secured. If the decision is made to decommission the wind farm, all components, track access and associated infrastructure requires to be removed from the site. The Planning Authority also requires that any foundations remain on site; the exposed concrete plinths would also be removed to a depth of 1m below the surface, graded with soil and replanted. Cables also require to be cut away

below ground level and sealed. It would be expected that any new tracks or areas used for constructing the wind farm would be reinstated to the pre-development condition, unless otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority.

7.209 The requirements to decommission at its end of life is relatively standard and straight forward, with any request for re-powering to be considered through the submission of a future application. It is important to ensure that any approval of this project secures by condition a requirement to deliver a draft Decommissioning and Restoration Plan (DRP) for approval prior to the commencement of any development and ensure an appropriate financial bond is put in place to secure these works.

7.210 The finalised DRP would be expected to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA no later than 12 months prior to the final decommissioning of the site. The detailed DRP would then be implemented within 18 months of the final decommissioning of the development unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Planning Authority.

Planning Compliance and Monitoring

7.211 As with any wind farm, the Planning Authority would request that any forthcoming permission includes a clear description of development which specifies the precise number of turbines to be developed, the maximum blade tip height, the rotor diameter and includes details of all associated ancillary infrastructure. THC requests this detail in the description so that it conveys the scope and substance of the development and so that such matters are not left to planning conditions, which could lead to scope for further redesign or re-powering without requiring a full fresh consent (which could also require substantial additional Council resource that would not be reflected in the fee). In this regard the description of development, requires to be amended to describe that the maximum turbines is 15 and not 15 should the 200m scheme be consented.

7.212 Given the complexity of major developments, and to assist in discharge of conditions, the Planning Authority usually seeks that the developer employs a Planning Monitoring Officer (PMO). The role of the PMO, amongst other things, would include the monitoring of, and enforcement of compliance with, all conditions, agreements and obligations related to this permission (or any superseding or related permissions) and shall include the provision of a bi-monthly compliance report to the Planning Authority.

7.213 Given proposed associated BESS on site, a fire safety management plan, along with finalised design, materials, access along with details of water supply and contaminated water storage could be secured by condition should the application be granted consent.

Other material considerations

7.214 There are no other material considerations.

Non-material considerations

7.215 The following are not material to the assessment of this application:

a) The need for the development.
b) The profile of the applicant/developer (it is noted that despite local crofters and residents having an interest in the proposal, this is not a community led scheme).
c) The profile of the contributor submitting a representation.
d) Pre-application consultation process for nearby residences and workplaces as this is a procedural rather than a matter for the planning assessment.
e) Community benefit funding.
f) Incidences at other developments of a similar nature and specifically, management of peat resources at Creag Riabhach.
g) Curtailment.

Preference for other types of energy generation.

Matters to be secured by Legal Agreement / Upfront Payment

7.216 A decommissioning and restoration financial guarantee and a Section 96 Roads Agreement can be secured by condition. No legal agreement is required should consent be granted.

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 be situated in appropriate locations to operate successfully. The project has the potential to contribute up to 99MW of renewable energy capacity, and 105MW of battery storage, towards Scottish Government targets and play a role in the route to a net zero Scotland. In addition, the development has potential to bring economic benefits to the area and to create new jobs.

9. 2 However, as with all such proposals, the benefits of the scheme must be weighed against potential drawbacks and then considered in the round, taking account of the relevant policies of the Development Plan. As an application submitted under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, it will be for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether the applicant has had sufficient regard to the preservation of amenity and the desirability of preserving the natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geographic or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting site, buildings, and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest, to the

extent that any such impacts are reasonably mitigated as required under Schedule 9 of the Act.

9.3 The report has set out that the impacts and effects of the proposal as they relate to construction, built and cultural heritage, roads, traffic, transport, and access, the water environment and peat, amenity as it relates to noise and shadow flicker, telecommunications, aviation and radar, as well as decommissioning and aftercare, would be within acceptable limits subject to the developer's compliance with conditions requested by consultees.

9.4 The assessment has however also considered the proposal against the criteria cited in the OSWESG designed to ensure developments are suitably located and sensitively sited and designed to avoid unacceptable impacts on the development's wider context. In this case the development does not achieve the threshold for several of these criteria due to the site's location and elevation and the subsequent positioning and exposure of its large-scale turbines. Officers consider that the specific locational qualities of the application site being on a low rising ridge of land within the open 'basin' type landscape containing Loch Shin and surrounded by higher hills, that characterises the hosting LCA, are factors that would make the proposed development over prominent within the landscape and views, with very limited topographic containment and localised opportunities for screening.

9.5 At 200m to tip height and with rotor diameters exceeding 150m, the turbines would be of a design, scale, and texture not experienced with such proximity to transport corridors and settlement.

9.6 Indeed, rather than the proposal appearing as a large but incidental and necessary feature of modern life, this scheme would appear to make wind farm development the centrepiece of its location; outcompeting distant mountains and a large loch for prominence and attention, not to mention the smaller landscape traditional features of rural life that it would tower above and, when viewed together, exacerbate its incongruous scale and texture in views.

9.7 As set out, the proposal would have direct and indirect effects on landscape resources including the character of the receiving and surrounding LCTs, while officers are also of the view that effects on landscape composition including the interactions between and across LCTs and LCAs will also be significantly adversely affected. Given the extent of approved schemes north, south, southwest, west, and northwest of Lairg, this proposal would tip the perception that the wider rural setting surrounding Lairg and beyond has been given over to wind farms. As such, the proposal would, as an addition, contribute to a significant change in landscape character and the character of the wider area, which is tipping over to a regional effect especially when experienced sequentially on two principle travel corridors in the area, the A836 and the A838 from where they would alter the experience and

appreciation of landscape qualities and views due to the undue prominence and dominance of the turbines.

9.8 It is the opinion of officers that locations that provide natural screening from the most public and residential locations are most suitable for very large turbines so that they have at least a chance of receding from views and, more importantly, people's daily lives, rather than being unavoidable and dominating them. As the VP visual impact appraisal has concluded, there isn't a single VP location within the hosting LCA that doesn't experience a significant visual effect, there are more significant effects in its surrounds, and in fact there may be more sensitive locations within it that equally experience significant effects such as at Torroble. These effects will extend into the hours of darkness with the requirement for aviation safety lighting, which officers contend, will result in significant visual effect for residents and road users alike.

9.9 Taken together then, it is not considered that the proposed reduction of turbine numbers and turbine heights undertaken at the design and application stages is sufficient to mitigate significant landscape or visual effects. Nor do officers consider the proposal for roadside planting along the A838 sufficient mitigation, which appears to acknowledge the scheme's significantly detrimental visual effect along this section of the route. This judgement is reached, not only because the planting would take years to establish, but also because once the turbines are experienced along routes, they are associated with that section of the route even if they drop in and out of travellers' views. As such, the proposal will result in significant effects across a broad area and a broad range of receptors that are not sufficiently mitigated by the design.

9.10 Significant weight has been given to the global climate and nature crises in this assessment. However, the significant and insufficiently mitigated landscape and visual effects, including effects on residential visual amenity are considered to outweigh the proposal's benefits and contributions to mitigate both crises and are sufficient reason to recommend the Council Raises an Objection to the application with the Scottish Ministers.

9.11 The report has also set out that the proposal site's overlap with the recently inscribed Flow Country World Heritage Site is also problematic. However, the applicant has sought to mitigate impacts on the resource through the amendments submitted under EIA Additional Information. Given that the protection of the designation is at the national scale, it will be for the Scottish Ministers to decide whether negligible indirect impacts on the peatland habitat OUV are deemed sufficient reason to determine against the application, or indeed, if NPF4 Policy 4 e) 'the precautionary principle' should be applied to the proposal's impacts on the setting and experiential qualities of the designation. As such, while of concern to

officers, the proposal's impact on the World Heritage Site is not recommended as a reason for refusal.

9.12 This application has been assessed principally against the policies set out in NPF4 and the Local Development Plan, including NPF4 Policy 1 for Tackling the climate and nature crises, NPF4 Policy 11 for Energy with its 13 considerations for project design and mitigation, along with the equivalent parallel HwLDP policy, Policy 67 for Renewable Energy, itself describing eleven tests as expanded upon within the OWESG. This HwLDP policy also reflects policy tests set out in other HwLDP policies, for example Policy 28 Sustainable Design.

9. 13 All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal does not accord with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is unacceptable in terms of applicable material considerations.

10. IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Resource: Not applicable

10.2 Legal: Not applicable

10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Not applicable

10.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: if permitted the development would produce renewable energy.

10.5 Risk: Not applicable

10.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

11. RECOMMENDATION

Action required before consultation response being issued to Scottish Ministers: N

It is recommended that the decision to **RAISE AN OBJECTION** to the subject to A. and for the reasons set out in B. below:

A Members granting delegated authority to the Area Planning Manager – North to respond to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit / Scottish Minsters, regarding any future Further / Supplementary Environmental Information, where that information does not materially reduce the scale of the proposed development.

B Reasons for Objection

1. The application does not accord with the provisions of Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 by virtue of not demonstrating sufficient regard to the desirability of, and failing to reasonably mitigate effects detrimental to preserving natural beauty and conserving physiographical features of special interest because the proposal would result in significantly detrimental landscape effects on Landscape Character Types LCT134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows, LCT135 Rounded Hill – Caithness and Sutherland, and LCT142 Strath, and significantly detrimental effects on the landscape composition including the interactions between and across Landscape Character Types and Landscape Character Areas surrounding the hosting Landscape Character Area of Sweeping Moorland and Flows: East of Loch Shin. These effects are not sufficiently mitigated by the design nor clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits. Consequently, the proposal does not accord with NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy) at e), Policy 4 (Natural Places) at a) is engaged as well as HwLDP Policies 67 (Renewable Energy Developments) and Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, 28 (Sustainable Design), and 61 (Landscape).

2. The application does not accord with the provisions of Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 by virtue of not demonstrating sufficient regard to the desirability of, and failing to reasonably mitigate effects detrimental to preserving natural beauty and conserving physiographical features of special interest because the proposal would result in significantly detrimental visual effects for: 1) residential receptors, in particular for residents of West Shinness where it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that the turbines would not be detrimental to residential visual amenity; 2) recreational receptors including users of paths, hills and mountain summits; and, 3) road user receptors of the A836 and A388 and local roads. These effects for all receptors would be experienced both during daylight hours and the hours of darkness as a result of aviation safety lighting. Significant visual effects on receptors are demonstrated by VP1 (A838 near West Shinness), VP2 (A836 North of Rhian Bridge), VP3 (A838 Cnoc an Laoigh), VP4 (A836 South of Crask), VP5 5 (Achnairn), VP6 (A838 Fiag Bridge), VP 7 (A836 North of Dalchork RSPB), VP8 (Sallachy), VP9 (Beinn Sgeireach), VP10 (The Ord), and VP11 (Ben Klibreck). As such, the proposal will result in significantly detrimental visual effects across a broad area and a broad range of receptors that are not sufficiently mitigated by the siting, layout, or design of the proposal nor clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits. Consequently, the proposal does not accord with NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy) at e), Policy 4 (Natural Places) at a) is engaged as well as HwLDP Policies 67 (Renewable Energy

Developments) and Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, 28 (Sustainable Design), and 61 (Landscape).

REASONED CONCLUSION

The Council is not in agreement with the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report that Shinness Wind Farm is unlikely to give rise to any new or other significant adverse impact on the environment. Due to the appraised significantly detrimental landscape and visual effects, the Council is not satisfied that all environmental effects of this development can be addressed by way of mitigation.

Signature:	Dafydd Jones
Designation:	Area Planning Manager - North
Author:	Mark Fitzpatrick
Background Papers:	Documents referred to in report and in case file.
Relevant Plans:	Plan 1 - Figure 1.1 Site Location Plan
	Plan 2 - Figure A1.3 Site Layout
	Plan 3 - Figure 3.3 Indicative Turbine Elevation
	Plan 4 - Figure 3.6 Indicative Battery Energy Storage System Compound
	Plan 5 - Figure 3.7 Indicative Battery Energy Storage System Elevations

Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Letters of Representation
	Appendix 2 - Cumulative Wind Farm Developments
	Appendix 3 - Development Plan and Other Material Policy Considerations
	Appendix 4 - Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Material Policy Considerations
	Appendix 5 - LVIA Methodology
	Appendix 6 - Viewpoint Visual Assessment Appraisal (operational only)

Appendix 6 - Assessment against Landscape and Visual Assessment Criteria contained within Section 4 of the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance

Appendix 2 - Cumulative Wind Farm Developments

Reference and Name	Distance from Proposed Development (km)	No. of Turbines	Blade Tip Height (m)
Existing and under construction wind energy development within 45 km			
E01. Creag Riabhach	7.1	22	125
E02. Achany	11.7	19	100
E03. Rosehall	12.4	19	90
E04. Lairg	14.6	3	99.5
E05. Kilbraur Ext.	25.6	8	125
E06. Kilbraur	25.9	19	115
E07. Gordonbush Ext.	30.2	11	149.9
E08. Gordonbush	31	35	107
E09. Beinn nan Oighrean	35.1	2	99.5
E10. Beinn Tharsuinn	35.5	17	80
E11. Coire na Cloiche	36.2	13	99.5
C10. Strathrory [Redesign]*	39.3	7	149.9 / 160 / 180
C11. Strathy South	39.9	39	200
E12. Novar	43.3	34	61
E13. Novar Extension	44.4	16	100.5
C13. Strathy Wood	45.3	13	180

Reference and Name	Distance from Proposed Development (km)	No. of Turbines	Blade Tip Height (m)
Consented wind energy development within 45 km			
C01.Strath Tirry	4.2	4	135
C02. Chleansaid	6.4	16	180 / 200
C04. Sallachy	7.8	9	149.9
C03. Creag Riabhach Extension	7.9	2	149.5
C05. Achany Extension	9.6	20	149.9
C06. Lairg II	15	10	200
C07. Garvary	16.3	24	180
C08. Strath Oykel	19.4	11	200
C09. Meall Buidhe	21.8	8	144.5/149.9
C12. Bettyhill Phase 2	44.4	10	149.9
Application wind energy development within 45 km			
S01. Coille Linne (Fiag)	5.8	15	250
A01. Allt an Tuir	15.1	9	180/200
A02. Acheildh	17.2	12	200/230
Coille Beith	20.2	11	200
Balblair	20.5	8	180 /200

Reference and Name	Distance from Proposed Development (km)	No. of Turbines	Blade Tip Height (m)
Scoping wind energy development within 10 km *(included on viewpoint wirelines only)*			
Invercassley	15.6	22	230
Inveroykel	18.3	29	230
Braelengwell	20.8	17	220
Pollie Hill	21.4	13	200
Creachan	32.9	21	220
Baledigle	43	13	250
Ceislein	44.1	20	250
Beinn Tharsuinn Repowered and Extended	34	31	180
Glasa	37.5	27	250
Novar Repowering	43.3	10	180

- **Bold** are wind farms have either changed status or were not included in the applicant's cumulative list.
- The decision to approve S36 Consent for Strath Oykel Wind Farm (19.4km from the application development, 11 x 200m turbines) was quashed by the Court of Sessions.

Appendix 3 - Development Plan and Other Material Policy Considerations

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

National Planning Framework 4 (2023)

A3.1 The NPF4 policies of most relevance to this proposal include:

National Development 3 (NAD3) - Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure.

Policy 1 – Tackling the climate and nature crisis

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 22 – Flood risk and water management

Policy 23 – Health and safety

Policy 25 – Community wealth benefits

Policy 33 – Minerals

Highland Wide Local Development Plan 2012

A3.2 28 - Sustainable Design

29 - Design Quality and Place-making

30 - Physical Constraints

31 - Developer Contributions

36 – Wider Countryside

51 – Trees and Development

53 - Minerals

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

69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

72 - Pollution

73 - Air Quality

74 - Green Networks

77 - Public Access

78 - Long Distance Routes

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)

A3.3 There are no site-specific policies covering the application site therefore the application requires to be assessed against the general policies of the Development Plan (NPF4 and HwLDP) referred to above. It is noted, however, that the CaSPlan does identify Special Landscape Areas (SLA) within the plan area. As noted in section two, there are several SLAs within the LVIA study area.

Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) (2016)

A3.4 The Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) provides additional guidance on the principles set out in HwLDP Policy 67 for renewable energy developments. The Guidance sets out the Council's agreed position on onshore wind energy matters, and, although reflective of Scottish Planning Policy at the time of its adoption prior to the adoption of NPF4, the document remains an extant part of the Development Plan and is therefore a material consideration in the determination of onshore wind energy planning applications. Nevertheless, the Spatial Framework included in the document is no longer relevant to the assessment of applications as in effect, the policies of NPF4 (specifically Policy 11, Energy) removes Group 2 Areas of significant protection from consideration by effectively making all land in Scotland either Group 1 Areas where wind farms

will not be acceptable (National Parks and National Scenic Areas), or Group 3, Areas with potential for wind farm development

A3.5 The OWESG also contains the Loch Ness Landscape Sensitivity Study, the Black Isle, Surrounding Hills and Moray Firth Coast Sensitivity Study, and the Caithness Sensitivity Study. The site does not fall within an area covered by a Landscape Sensitivity Study at this time. The proposed site sits within the Landscape Character Type (LCT) of Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland (NatureScot LCT135) as noted in section 2 of this report.

Other Highland Council Supplementary Guidance

A3.6

- Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance (May 2024)
- Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects (August 2010)
- Developer Contributions (Mar 2018)
- Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment (Jan 2013)
- The Flow Country Planning Position Statement 2 (June 2025)
- Green Networks (Jan 2013)
- Highland Historic Environment Strategy (Jan 2013)
- Highland's Statutorily Protected Species (Mar 2013)
- Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines (May 2006)
- Physical Constraints (Mar 2013)
- Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments (May 2013)
- Special Landscape Area Citations (Jun 2011)
- Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)
- Trees, woodland and development (Jan 2013)

OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Emerging Highland Council Development Plan Documents and Planning Guidance

A3.7 The Highland-wide Local Development Plan is currently under review and is at Main Issues Report Stage. It is anticipated the Proposed Plan will be published following publication of secondary legislation post NPF4.

A3.8 In addition, the Council has further advice on delivery of major developments in a number of documents. This includes Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects (Aug 2010) and The Highland Council Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments (Jul 2016).

Other International and National Legislation, Policy, and Guidance

A3.9

- The Flow Country World Heritage Site Draft Management Plan (December 2022)
- 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 4/1998 – The use of Conditions in Planning Permissions – this states that planning conditions should only be imposed when they meet all of the following six tests: 1) Necessary, 2) Relevant to planning, 3) Relevant to the development to be permitted, 4) Enforceable, 5) Precise; and Reasonable in all other respects.
- Circular 1/2017: Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (2017)
- NatureScot: Guidance on Aviation Lighting Impact Assessment (2024)

- Managing Natural World Heritage (2012)
- Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (2025)
- Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA), Landscape Institute (March 2019)
- UNESCO Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context (2022)
- Scottish Forestry Woodland Creation Application Guidance (November 2017)

Appendix 4 - Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Material Policy Considerations

National Policy

A4.1 National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) forms part of the Development Plan and was adopted in February 2023. It comprises three parts:

- Part 1 – sets out an overarching spatial strategy for Scotland in the future. This includes spatial principles, national and regional spatial priorities, and action areas;
- Part 2 – sets out policies for the development and use of land to be applied in the preparation of local development plans; local place plans; masterplans and briefs; and for determining the range of planning consents. This part of the document should be taken as a whole in that all relevant policies should be applied to each application; and
- Part 3 – provides a series of annexes that give the rationale for the strategies and policies of NPF4, it outlines how the document should be used, and sets out how the Scottish Government will implement the strategies and policies.

A4.2 **Part 1 - The Spatial Strategy** sets out that we are facing unprecedented challenges and that we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to future impacts of climate change. It sets out that that Scotland's environment is a national asset which supports out economy, identity, health and wellbeing. It sets out that choices need to be made about how we can make sustainable use of our natural assets in a way which benefits communities. The spatial strategy reflects legislation in setting out that decisions require to reflect the long term public interest. However, in doing so it is clear that we will need to make the right choices about where development should be located ensuring clarity is provided over the types of infrastructure that needs to be provided and the assets that should be protected to ensure they continue to benefit future generations. The Spatial Priorities support the planning and delivery of sustainable places, where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; liveable places, where we can all live better, healthier lives; and productive places, where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.

A4.3 At the national level, NPF4 considers that Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure will assist in the delivery of the Spatial Strategy and Spatial Priorities for the north of Scotland, and that Highland can continue to make a strong contribution toward meeting Scotland's ambition for net zero. 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.

A4.4 The proposed development is of national importance for the delivery of the national Spatial Strategy, whereby in principle support for the development is established. As the proposed development would be capable of generating over 50 MW, it is of a type and scale that constitutes NPF4 National Development 3 - Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure.

A4.5 **Part 2 – Policies: NPF4 Policies 1, 2, and 3** now apply to all development proposals Scotland-wide, which means that significant weight must be given to the global climate and nature crises when considering all development proposals, as required by NPF4 Policy 1. To that end, development proposals are to be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions, as far as is practicably possible, in accordance with NPF4 Policy 2, while contributing to the enhancement of biodiversity, as required by NPF4 Policy 3.

A4.6 Complementing those policies is NPF4 Policy 4 Natural Places, which sets out that development proposals by virtue of type, location, or scale that have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment will not be supported. The policy goes on to clarify what that means for different designations. It sets out that proposals with likely significant effects on European sites (SACs or SPAs) require appropriate assessment, and that development proposals that will affect a National Park, NSA or SSSI will only be supported where:

i) the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or
ii) any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits of national importance.

This is an important consideration given the proximity of the development natural heritage designations. However the proposal's impacts on designated sites will are likely to be well within the limits deemed acceptable by Scottish Ministers, subject to conditions.

A4.7 Similarly, sites designated in Development Plans for local nature conservation or Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are protected in NPF4 Policy 4 unless the development will not result in significantly adverse effects on its qualities or its integrity, or, these effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits of at least local importance. In this instance, the proposal is not considered to significantly affect the special qualities of nearby SLAs or their integrity.

A4.8 The most significant policy change for Natural Places introduced by NPF4 Policy 4 is with regard to Wild Land Areas (WLA). This policy now states that renewable

energy developments that support national targets will be supported in WLAs and that buffer zones around WLAs will not be applied, so that effects of development outwith WLAs will not be a significant consideration. The site itself is located within 1km of WLA37 Foinaven - Ben Hee, 3.4km of WLA34 Reay – Cassley, and 6.5km of WLA35 Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest.

A4.9 Policy 7 includes a consideration of World Heritage Sites, and although the Flow Country World Heritage Site is inscribed as a natural property rather than an historic asset or place, it falls under the provision of Policy 7 l), which states that development proposals affecting a World Heritage Site will only be supported where their Outstanding Universal Value is protected and preserved.

A4.10 Policy 11 intent is to "encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low-carbon and zero emissions technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS)". It specifies that the principle of all forms of renewable, low-carbon, and zero emission technologies is supported (with the exception of wind farm proposals located in National Parks or National Scenic Areas) including 'enabling works, such as grid transmission and distribution infrastructure' which encompasses this application.

A4.11 It states that development proposals should only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities. The policy goes on to say that significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, while identifying impacts, including cumulative impacts, that must be suitably addressed and mitigated against. Policy 11 e) i to xiii) sets out the criteria against which applications must be assessed.

A4.12 This includes a broad range of matters similar those to be assessed under HwLDP Policy 67 including landscape and visual impacts. It advises that where impacts are localised and / or appropriate design mitigation has been applied such effects will generally be considered acceptable. While the adopted NPF4 reflects a stronger presumption in favour of all national scale energy developments, judgment is still required at the project level to ensure proposals do not have unacceptable landscape and visual impacts even if the contribution to national renewable energy targets is considerable.

A4.13 On that point it is noted that both legislation and planning law indicate that where there may be incompatibility between NPF4 and the Local Development Plan (LDP) (HwLDP, CaSPlan, and Highland Council Supplementary Guidance) published prior to NPF4, then the more recent document shall prevail. Notwithstanding however, in instances of incompatibility, this requirement may

not eliminate the provisions of the LDP in their entirety whilst these documents remain an extant part of the adopted Development Plan. That means that the Council may wish to give more weight to the provisions of its LDP over national policies where there is strong justification for doing so, such as where it feels that LDP policy is better equipped to respond to local conditions for example. However, this matter is yet to be tested through the planning system.

A4.13 It is considered the proposal is in not in overall conformity with NPF4 Policy 11, particularly with regards to 11 e) ii. which requires the proposed development project design and mitigation to demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed: Significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that significant impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable.

A4.14 The current proposal will have significant adverse landscape and visual impacts on a broad range of features/receptors across a broad area including but not restricted to:

- LCT134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows including within the East of Loch Shin Character Area for up to 5km from the turbines;
- LCT135 Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland including the setting of Loch Shin for up to 5 km from the turbines;
- across the Strath Tirry LCA of LCT142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland;
- Resident, recreational, and road user visual receptors within up to 9 km of the turbines and at sensitive summits beyond this distance including The Ord and Ben Klibreck;.

It is considered that the threshold of the ‘appropriate design mitigation’ policy test is not reached.

A4.15 Additionally, whilst the generality of HwLDP’s topic policies are superseded by those in NPF4, HwLDP policies that offer greater detail than NPF4 or that are tailored to Highland circumstance (and are not wholly incompatible with NPF4) are still relevant and applicable. In particular, Policy 67 Renewable Energy and its related Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance is relevant. Also, Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage in terms of protection of the setting of scheduled monuments.

A4.16 It is considered the proposal is in overall conformity with Policy 57, but not Policy 61 or Policy 67 of HwLDP. Policy 57 requires all development proposals be assessed taking into account the level of importance and type of heritage features, the form and scale of the development, and any impact on the feature and its setting. The following criteria will also apply:

- For features of local/regional importance development will be allowed if it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that they will not have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource; and,
- For features of national importance development will be allowed if it can be shown not to compromise the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource. Where there may be any significant adverse effects, these must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. It must also be shown that the development will support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services.

Historic Environment Scotland considers impacts on the settings of nearby scheduled monuments to be significant, but not to the level that it reaches national interests.

A4.17 In terms of HwLDP Policy 67, whilst the proposed development would contribute towards meeting renewable energy generation targets and generally have a positive effect on the local and national economy the Council has to be satisfied that it is located, sited and designed not to be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments, having regard in particular to any significant effects on the following:

- Natural, built and cultural heritage features;
- Visual impact and impact on the landscape character of the surrounding area (the design and location of the proposal should reflect the scale and character of the landscape and seek to minimise landscape and visual impact, subject to any other considerations);
- Amenity at sensitive locations, including residential properties, work places and recognised visitor sites (in or outwith a settlement boundary); and
- The amenity of users of any Core Path or other established public access for walking, cycling or horse riding.

The assessment considers the impacts on these matters to result in disbenefits that outweigh the overall socio-economic and environmental benefits of the proposal,

A4.18 **Part 3: Annex B – National Developments Statements of Need**. National developments are significant developments of national importance. Appendix B identifies 18 types of national development which will support the delivery of the spatial strategy. The statements of need set out in the Appendix are a requirement of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997). Any project identified as national development is required to be considered at a project level to ensure all statutory tests are met. This project is classified as National Development under Annex B Section 3 which states National Development for renewable energy

includes “Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure” including: a) On and off shore electricity generation, including electricity storage, from renewables exceeding 50 megawatts capacity;

A4.19 This brings the application under the environmental considerations set out in NPF4 Policy 11e) that require to be sufficiently mitigated against and which largely correspond to their HwLDP Policy 67 equivalents. As has already been set out, in-solus and cumulative landscape and visual effects are significant and adverse across a broad range of receptors within a broad area and are judged to be not within acceptable limits with visual effects encroaching on the level of visual residential and community amenity. Ecology, built and cultural heritage resources, roads, while proposals for decommissioning, restoration and aftercare can adequately be dealt with by condition however.

Highland wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)

A4.20 The HwLDP identifies the site as “wider countryside” under Policy 36. It sets out a range of parameters against which development will be assessed. It states that development proposals may be supported if they are judged to be not significantly detrimental under the terms of the policy noting “Renewable energy development proposals will be assessed against Renewable Energy Policies, the non-statutory Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and where appropriate the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance”.

A4.21 HwLDP Policy 67 - Renewable Energy sets out that ‘renewable energy development should be well related to the source of the primary renewable resource needed for operation’. It states that ‘The Council will consider the contribution of the proposed development in meeting renewable energy targets and positive/negative effects on the local and national economy as well as all other relevant policies of the Development Plan and other relevant guidance.’ The Council will support proposals where it is satisfied they are located, sited and designed such as they will not be significantly detrimental overall, individually or cumulatively with other developments against eleven specified criteria (as listed in HwLDP Policy 67). Such an approach is consistent with the concept of Sustainable Design (HwLDP Policy 28) and the concept of supporting the right development in the right place at the right time.

A4.22 Policy 69 – Electricity Transmission Infrastructure states that ‘proposals for overground, underground or sub-sea electricity transmission infrastructure (including lines and cables, pylons/ poles and vaults, transformers, switches and other plant) will be considered having regard to their level of strategic significance in transmitting electricity from areas of generation to areas of consumption’. Subject to balancing with this consideration, and taking into account any proposed mitigation measures, the Council will support proposals which are assessed as

not having an unacceptable significant impact on the environment, including natural, built and cultural heritage features.

A4.23 Although HwLDP Policy 67 and Policy 69 are considered compatible with NPF4 Policy 11, NPF4 expresses greater support for renewable energy projects outwith National Parks and NSAs and requires greater weight to be attributed to the twin climate and biodiversity crises in the decision-making process, whilst still recognising that a balancing exercise must still be carried out.

A4.24 As for NPF4 Policy 11e) considerations, residual in-solus and cumulative landscape and visual effects are not within acceptable limits despite residual significant effects, with visual effects considered to be encroaching on the level of residential and community amenity, such tat the disbenefits of the development are adjudged to outweigh the benefits overall.

Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan)

A4.25 No specific policies apply however, that the CaSPlan does identify Special Landscape Areas (SLA) within the plan.

A4.256 As has been set out in the report, there are no residual significant effects on the Special Qualities of the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA and therefore the proposal is compliant with the CaSPlan.

Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG)

A4.27 The Council's OWESG is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The supplementary guidance does not provide additional tests in respect of the consideration of development proposals against Development Plan policy. However, it provides a clear indication of the approach the Council towards the assessment of proposals, and thereby aid consideration of applications for onshore wind energy proposals

A4.28 The OWESG approach and methodology to the assessment of proposals is applicable and is set out in the OWESG Para 4.16 - 4.17. It provides a methodology for a judgement to be made on the likely impact of a development on assessed "thresholds" in order to assist the application of HwLDP Policy 67. The 10 criteria are particularly useful in considering visual impacts, including cumulative impacts. An appraisal of how the proposal meets with the thresholds set out in the criteria is included in Appendix 7 of this report.

Landscape Sensitivity Study

A4.29 The OWESG also provides strategic considerations that identify sensitivities and potential capacity for wind farm development. These are called the Landscape Sensitivity Appraisals (LSA) and form part of the statutorily adopted Onshore

Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance. The Appraisals identify Key Views, Key Routes and Gateways as well as Landscape Character Area sensitivities and guidance. The site is not currently located within an appraisal area.

Other Material Policy Considerations - Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement (2022) and Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)

A4.30 The Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement supersedes the previously adopted Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement which was published in 2017. The document sets out a clear ambition for onshore wind in Scotland and for the first time sets a national target for a minimum level of installed capacity for onshore wind energy, being 20 GW. This is set against a currently installed capacity of 9.4 GW (June 2023). Therefore, a further 10.6 GW of onshore wind requires to be installed to meet the target. It is however acknowledged that targets are not caps. In delivering such a target Scotland would play a significant role in meeting the requirement of 25-30 GW of installed capacity across the UK identified by the Climate Change Committee.

A4.31 Like the previous iteration of the Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement, the document recognises that balance is required and that no one technology can allow Scotland to reach its net zero targets. The document is clear that in achieving a balance, environmental and socio-economic benefits to Scotland must be maximised. In taking this approach, this echoes Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy.

A4.32 The document recognises that there may be a need to develop onshore wind energy development on peat. Priority peatland is present on the site, and it is considered that a Peat Management Plan and the Habitat Management Plan, which shows adequate compensation, can be secured by condition.

A4.33 Additionally, the document acknowledges that in order for Scotland to achieve its climate targets and the ambition for the minimum installed capacity of 20 GW by 2030, the landscape will change. However, the OWEPS also sets out that the right development should happen in the right place. Echoing NPF4, the document sets out that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected and that where the impacts are localised and / or appropriate mitigation has been applied the effects will be considered acceptable.

A4.34 Benefits to rural areas, such as provision of jobs and opportunities to restore and protect natural habitats, are also highlighted in the document. It considers some of the wider benefits and challenges faced by in delivery of ambition and vision for onshore wind energy in Scotland. These include shared ownership, community benefit, supply chain benefits, skills development and financial mechanisms for delivery. The proposed development does lead to such benefits being delivered, however, in relation to maximising socio-economic benefits,

there is no current guidance on what that should look like and evidence of a significant shift of requirements is yet to emerge, which Members may expect to see, from what was likely to be offered pre-adoption of NPF4.

A4.35 Finally, the document also highlights technical considerations, those relevant to this application have been considered and mitigation, where required has been secured by condition.

A4.36 The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan has been published for consultation. Ministers will likely give consideration to this document in their decision on the application; however, limited weight can be applied to the document given its draft status. Unsurprisingly, the material on onshore wind in the document reflects in large part that contained in NPF4 and the Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement 2022. A fundamental part of the Strategy is expanding the energy generation sector. Overall, the draft Energy Strategy forms part of the new policy approach alongside the OWEPS and NPF4 and confirms the Scottish Government's policy objectives and related targets reaffirming the crucial role that onshore wind and enabling transmission infrastructure will play in response to the climate crisis which is at the heart of all these policies.

A4.37 To deliver the ambition for onshore wind, the Onshore Wind Sector Deal for Scotland was introduced in September 2023. The document focuses on necessary high-level actions by Government and the Sector to support onshore wind delivery. Jointly, Government and the Sector are committed to working together to ensure a balance is struck between onshore wind and the impacts on land use and the environment. The document looks to expediate decision making and consent implementation to achieve 20 GW of installation by 2030, meaning we should be seeing faster decisions on applications that are already in the system, with more consents being build out. Again, the sector deal does not detail what the socio-economic commitments should be.

Appendix 5 - Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Methodology

A5.1. The applicant has presented a number of submissions to illustrate the landscape and visual impact of the development both singularly and cumulatively with existing and consented wind farm developments, although the cumulative information included with the submission including the Additional Environmental Information (AEI) is now out of date.

A5.2 The EIAR includes a description of the design process along with assessments against several Landscape Character Types (LCTs) (EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 5 Sections 5.9 and 5.10), the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire Special Landscape Area (SLA) (EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 5 Section 5.11), and the Reay – Cassley Wild Land Area (WLA 34), Ben Klibreck and Armine Forest WLA 35, and Foinaven and Ben Hee WLA 37 (EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.5). Section 1.5 of the AEIR Appendix 1 Volume 3 updates the assessment for all these features following the removal of T16 and relocation of Ts 12, 13, and 14. Assessments against the Special Qualities of National Scenic Areas and all other SLAs have been scoped out of the EIAR and AEI with NatureScot's and the Council's agreement.

A5.3 In terms of visual amenity assessments of settlements, only Lairg has been scoped in to the EIAR as being defined as a settlement in the Development Plan. The dispersed settlement at Achnairn is considered through the analysis of VP5 (Achnairn) although 18 properties within 2.5km of the turbines have been assessed for further consideration within the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) with nine properties carried through for a full assessment. These properties are located in the dispersed settlement of West Shinness along the A838 and the West Shinness Road (U2112). Routes included for further analysis are the A838, A836, and A839 transport routes, the Moray Firth Tourist Route and Inverness to John O'Groats Sustrans Network, along with the Core Paths at Lairg and Scottish Hill Track 341 (plus overlapped routes). The popular summits of Ben Klibreck (VP 11), Ben More Assynt (VP14), and Ben Hope (no VP), along with two nearby caravan and camping sites and the RSPB Dalchork Bird Hide (near VP7 but no specific VP supplied) are also considered. Hours of darkness effects are assessed in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.4.with visualisations included for VPs 4 (A836 South of Crask), 5 (Achnairn), and 6 (A838 Fiag Bridge).

A5.4 A total of 14 viewpoints across the study area of 45 km have also been assessed (EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Table 5.22), as also updated in AEI Volume 3 Appendix 1 Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment). The furthest viewpoint is 19.5km away at Ben More Assynt (VP14). These viewpoints are representative of the range of receptors set out above including communities and residential receptors, recreational users of the outdoors, road users with the

A836 and A838 (supplemented through Figures 5.19a-r and 5.18a-p and s-x Sequential Route Assessments respectively) and people at their place of work.

A5.5 The expected bare earth visibility of the development, which has informed the scoped in effects and list of viewpoints, can be appreciated from several EIA and AEI Figures showing visibility to blade tip and hub heights with viewpoint locations, as well as cumulative visibility with wind farms in the wider landscape. There are plans of LCTs, designated landscapes, and WLAs. AEI Figure A5.34 shows the comparative bare earth visibility of the amended and original schemes at blade tip height.

A5.6 The information submitted with the EIAR and SEI is considered sufficient to allow the Planning Authority to come to a reasoned conclusion on the likely landscape and visual effects of the completed development.

A5.7 The methodologies for both the LVIA and CLVIA are set out in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.1: LVIA Methodology, which follow the guidance out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (GLVIA3). As set out in Paragraph 3.32 of GLVIA3, the 'LVIA should always clearly distinguish between what are considered to be significant and non-significant effect'. The applicant judges significant effects following the combination of judgements based on the sensitivity of the receptor against the magnitude of change.

A5.8 The sensitivity of the receptor (landscape or visual) is defined by the receptor's susceptibility to the change brought about by the proposal against the importance (value) of the landscape resource / view. For landscape, 'susceptibility' is the "ability of the landscape receptor…to accommodate the development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies' (GLVIA3, Page 88). The EIAR methodology advises that such an assessment is based on judgements of a number of factors including special qualities and/or key characteristics, scale and topography, openness, land cover pattern, skyline, rationale, remoteness, naturalness, wildness, tranquillity, landscape context and adjacent landscapes.

A5.9 For visual receptors, higher susceptibility to the proposed change are those whose attention or interest is focussed on their surroundings whereby the Council considers recreational users moving through the landscape at slower speeds such as cyclists as well as passengers in vehicles to also have a higher susceptibility to change. Receptor susceptibility is judged to be high, medium, or low with some receptors falling into intermediate brackets within the applicant's assessment.

A5.10 The value of a landscape receptor, given as high, medium, low or an intermediary of these brackets, is based on a review of policy designations and application of judgement based on criteria relating to scenic value, rarity, recreational value, representativeness, conservation interest, and association. Similar criteria are applied for views such as designations for specific views and views with recognised scenic value, whether they are specifically mentioned in special qualities of a designated landscape, their importance to heritage assets, and value attached to views by visitors as may be indicated by inclusion in tourism literature or references in literature and art.

A5.11 Judgement of magnitude of change is based on an assessment of factors including: size and scale of effect; geographical extent of the effect, described as large, medium, small; duration, long-term, medium-term, or short-term; and, reversibility of the effect, reversible, partially reversible, irreversible (i.e. permanent).

A5.12 For landscape, judgements of size and scale of effect requires consideration of the degree to which the loss of, or change to, landscape elements effect the character of a landscape and its key characteristics. For visual, this judgement requires a consideration of the scale of the loss or addition of features (turbines) within the view including portion of the view effected, degree of contrast or integration of the new elements within the view setting in terms of scale and mass, line, height, colour, and texture, and, how the view is experienced by the receptor (e.g., full, partial, or glimpsed). Scale of effects are described using the large, medium, small, barely perceptible and intermediary brackets.

A5.13 Geographic extent of landscape effects is a judgement on the extent of the effect relative to the scale of the landscape character type or character area, whether it affects several landscape types or character areas, or if it is limited to immediate surrounds or is a site level effect. Judgement on geographic extent of visual effects requires consideration of whether the viewpoint represents a similar visual effect for the receptor over an extensive or limited geographical area. In reality, this judgement will likely reflect the activity of the receptor (stationary or moving), the distance of the receptor from the proposal, and the angle of view towards the proposal in relation to the receptor's main activity. The judgement of geographic extent of effects is described using 'large', 'medium', 'small', or intermediary brackets.

A5.14 In concluding the level and significance of an effect, the appraisal assumes a long term duration and reversible effect following the potential decommissioning of a site, although Policy 11 (f) of NPF4 states that windfarm sites should be suitable in perpetuity. Moreover, it is generally agreed that the landscape and visual effects arising from wind farm developments should be assumed to be adverse.

A5.15 It is important to note that the consideration of existing turbines in the baseline view for landscape effects is a consideration for the susceptibility of the landscape receptor in the methodology rather than of the magnitude of change. That means that it is the sensitivity to the development that is reduced in the applicant's assessment where wind farm developments already exist. For visual receptors, the presence of existing and under construction turbines in views reduces the size and scale of the effect of the application wind farm and therefore the magnitude of change for the in-solus visual impact assessment is itself a judgement of cumulative effects.

A5.16 Following on, the cumulative landscape and visual assessment (CLVIA) are also a function of sensitivity and magnitude of change but with a focus on the additional impacts occasioned by the development when considered together with two scenarios of existing, consented, or proposed wind farms. Scenario 1 includes existing, under construction, and consented wind farm schemes, while Scenario 2 considers Scenario 1 plus application stage, and some scoping stage (where requested), wind farm schemes. Additional impacts in these future scenarios are taken to be those effects that result from the interaction of the proposal with the future baseline schemes. The total or combined effects are also considered under these scenarios.

A5.17 More significant cumulative landscape effects are considered to arise from changes to the landscape character of the study area whether through effects on key characteristics/features or whether the landscape is transformed in to a different type, as set out in GLVIA3 at Paragraph 7.28. The methodology sets out that wind farm development that results in the creation of a 'wind farm landscape' as opposed to a 'landscape with wind farms' or 'landscape with occasional wind farms' is likely to be assessed as significant. Such effects may occur where the proposal extends or intensifies a landscape effect, or it fills an area such that it alters the landscape resource, or, where the interaction between the proposal and other wind farms is such that the effect is greater than it should otherwise be.

A5.18 Similarly, more significant cumulative visual effects are considered to occur where the proposal would extend or intensify a visual effect, where the proposal fills an area such that it alters the character of the view/visual amenity, and / or, where the interaction between the proposal and other wind farms is such that the effect is greater than it should otherwise be. Sequentially, more significant cumulative visual effects are considered to occur where the proposal lengthens the time over which an effect is experienced for receptors moving through the landscape.

A5.19 It is noted here that it would be perfectly reasonable to expect a development of the type, size, scale, and texture of a wind farm to result in significant landscape

and visual impacts, bearing in mind that significant effects are not relative to the size and scale of the proposal, and do not necessarily equate to unacceptable effects.

A5.20 Table 5.1.5 of EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.1 LVIA Methodology 'Evaluation of Landscape and Visual Effects' sets out the relationship between the above considerations and how they combine to reach a conclusion on the level of effect (none, negligible, minor, moderate, major, or substantial), and thus the significance of the effect (significant or not significant). Impacts of major to moderate up to substantial levels of effect correspond to significant effects in the context of the EIA Regulations, moderate may be considered significant depending on professional judgement. Non, negligible, and minor effects are not significant. The Methodology advises that a rigid matrix-type approach is not applied by the assessor in order to take account of professional judgement and experience (see Section 1.7 of EIAR Volume 4, Technical Appendix 5.1). While a matrix approach generally makes the assessor's logic easier to follow and ensure consistent results, the matrix is there to inform the textual assessment, which should set out the reasoning of the assessor's conclusions on the overall significance of effect, which provides for some flexibility.

A5.21 As stated, Table 5.2 of EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 5, as updated in AEI Volume 3 Appendix 1 (see Table 1-1), set out the assessor's visual impact assessment of each viewpoint whereby the applicant has come to a judgement as to whether the effect is significant or not on a viewpoint by viewpoint basis. In assessing visual impacts in particular, it is important to consider that the viewpoint is representative of particular receptors i.e., people who would be at location and experiencing that view of the landscape not just in that single view but in taking in their entire surroundings.

A5.22 The summary of the applicant's assessment and officer appraisal of this assessment, which highlights the differences and any concerns with regard to visual impact, can be found in Appendix 6 of this report.

A5.23 A key part of the of the Council's assessment of landscape and visual effects is a consideration of the proposal against the Criteria set out in Section 4 of the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG), with the assessment against each relevant criterion with a view as to whether the threshold set out in the guidance is met or not, contained in Appendix 7 to this report..

Appendix 6 - Viewpoint Visual Assessment Appraisal

Scenario 1 = existing + consented + the proposed development
Scenario 2 = existing + consented + applications + the proposed development

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 1: A838 near West Shinness Distance: 1.39km Looking northwards	App	Medium	High to Medium (Medium-Low in winter following establishment of planting)	Major to Moderate (Moderate in winter following establishment of planting)	**Significant**	Scenario 1: High Scenario 2: High	Scenario 1: Major to Moderate Scenario 2: Major	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	THC	High-medium	High	Major	**Significant**	Scenario 1: High Scenario 2: High	Scenario 1: Major to Moderate Scenario 2: Major	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 1: A838 near West Shinness. Assessment updated through Additional Information (AI) Report Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Appendix 1, Volume 3. Relatively long stretches of open road with intermittent roadside vegetation and forestry further northwest where the loch side becomes steeper and increases screening. Turbines are likely to be less exposed to views from nearby residential properties.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
		Existing Development - Viewpoint Analysis advises that Achany is partially visible to the south as a hub and six blade tips, Rosehall not visible, and Lairg is visible to the south-east as hubs on the skyline both beyond 10km away but no visual material to assess this. Creag Riabhach not visible. Consented Development – Achany Extension (Redesign at Scoping) would also be partially visible as three hubs and seven blades / tips 8.2km SW, Sallachy 10km NW, Lairg II and Garvary 14km+ SE, Chleansaid and Strath Tirry not visible. In planning development - Coille Linne 8.5km NW (likely to have limited influence), Balblair WF 20km+ SSW, Coille Beith, Allt an Tuir not visible Sensitivity Considerations Represents views experienced by road users there are nearby properties but views from these are likely to be more screened. Susceptibility: road used by cyclists, recreational and tourist users with a higher susceptibility Value: medium value can be accepted due to lack of designations etc. Overall high-medium sensitivity, an intermediary bracket above the applicant's assessment. MoC considerations Consider the MoC high rather than high to moderate. Roadside planting will help reduce the impact in time assuming the planting establishes. The proposal is long term and reversible. Consider that it will result in a major level of effect, although tending towards the substantial bracket following the applicant's methodology.					

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Hours of darkness - visible aviation lighting on Ts 1, 2, 7, and 13 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – the proposal would represent a high additional MoC given distance and limited influence of existing and consented development so consider that the level of effect remains major and significant. Scenario 2 – even with the presence of Coille Linne WF in the updated 'in planning scenario', it is likely the additional MoC, while reducing, would likely remain in the high bracket so agree that the level of effect is major and significant.							
Viewpoint 2: A836 North of Rhian Bridge Distance: 2.04km Looking northwest	App	High-medium	High	Substantial to Major	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: High <u>Scenario 2</u>: High	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Substantial to Major <u>Scenario 2</u>: Substantial to Major	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	THC	High-medium	High	Substantial to Major	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: High <u>Scenario 2</u>: High	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Substantial to Major <u>Scenario 2</u>: Substantial to Major	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 2: A836 North of Rhian Bridge. The receptor's experience of this landscape is likely to change with woodland establishing and conifers self-seeding, such that it is may not appear so open and expansive to viewers in the future, depending on land management practices. <u>Existing Development</u> – Theoretical limited visibility of Creag Riabhach to the north but not exerting influence in the view. Viewpoint Analysis advises that 'Achany and Rosehall would be visible to the south-west at 12.9km and 13.7km respectively subject to screening from intervening vegetation (Low magnitude). A cluster of wind farms including Lairg, Beinn nan Oighrean, Beinn Tharsuinn, Coire na Cloiche and Novar would be theoretically visible to the south at over 14.2km but would be mostly screened by intervening foreground vegetation (Low and Very Low magnitude)'. <u>Consented Development</u> – visible: Strath Tirry 2.5 SE, Chleansaid 4.3km E, Achany Extension 11.9km SW, Lairg II and Garvary 13.6km+ S. <u>In planning development</u> – visible: Balblair, Coille Linn, not visible: Allt an Tuir, Coille Beith <u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by road users including cyclists and passengers in vehicles. Susceptibility: high-medium (consider cyclists and passengers to be of higher susceptibility than medium) Value: can high-medium sensitivity overall given Sustrans promotion of the route for more experienced cyclists, high-medium sensitivity overall is agreed. <u>MoC considerations</u>							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Turbines straddle the whale back separating Loch Shin and Strath Tirry, nearest turbines appear super tall, in particular Ts 2 and 4, with the towers of the nearside turbines visible to base, although the grouping of Ts 10, 12, 14, 15, and 16 to the viewers right of the array appear to taper in to the woodland. Agree that the MoC is high. The proposal is long term and reversible. Agree that the level of effect, is substantial to major Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15 would be visible <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – the proposal would represent a high additional MoC given the starkness of the array despite Strath Tirry and Chleansaid being visible in successive views, agree with assessment that the level of effect remains substantial to major and significant. Scenario 2 – Coille Linne WF is unlikely to be influential in the view of the updated 'in planning scenario', it is likely the additional MoC, would likely remain in the high bracket so agree that the level of effect is substantial to major and significant.							
Viewpoint 3: A838 Cnoc an Laoigh Distance: 2.78km	App	Medium	High-medium	Major to Moderate	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: High-medium <u>Scenario 2</u>: High-Medium	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Major to Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Major to Moderate	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Looking east-southeast	THC	High-medium	High	Major	**Significant**	Scenario 1: High Scenario 2: High-Medium	Scenario 1: Major Scenario 2: Major to Moderate	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 3: A838 Cnoc an Laoigh. Relatively remote stretch of the road although still a settled landscape with some agricultural buildings. Existing Development – 'Achany is partially visible to the south at ~14km (Low-Very Low magnitude). The blade tips of the existing Lairg would not be discernible in the view (Zero magnitude).' Consented Development – 'Sallachy would be located to the west at ~5.1km (Medium magnitude). Achany Extension would also be partially visible as blades / tips to the south-west (Low-Very Low magnitude). The blades / hub of Lairg II would be visible at ~20.3km (Very Low magnitude)', 'Garvary would be visible to the south at ~21.5km but would be obscured by local landform (Very Low to Zero magnitude)'. Strath Tirry and Chleansaid not visible. In planning development – Coille Linne partially visible to the north Balblair unlikely to exert influence in the view. Sensitivity Considerations Represents views experienced by road users. Susceptibility: higher susceptibility road users including passengers and							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Value: agree that the value is medium as area not designated. Overall sensitivity is high-medium <u>MoC considerations</u> T's 11 and 13are particularly over-scaled for the receiving landscape appearing as super tall structures with the intervening small, rounded hills providing negligible screening. The cluster formed of Ts 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 produce visual clutter with the section of the array formed of the turbines numbered specifically reducing the sense of scale and distance in landscape for the visual receptor particularly when viewed against intervening scale comparators such as OHL towers and agricultural buildings, large degree of contrast to the existing texture of development. The applicant's assessment of high-medium magnitude of change underplays the effect on the receptor from 15 x 200m turbines at this VP where views to the scheme are only slightly opaque of the road, consider the MoC to be high although accept that this will reduce if roadside planting establishes. The turbines are long term and reversible. The level of effect is major, tending towards the substantial bracket but still significant. Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – as above, limited influence of existing and consented proposals so the MoC remains high given the starkness of the development from this location. Major and significant level of effect.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Scenario 2 – as a static viewpoint, Coille Linne would have limited visibility at the section of the A838 where the viewpoint is located however most receptors wouldn't be static in this location so would be aware of its presence. Can agree a high-medium MoC for S2, Major to Moderate LoE which is significant.							
Viewpoint 4: A836 South of Crask Distance: 4.13km Looking south-southwest	App	High	Medium	Major	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Medium Scenario 2: Medium	Scenario 1: Major Scenario 2: Major	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	THC	High	Medium	Major	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Medium Scenario 2: Medium-low	Scenario 1: Major Scenario 2: Major to moderate	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 4: A836 South of Crask. Forestry is currently clear felled allowing expansive views south and west of the A836 over the north of Loch Shin and Strath Tirry unit of Sweeping Moorland and Flows. The viewpoint is located north of a bend which obscures this more expansive view however, while the location has gateway qualities for travellers heading south along the A836 whereby further north the route is enclosed by the sides of Strath Vagastie from which it climbs as the traveller passes the entrance to the Creag Riabhach WF where views of the moorland are hemmed in by the Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and forestry until the forestry stops north of the Crask Inn (a location also with gateway qualities). The road climbs from							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	this location again, with the road enclosing forward views while views to the west remain open, but as the traveller turns the corner south of the viewpoint location, the forward views open up once more while the road itself drops. Existing Development – 'Creag Riabhach is visible to the north as hubs at ~3km beyond intervening coniferous forest (Medium magnitude). Achany and Rosehall would be visible to the south at 18.4km and 19.2km respectively subject to screening from intervening vegetation (Very Low magnitude). Coire na Cloiche would be theoretically visible to the south at over 43km but would be mostly screened by intervening foreground vegetation (Very Low to Zero magnitude).' Consented Development – 'Sallachy would be visible as hubs and blades to the south-west at ~9.8km (Medium - Low magnitude). Achany Extension would also be partially visible as hubs and blades / tips ~14.6km to the south-west (Low magnitude). The blades of Meall Buidhe would not be discernible to the south-west (Zero magnitude).' There is also theoretical visibility of Lairg II and Garvary along this stretch of the A836 although their influence is not clear from the submission it is likely to be negligible. In planning development – Coille Linne is a little over 6km W of the viewpoint, Acheilidh and Balblair also have theoretical visibility but their influence is also likely to be negligible. Sensitivity Considerations Represents views experienced by . Susceptibility: higher susceptibility of cyclists, tourists, passengers in vehicles Value: part of the Inverness to John O'Groats Sustrans cycle network. Agree to the high sensitivity. MoC considerations							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	It is clear that the screening of the proposal afforded by topography and self-seeded vegetation from the viewpoint location reduces the scale and magnitude of change so on that basis the applicant's assessment of medium magnitude of change appears reasonable. However a more representative viewpoint location just metres south of that chosen would likely expose the full array including tower bases, ground level infrastructure including tracks, BESS and substation etc., to the receptor (as per locations 28 and 29 of the sequential route assessment AI Vol 3a Figs. A5.18O-P). With relative screening the two rows of turbines are less discernible so it appears more of a loose linear array however there is a slight tapering effect at the sides of the array that reduce the starkness of the proposal a little. Nevertheless, the skylined turbines would be sited in front of the distant rugged and rounded mountain massifs which provide a strong sense of scale and distance in the expansive view making the turbines more prominent, immediate, and stark than the massifs which they replace as a characterising feature in the landscape for the receptor. The turbines are long term and reversible. Agree with the applicant's assessment of major and significant level of effect from the specific location with the caveat that the location is not representative of the development's full impact from this location. Aviation warning lights on T1, T7 and T15. The EIAR advises that T10, 13 and T16 would be screened by trees however this is not a static VP, the trees alluded to are self-seeded conifers, while the forestry beyond the bend in the road is below the road level and has no screening effect. The receptor will experience all 6 nacelle cell lighting from this section of the A836 travelling south. <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – existing and consented turbines are sited behind the ridgeline of the rounded hills which, like the more distant rugged and rounded mountain massifs, frame the sweeping moorland and flow landscape and provide a heightened sense of scale and distance in views from the							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	location. Achany Extension would bring turbine development more northwards along the ridge increasing the prominence of turbine development (with a redesign scheme for larger turbines currently at the scoping stage) Scenario 2 – the application stage Coille Linne would a large influence on the receptor from this location if built out, reducing the MoC for Shinness to medium-low however the level of effect would remain significant albeit reduced to medium-low.							
Viewpoint 5: Achnairn Distance: 4.28km Looking northwest	App	High	Low	Moderate	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Low Scenario 2: Low	Scenario 1: Moderate Scenario 2: Moderate	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	THC	High	Low	Moderate	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Low Scenario 2: Low	Scenario 1: Moderate Scenario 2: Moderate	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 5: Achnairn Linear settlement on elevated ground on the east side of the A838 from which it follows the C1078 northeast and then southeast in the direction of Dalchork properties generally orientated towards the southwest and south to take advantage of views of Loch Shin. Existing Development – 'Lairg is visible to the south-east as hubs on the skyline at ~10.2km (Low-Very Low magnitude). Achany would be theoretically visible to the south-west as blades / tips and one hub at 9.1km subject to screening from intervening vegetation (Very Low magnitude). A cluster of wind farms including Lairg, Beinn nan Oighrean, Beinn Tharsuinn, Coire na Cloiche and Novar would be theoretically visible to the south at over 30km but would be mostly screened by intervening vegetation (Very Low to Zero magnitude).'							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Consented Development – 'Achany Extension would be partially visible as 7 hubs and blades / tips along the skyline to the west at 7.5km (Low magnitude). Lairg II would be visible to the south-east at 10.6km (Low-Very Low to Zero magnitude). Sallachy would be theoretically visible to the north-west at ~13.5km but would be screened by foreground vegetation (Zero magnitude).' Garvary is theoretically visible forming a cluster with the Lairg WFs. In planning development – Coille Linne has some influence in the northwest section of the view, although the extent of the influence is not clear. Sensitivity Considerations Represents views experienced by residents with a high sensitivity. MoC considerations Circa 11 x hubs and tips are likely to be theoretically visible for the northeast/southwest stretch of the C1708 beyond the agricultural fields to the north barring intermittent screening. The applicant's assessment of low magnitude of change is reasonable given the orientation of the houses, which reflect that it is Loch Shin that provides the larger part of the community's visual amenity. The development is long term and reversible. A moderate and significant level of effect is agreed. Aviation warning lights on T1 (subject to tree cover) Future baseline effects Scenario 1 – agree that the proposal will represent a similar MoC, level, and significance of effect in the cumulative scenario as per the LVIA. Scenario 2 – Coille Linne will have limited influence on the view, as per LVIA and Scenario 1.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 6: A838 Fiag Bridge Distance: 4.72km Looking southeast	App	Medium	Medium	Moderate	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Medium <u>Scenario 2</u>: Medium	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Moderate	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	THC	High-medium	Medium	Major to moderate	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Medium <u>Scenario 2</u>: Medium	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Moderate	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 6: A838 Fiag Bridge. <u>Existing Development</u> – 'Lairg is visible to the south-east as hubs on the skyline at ~21.7km (Very Low magnitude).' <u>Consented Development</u> – 'Sallachy would be located to the west at ~3.4km (Medium magnitude). The hubs of Lairg II would be visible to the south-east at ~21.9km (Very Low magnitude). Blade tips of Achany Extension would not be perceptible to the south-west (Zero magnitude)'. Garvary and Lairg II also visible to the southeast forming a cluster with Lairg WF. <u>In planning development</u> – Coille Linne 1.1km N in successive views with proposal. Acheilidh and to a lesser extent Balblair adding to the distant cluster with the Lairgs and Garvary. <u>Sensitivity Considerations</u>							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Represents views experienced by road users. Susceptibility: higher susceptibility for passengers and cyclists taking in their surroundings Value: medium. Overall high-medium sensitivity. <u>MoC considerations</u> Nine turbines will form a dense array appearing large over and behind small hill summits such that there would be some loss of sense scale and distance in the view. The array recedes to the distance however, and tapers, with the bases screened from view while the spread of the development is relatively contained from this location given that Ts 10, 12, and 14 will be further screened to the viewer's left although not ha The applicant's assessment of medium magnitude of change is reasonable. Proposed riparian planting will reduce the presence and prominence of turbines in the future providing they establish. The development is long term and reversible. The moderate and significant level of effect can be agreed. Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, and T13 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – as per the LVIA in MoC and level of effect. Scenario 2 – Coille Linne would have by far the larger impact but would be behind the viewer travelling south on the A838, would be a medium MoC in the direction of the view but medium low in the							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 7: A836 North of Dalchork RSPB Distance: 8.34km Looking northwest	App	High	Medium-Low	Major to Moderate	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Medium-Low Scenario 2: None	Scenario 1: Major to Moderate Scenario 2: Zero	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Not Significant**
	THC	High	Medium-Low	Major to Moderate	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Medium-Low Scenario 2: Medium-Low	Scenario 1: Major to Moderate Scenario 2: Medium-Low	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 7: A836 North of Dalchork RSPB. This roadside view is unobtainable at the moment as the woodland planting has established. There are still open views from the A836 such as junction with the A838 and entrance to Dalchork Substation (in the region of 7km from the nearest turbine. Existing Development – 'Creag Riabhach would be partially visible to the north-east to the right of the Proposed Development at ~18.6km (Very Low magnitude).' Consented Development – 'Strath Tirry would be visible to the north-east at 5.3km and would be seen beyond pylons and partially screened by coniferous forest (Low magnitude). Chleansaid would be visible to the north-east at 8.1km (Medium-Low magnitude). Sallachy would also be theoretically visible further to the east at over ~17.1km distance but would be mostly screened by intervening vegetation (Very Low to Zero							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	magnitude).' 'Creag Riabhach Extension would be partially visible behind the existing turbines (Very Low magnitude).' Lairg II, Garvary, and Balblair not visible In planning development – Coille Linne theoretically visible in combination with proposal 16.5km NW. Acheilidh not visible. Sensitivity Considerations Represents views experienced by road users on the Inverness to John O'Groats Sustrans cycle network. Susceptibility: higher susceptibility of cyclists, tourists, passengers in vehicles. Value: promoted cycle network. Agree to the higher value. Main texts advises high-medium sensitivity but tables say high overall sensitivity. Agree to high sensitivity. MoC considerations Turbines loom large of small scale settled landscape below, with turbines skylined and obscuring the landmark of Ben Hee in the distance. Some visual clutter caused by the grouping of Ts 1, 8, 10, 12, 14, and 15. Ts 2, 4, and 6 appearing as outliers. The applicant's assessment of medium-low magnitude of change is reasonable considering relative distance however, as stated, there are closer locations from the A836 with more long term open views to the proposal that would be more representative of the proposal's effects. The development is long term and reversible, unclear what longevity the new woodland will have. Agree major-moderate level of effect and significant. Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Future baseline effects Scenario 1 – agree with applicant's assessment, successive views of wind farms for north bound travellers but the larger influence would be the application wind farm. Scenario 2 – more difficult to assess as there would be an in combination effect with Coille Linne, although it's not clear based on the submission what level of influence it will have from this location (VP14 of Coille Linne is taken from the bird hide rather than the roadside) however it is likely that Shinness will still have the greater impact which is likely to significant.							
Viewpoint 8: Sallachy Distance: 8.39km Looking north-northwest	App	High	Medium	Major	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Medium Scenario 2: Medium	Scenario 1: Major Scenario 2: Major	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	THC	High	Medium	Major	**Significant**	Scenario 1: Medium Scenario 2: Medium	Scenario 1: Major Scenario 2: Major	Scenario 1: **Significant** Scenario 2: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 8: Sallachy. Ben Hee peaks are obscured under cloud cover in the baseline photography. Existing Development – 'Creag Riabhach is visible to the north behind the Proposed Development at ~18.8km (Very Low magnitude). Lairg would be visible to the south-east at ~7.8km (Low magnitude). The blade tips of Kilbraur / Extension to the east would not be discernible at over 30km (Zero magnitude).'							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Consented Development – 'Strath Tirry would be visible to the north-east at 6.6km (Medium magnitude). Chleansaid would be visible to the north-east at 10km (Medium magnitude). Lairg II would also be visible to the southeast at over ~7.8km distance (Medium-Low magnitude).' 'Creag Riabhach Extension would be partially visible behind the proposed turbines (Very Low magnitude). Garvary would be visible to the south-east behind Larig II at 8.9km (Medium-Low magnitude).' In planning development – Coille Linne will be to the left of Shinness and further distant at around 16km distant although it's not possible based on the submission to understand the extent to which intervening forestry would or would not screen this proposal in this view. Sensitivity Considerations 'The view would be experienced by road users and nearby residents whose attention is likely to be on the surrounding landscape and features (High susceptibility). Sensitivity is assessed as High', which is agreed. MoC considerations Towers visible at least almost to base for all turbines with nearside ground infrastructure also visible. The spread of the array is highly noticeable as the turbines tower above many fields and woodland/forestry features, with the nearer housing of Achnairn presenting multiple scale indicators. It is noted that 125m Creag Riabhach turbines appear large when experience from this location so the differences of scale, hosting landscape contexts and development pattern between the schemes will be noticeable to the viewer. The applicant's assessment of medium magnitude of change is reasonable given the extensive 180° degree panorama left right over the loch available to receptors from this location (albeit it with forestry and housing intermittently screening views). The development is long term and reversible. The conclusion of a major and significant level of effect is agreed.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – consented developments in successive views Scenario 2 – difficult to assess the in combination effect with Coille Linne as it's not clear based on the submission what level of influence it will have from this location (VP8 of Coille Linne is taken from Arscaig further north rather than Sallachy) however it is likely that Shinness will still have the greater impact which is likely to significant.							
Viewpoint 9: Beinn Sgeireach Distance: 8.9km Looking northeast	App	High	Medium	Major	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Medium <u>Scenario 2</u>: Medium	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Major <u>Scenario 2</u>: Major	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	THC	High	Medium	Major	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Medium-Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Medium-Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Major to Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Major to Moderate	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 9: Beinn Sgeireach.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Existing Development – 'Creag Riabhach is visible to the north-east at ~16.7km (Low magnitude). There are several existing wind farms in the view to the south and south-east including Achany and Rosehall at ~7- 9km to the south (Medium - Low magnitude), Gordonbush / Extension, Kilbraur / Extension to the south-east at over 33km (both Very Low magnitude) and Lairg to the south-east at ~18km (Low-Very Low magnitude.' Consented Development – 'Sallachy would be visible to the north at 8km distance (Medium-Low magnitude), Strath Tirry to the east at ~13km (Low magnitude). Chleansaid to the north-east at 16.1km (Low magnitude). Meall Buidhe would be visible behind Achany Extension to the south at ~15.5km (Low magnitude). Lairg II would also be visible at over ~18km distance to the south-east (Low magnitude).' 'Garvary to the south-east at ~18.5km (Low magnitude). Other application wind farm development would be visible at greater distances including Creag Riabhach Extension (all Very Low magnitude).' In planning development – Coille Linne but no equivalent Sensitivity Considerations Agree with applicant's assessment of high sensitivity 'The viewpoint is not located within a designated landscape area but is located within the Reay – Cassley WLA. The value of the viewpoint is therefore assessed as High-Medium. The view would be experienced by walkers whose attention is likely to be focused on surrounding landscape features. Therefore, susceptibility to change is assessed as High and the overall sensitivity is assessed as High.' MoC considerations Agree with applicant's medium MoC assessment, '… [t]he expansive open landscape helps to mitigate the apparent scale of the turbines and the Proposed Development would appear reasonably well accommodated in this panoramic view.' The development is long term and reversible. Major and significant level of effect is agreed.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 and 2 – Achany Extension will have the greatest influence on the experience of the receptor from this viewpoint even with Coillie Linne built out (Scenario 2) so while in the direction of the view, the applicant's assessment of medium MoC and major and significant level of effect can be agreed, consider the actual MoC to be reduced overall for the receptor at this location.							
Viewpoint 10: The Ord Distance: 11.68km Looking north-northwest	App	High	Low	Moderate	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	THC	High	Medium-Low	Major to Moderate	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Medium-Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Major to Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Moderate	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 10: The Ord. 360° panorama with views to the west and east being enclosed by rounded hills in the mid distance. In views to the south, the lower slopes below the moorland covered enclosing rounded hills, along with the valley floor of the Achany Glen create a notable geographic and topographic feature. However, it is the open and expansive view over Loch Shin, across the sweeping moorland and flows to the rugged mountain massif							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	of Ben Hee and the lonely mountain of Ben Klibreck to the north that provides the drama and interest in the view when experienced from this location. <u>Existing Development</u> – 'Creag Riabhach would be partially visible to the north-east to the right of the Proposed Development at ~22km (Very Low magnitude). Lairg would be visible to the south-east at 3.8km (Medium-Low magnitude). Other theoretically visible existing wind farms to the south would contribute to a Very Low magnitude due to the long distance and/ or screening from intervening landform and vegetation.' Tips of Achany also visible to the west. <u>Consented Development</u> – 'Lairg II would be to the south-east at 3.8km (High-Medium magnitude). Chleansaid would be visible to the north-east at 8.1km (Medium magnitude). Strath Tirry would be visible as hubs to the north at 8.3km (Low magnitude). Meall Buidhe would be partially visible to the south-west (Low to Very Low magnitude). Sallachy would be barely visible to the north-west (Very Low magnitude).' 'Garvary would be visible overlapping with Lairg II at 4.8 km distance (High-Medium magnitude). Creag Riabhach Extension would be partially visible behind the existing turbines (Very Low magnitude).' <u>In planning development</u> – Acheilidh 7km E, Balblair 9.2km SSE, Coille Linne 19.25km N. <u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by recreational receptors including walkers and tourists. Susceptibility: agree the susceptibility of receptors is high. Value: agree the value is high as assessed by the applicant for the reasons given (promoted by THC, HES, and Scottish Forestry, Core Path) Overall high sensitivity is agreed. <u>MoC considerations</u>							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Turbines are sited in the most interesting and dramatic section of the view when experienced from the Ord and are exposed on either side of the hosting whaleback ridgeline, to the tower base on the nearside, with the left of the array (Ts 9, 11, and 13) part obscuring the distant Ben Hee while the remaining turbines are at least in part skylined. Moreover, the turbines loom large with contrasting texture over and above the traditional rural features of the settled landscape on the northern shores of Loch Shin, which act as uncomfortable scale indicators in the near mid-distance, while competing with distant peaks for prominence. It is worth noting that from this location, as confirmed at site visits, the further distant 125m turbines of Creag Riabhach are legibly large structures in their more remote hosting landscape and that the relationship between the two schemes, which would be experienced in combination together, would amplify the sheer scale of the proposal scheme's turbines and highlight its unsuitability for its exposed and open site from this location. Taken together, the proposal would result in a highly distracting, over-scaled, and characterising new feature in the northward section of the view. On the above basis, a low magnitude of change is not agreed, a MoC of medium-low is more appropriate given the proposal's characterising effect in the scene and on the overall amenity of the scenic view, and indeed tending towards the medium bracket. The proposal is long term and reversible. The level of effect is major to moderate and significant. Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – the combined significant visual effects of existing and consented schemes to the west of the viewpoint would also be experienced in successive views with the proposal, as would the tips of Achany. Cumulatively, the schemes would result in the encircling and enclosing of the settlement of Lairg and Loch Shin creating a wind farm landscape. By occupying a significant portion and new section of the view, the MoC of the proposal is medium-low, with a major to moderate and significant level of effect.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Scenario 2 – the addition of the proposal in combination with Coille Linne would be of a lower magnitude of change but a moderate and significant level of effect.							
Viewpoint 11: Ben Klibreck Distance: 11.88km Looking southwest	App	High	Low	Moderate	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Low-Very Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>:	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	THC	High	Medium-Low	Major to Moderate	**Significant**	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Medium-Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Medium-Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Major to Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Major to Moderate	<u>Scenario 1</u>: **Significant** <u>Scenario 2</u>: **Significant**
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 11: Ben Klibreck. Baseline photography and photomontage rendering are poor for this viewpoint. <u>Existing Development</u> – 'Creag Riabhach would be visible to the south-west at ~5km distance (High magnitude). Achany and Rosehill wind would be visible in clear conditions behind the Proposed Development to the south-south-west at ~23km distance and Kilbraur and its Extension to the south-east at ~30km (all Very Low magnitude). Other more distant existing wind farms would be theoretically visible in very clear conditions (all Very Low magnitude).'							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	Consented Development – 'Sallachy would be visible at ~18km distance (Low - Very Low magnitude). Chleansaid visible at ~11.2km (Low magnitude), Strath Tirry (Low – Very Low magnitude) would be visible to the southeast. Lairg II at 26.8km and Meall Buidhe at 35.9km would be visible in clear or exceptional conditions (all Very Low magnitude). Achany Extension would be visible to the south behind the Proposed Development (Very Low magnitude).' 'Garvary visible contributing to a cluster of wind farms including Lairg and Lairg II (Low-Very Low magnitude). Creag Riabhach Extension would be visible to the south-west at 5.6km distance (Low magnitude). Other wind farms in the view including Strath Oykel behind the Proposed Development would be seen at greater distances in clear or exceptional conditions and would have a magnitude no greater than Very Low.' In planning development – Coillie Linne 14.1km WSE, Acheilidh 27.7km SSE, Allt an Tuir 28.8km SW, Balblair beyond Acheilidh SSE, Coille Beith 34.5km SW. Sensitivity Considerations Represents views experienced by hillwalkers on Ben Klibreck within the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA. Susceptibility: hillwalkers have a high susceptibility to wind farm development. Value: agree that the SLA scenic designation means the location is highly valued. Agree to high sensitivity overall. MoC considerations While compositionally there is an ordered rhythm across the scheme with relatively even hub and turbine heights, its spread is perceptually wide which is heightened by the noticeable distances between the turbines themselves. Given the elevated position of the receptor, turbines are visible to base as is ground based infrastructure, meaning the full scale of the development can be appreciated from the viewpoint.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	The scheme's siting brings wind farm development much closer to the receptor in this portion of the 360° view in comparison to existing development being viewed in combination with the Achany and Rosehall cluster to increase the vertical spread of wind development, while Creag Riabhach turbines are experienced at closer range in successive views when the receptor pans to the right. The overall impression is that turbines are encroaching on the SLA, particularly as the hill summits in the foreground screen intervening lower ground making the scheme more immediate in the view and reducing the sense of scale and distance in the landscape as experienced when reaching the summit. Given the above, it is considered that a medium-low MoC is more appropriate, leading to a major to moderate and significant level of effect. The scheme is long term and reversible. Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Scenario 1 – the addition of Shinness in the landscape would be as assessed for the LVI despite additional schemes installed across the wider view given that the greater part of its effect is in the portion of the view directed towards the scheme. Scenario 2 – Coille Linne would be visible in successive views as the receptor pans to the right however the additional MoC for Shinness would be as assessed for Scenario 1 and the LVI due to the separation distances and the two schemes appearing in their own settings.							
Viewpoint 12: Ben Hee	App	High	Low	Moderate	Not significant	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Moderate <u>Scenario 2</u>: Moderate	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Not significant <u>Scenario 2</u>: 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)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Distance: 16.97km Looking southeast	THC	High	Low	Moderate	Not significant	Scenario 1: Low Scenario 2: Low	Scenario 1: Not significant Scenario 2: Not significant	Scenario 1: Not significant Scenario 2: Not significant
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 12: Ben Hee. Existing Development – 'Several existing wind farms would be potentially visible from this location in clear or exceptional conditions. The nearest include Creag Riabhach Wind Farm which would be visible to the southeast at ~10.5km distance (Medium-Low magnitude). Lairg would be visible at ~35km behind the Proposed Development, Achany and Rosehill wind would be visible in clear conditions to the south-south-east at ~29km distance and Kilbraur and its Extension to the south-east at over ~40km (all Very Low magnitude). Other more distant existing wind farms would be theoretically visible in very clear conditions (all Very Low magnitude).' Consented Development – 'There would be several consented wind farms visible from this location including: Sallachy be at ~13.2km distance (Low magnitude). Strath Tirry would be visible to the left of the Proposed Development at ~24.3km (Very Low magnitude). Lairg II at 35.4km would be visible behind the Proposed Development, Chleansaid would be visible to the south-east at ~23.1km, and Meall Buidhe / Achany Extension would be partially screened by intervening landform and would be visible in clear or exceptional conditions (all Very Low magnitude). Strathy Wood and Strathy South would be visible in clear conditions to the north-east at over 35km (Very Low magnitude).' 'There would be several application wind farms visible from this location. The nearest include: Creag Riabhach Extension (visible behind the existing turbines) at 11.9km, Garvary visible contributing to a cluster of wind farms behind the Proposed Development at ~36.6km (all Very Low magnitude). Other wind farms in the view would be seen at greater distances in clear or exceptional conditions and would have a magnitude no greater than Very Low.' In planning development – Coille Bieth 8.7km S, Allt an Tuir 28.4km S, Acheilidh 37.7km SE.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by walkers visiting the peak in the Foinaven – Ben Hee Wild Land Area WLA37. High susceptibility and high value with high overall sensitivity agreed. <u>MoC considerations</u> Agree with the applicant's overall assessment, the proposal's distance and intervening landform along with the presence of Creag Riabhach having a greater influence on the view, reduces the MoC, which is agreed to be low. Agree that the level of effect is moderate but that the effect is not significant from this location. Aviation warning lights on T1, T2, T7, T10, T13, and T15 <u>Future baseline effects</u> Agree that the proposal will have a low MoC and moderate and not significant level of effect in both scenarios, potentially reducing if Coillie Linne is built out (Scenario 2).							
Viewpoint 13: Ben Armine	App	High	Low-Very Low	Moderate to Minor	Not significant	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Low-Very Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Low-Very Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Moderate to Minor <u>Scenario 2</u>:	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Not significant <u>Scenario 2</u>: 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)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Distance: 18.39km Looking southwest							Moderate to Minor	
	THC	High	Low-Very Low	Moderate to Minor	Not significant	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Low-Very Low <u>Scenario 2</u>: Low-Very Low	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Moderate to Minor <u>Scenario 2</u>: Moderate to Minor	<u>Scenario 1</u>: Not significant <u>Scenario 2</u>: Not significant
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 13: Ben Armine. <u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by hill walkers visiting a remote summit within an SLA and WLA with high sensitivity overall. <u>MoC considerations</u> The scheme will have a noticeable presence in views eastward, occupying an area currently free of turbines. At the distance to the viewer they are not characterising given they are largely screened beyond a moor covered ridge and associated with the settled landscape beyond the SLA and Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest Wild Land Area WLA35 where not screened. Agree with the applicant's assessment of low-very low MoC and moderate to minor and not significant level of effect. Agree that the LVI assessment is correct for Scenarios 1 and 2.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Level of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Impact of Existing/consented development	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 14: Ben More Assynt Distance: 19.46km Looking east-southeast	App	High	Low-Very Low	Moderate to Minor	Not significant	Scenario 1: Medium-Low Scenario 2: Low	Scenario 1: Minor Scenario 2: Minor	Scenario 1: Not significant Scenario 2: Not significant
	THC	High	Low	Moderate	Not significant	Scenario 1: Low-Very Low Scenario 2: Low-Very Low	Scenario 1: Moderate to Minor Scenario 2: Moderate to Minor	Scenario 1: Not significant Scenario 2: Not significant
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Volume 4 Technical Appendix 5.2 Viewpoint Analysis, Table 5.22 Viewpoint Analysis: Viewpoint 14: Ben More Assynt. Turbines will influence the view being perceptibly large structures occupying a wide expanse of land however are backdropped and low in the view such that the scale of the overall landscape is not disrupted and distant peaks remain the dominant features. All aviation lights visible							

Appendix 6 - Assessment against Landscape and Visual Assessment Criteria contained within Section 4 of the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance

1	Relationship between Settlements/Key locations and wider landscape respected.	Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/Key Locations or from the majority of its access routes. ---------- The proposals would have limited visibility from Lairg, but would be significantly adverse from some important locations including Ben Klibreck (VP11) and The Ord (VP10), and the setting of Loch Shin including significant cumulative effects, contributing to a sense of encirclement/ part encirclement by wind energy development from these locations. Threshold not met at these locations.
2	Key Gateway locations and routes are respected	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. ---------- There are no identified key gateway locations however there are locations with gateway qualities in the wider area however the threshold is generally met.
3	Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting. ------ The proposal will disrupt an appreciation of distant lone and rugged mountain massifs that contribute to an appreciation of landscape setting and the amenity of views, including from The Ord and Ben Klibreck and the setting of Loch Shin. However the features would still be appreciable.

		Threshold is generally met.
4	The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways. ---- While significant adverse visual effects would be experienced from the Inverness-John O'Groats Sustrans route for a portion of the route, local core paths, routes to Ben Kilbreck, Ben More Assynt, effects would not be overwhelming or significantly detract from their overall appeal. Threshold is generally met
5	The amenity of transport routes is respected	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes -------- There would be some very high/ overwhelming visual impacts from parts of the A838 and A836 when close to the wind farm (see VPs 2, 3 and 4), there are significant effects for longer distances along the routes. Threshold is not met at these locations
6	The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.	The degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development, considerations include: • 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 • Planning Authority stated aims for development of area

		--- To the extent that existing/ consented pattern of development by and large (excepting the cluster south east of Lairg) comprises individual wind farm development with layouts responding to their particular landscape context, the Proposed Development would not be a notable diversion from this pattern of development. However, the proposal would introduce very largescale turbines to a central location within a basin landscape setting contrary to the main pattern of development in the area of large turbines being located with rounded hill settings that provide natural screening (see VP 7). To that extent the threshold is not met.
7	The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.	The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters --- The landscape of the site and surrounds provides some relief from wind energy development as seen in outward views from nearby populated areas or across the area from higher ground. The addition of the Proposed Development would give rise to the impression of the wider landscape being much more strongly characterised by wind energy development (e.g. VP9, VP10). Threshold not met.
8	The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected	The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected --- The Proposed Development would be seen with the smaller scaled 'Straths' farming landscape (see VPs 8 and 10), tending to accentuate the scale of the turbines and exacerbate their visual impact. Threshold not met

9	Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected	Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines. --- The Proposed Development is well separated from other wind energy developments and would not exacerbate their effects, notwithstanding likely significant cumulative effects. Threshold met.
10	Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected	Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained. ---------- Distinction between these three landscape types would remain. Threshold met

Rev.	By	App.	Description	Date
A	SNC	–	INITIAL ISSUE.	31/01/24

Project

PROPOSED WINDFARM DEVELOPMENT AT SHINNESS, LAIRG, SUTHERLAND.

Drawing Title

FIGURE 1.1 – SITE LOCATION PLAN.

Architect

–

Job No.	Drawing No.	Revision	Scale	Issue Status
C3746	050	A	1:25,000 A0 1:50,000 A2	FOR INFORMATION

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GENERAL NOTES:–

THE CONTRACTOR MUST CONSULT THE CIVIL/STRUCTURAL DESIGN ENGINEER IMMEDIATELY IF:

a) GROUND CONDITIONS VARY ON SITE.
b) EXISTING BUILDINGS VARY ON SITE.
c) DIMENSIONS OR LEVELS SHOWN ARE CHANGED BY ANYONE ON SITE.
d) COMPLETE OR PARTIALLY COMPLETE STRUCTURES ARE TO BE SUBJECT TO CONSTRUCTION LOADING OR AFFECTED BY TEMPORARY WORKS.

DO NOT SCALE – IF IN DOUBT, ASK.

LARGE SCALE DETAILS TAKE PRECEDENCE OVER SMALL SCALE DETAILS.

ALL MATERIALS ARE TO BE USED STRICTLY IN ACCORDANCE WITH MANUFACTURERS INSTRUCTIONS.

THE CONTRACTOR WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL COSTS INVOLVED IN CHANGES OR MODIFICATIONS REQUESTED AND APPROVED, TO SUIT HIS PREFERED WORK METHOD.

ALL NECESSARY METHOD STATEMENTS MUST BE PROVIDED PRIOR TO COMMENCEMENT OF ASSOCIATED SITE OPERATIONS.

THIS DRAWING SHOULD ONLY BE USED FOR CONSTRUCTION PURPOSES ONLY WHEN THE ISSUE STATUS IS "FOR CONSTRUCTION".

ALL DIMENSIONS ARE IN MILLIMETERS UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED.

ALL LEVELS ARE IN METERS UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED.

NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

LEGEND.

- EXTENT OF PROPOSED WIND FARM SITE.
- EXTENT OF SHINNESS ESTATE.

Rev.	By	App.	Description	Date
C	SNC	–	T10 – T15 ROUTE ADJUSTED.	18.03.2025
B	SNC	–	T14 ADJUSTED.	04.12.2024
A	SNC	–	INITIAL ISSUE.	11.09.2024

Project

PROPOSED WINDFARM DEVELOPMENT AT SHINNESS, LAIRG, SUTHERLAND.

Drawing Title

SITE LAYOUT.

Architect

–

Job No.	Drawing No.	Revision	Scale	Issue Status
C3746	042	C	1:12,500 A1 1:25,000 A3	FOR INFORMATION

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GENERAL NOTES:–

DO NOT SCALE – IF IN DOUBT, ASK.

THIS DRAWING SHOULD ONLY BE USED FOR CONSTRUCTION PURPOSES ONLY WHEN THE ISSUE STATUS IS "FOR CONSTRUCTION".

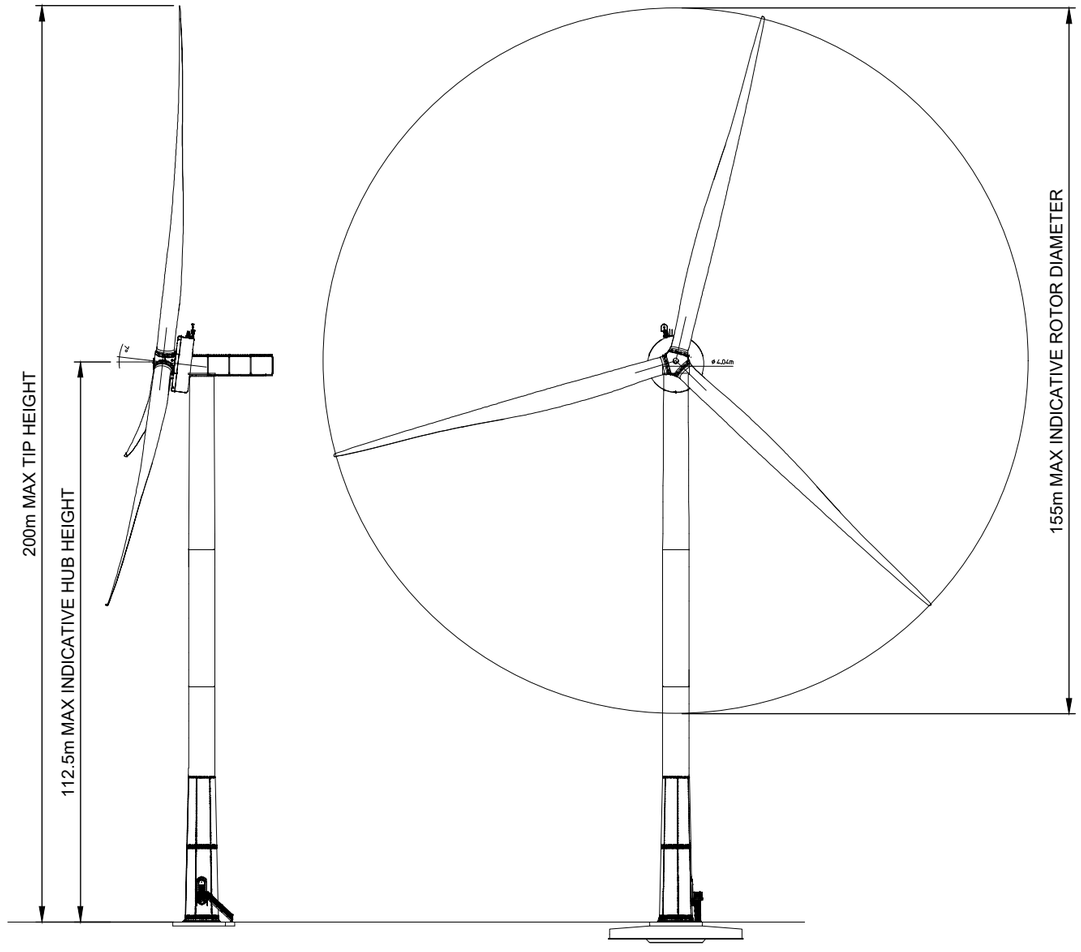
NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

LEGEND.

- PROPOSED SUB STATION.
- BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM.
- TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION COMPOUND.
- ANEMOMETER MAST.
- PROPOSED TURBINE LOCATION.
- WHS BOUNDARY.
- SITE BOUNDARY.
- MICROWAVE LINK 1.
- MICROWAVE LINK 2.
- RIPARIAN WOODLAND.
- ACCESS TRACK ROUTE.
- BORROW PIT.
- HISTORIC MONUMENT LOCATIONS.
- EXISTING AREAS OF FORESTRY.
- EXTENT OF 50m OFFSET FROM WATERCOURSE AND 100m OFFSET FROM LOCH AND LOCHANS.

TURBINE SETTING OUT CO–ORDINATES

TURBINE	EASTING(km)	NORTHING(km)	AOD(m)
T01	253.605	916.613	205
T02	254.222	917.065	215
T03	253.214	916.924	203
T04	253.831	917.378	215
T05	252.831	917.246	197
T06	253.536	917.781	206
T07	252.446	917.564	196
T08	253.110	918.043	216
T09	252.020	917.827	203
T10	252.884	918.489	196
T11	251.669	918.183	215
T12	252.537	918.954	206
T13	251.237	918.520	207
T14	252.264	919.373	220
T15	252.132	919.863	208
AM1	253.431	916.812	209



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Project
PROPOSED WINDFARM DEVELOPMENT AT SHINNESS, LAIRG, SUTHERLAND.

Drawing Title
FIGURE 3.3 - INDICATIVE TURBINE

Rev.	By	App.	Description	Date
B	SNC	-	INITIAL ISSUE.	05.04.2024
A	SNC	-	INITIAL ISSUE.	21.02.2024

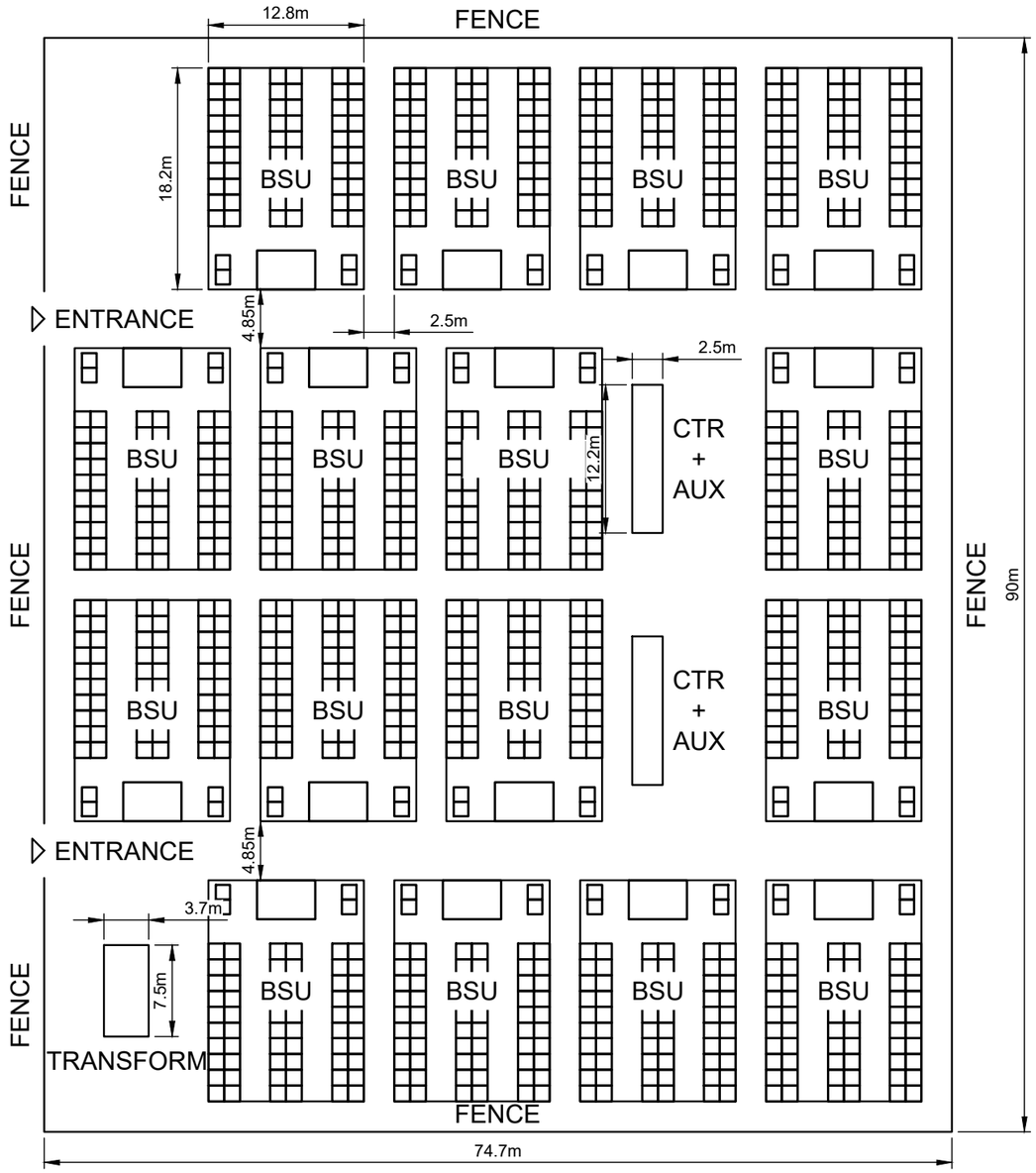
Drawing ID
SHN-RAC-ZZ-XX-DR-C-0057-B

Architect
-

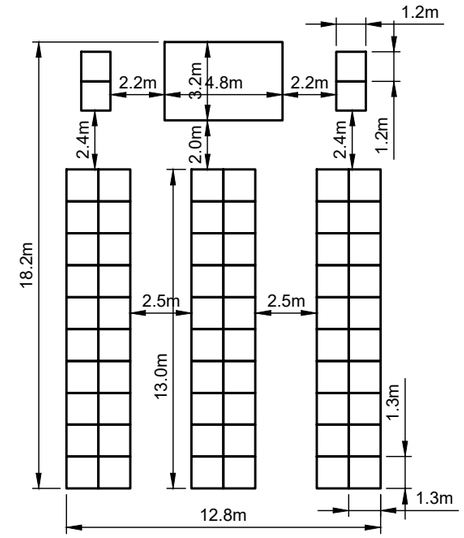
Job No.
C3746

Scale
not to scale

Issue Status
FOR INFORMATION



BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM.(1:500)



BATTERY STORAGE UNIT.(1:250)

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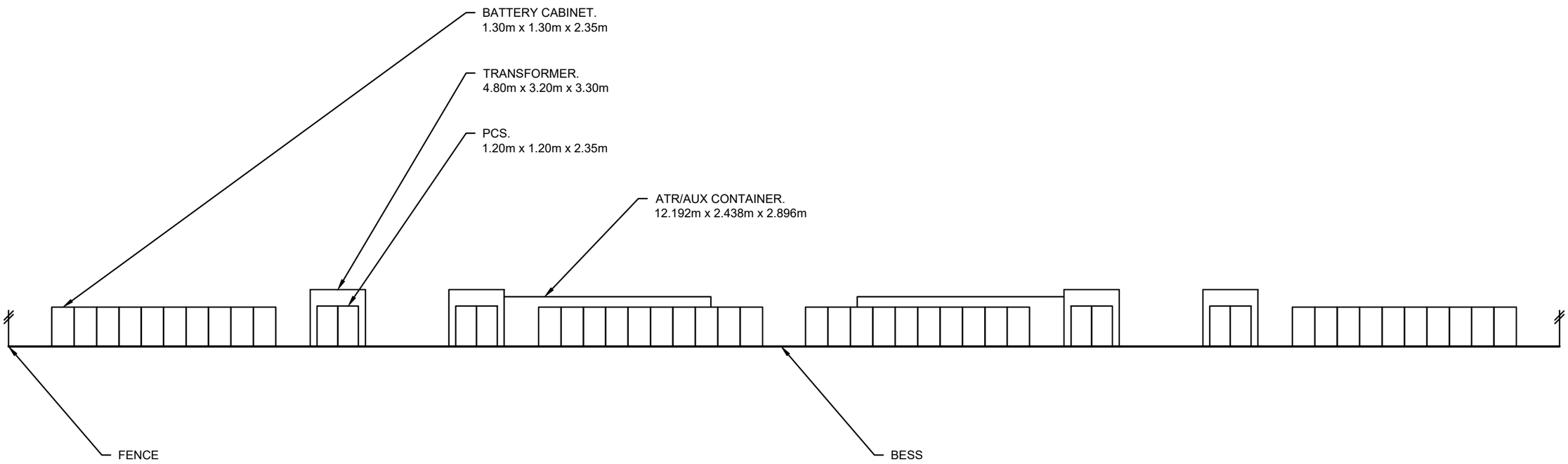
Project
PROPOSED WINDFARM DEVELOPMENT
AT SHINNESS, LAIRG, SUTHERLAND.

Drawing Title
FIGURE 3.6 - BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM.

Rev.	By	App.	Description	Date
A	SNC	-	INITIAL ISSUE.	07.12.2023

Drawing ID
SHN-RAC-ZZ-XX-DR-C-0060-A

Architect	Job No.	Scale	Issue Status
-	C3746	AS SHOWN A3	FOR INFORMATION



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Project
PROPOSED WINDFARM DEVELOPMENT AT SHINNESS, LAIRG, SUTHERLAND.

Drawing Title
FIGURE 3.7 - INDICATIVE BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM ELEVATIONS

Rev.	By	App.	Description	Date
A	SNC	-	INITIAL ISSUE.	23.02.2024

Drawing ID
SHN-RAC-ZZ-XX-DR-C-0061-A

Architect
-

Job No.
C3746

Scale
1:250-A3

Issue Status
FOR INFORMATION