

Agenda Item	6.2
Report No	PLS/18/26

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: South Planning Applications Committee

Date: 01 April 2026

Report Title: 25/04362/PIP: Ardersier Port Limited
Former Fabrication Yard, Ardersier

Report By: Area Planning Manager – South

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Port extension and continued use of the existing port facility for port-related services associated with energy-related uses including demolition and site clearance, upfilling and regrading / surfacing of new landward areas, and creation of hardstanding surface, quay construction, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, and associated works including manufacture, assembly, storage and delivery of port related cargo, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, bunding, parking, security fencing, site drainage, services, landscaping and biodiversity enhancement.

Ward: 17 – Culloden and Ardersier

Development category: Major Development (Business and Industry)

Reason referred to Committee: Major Development

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

Recommendation

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

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 Planning Permission in Principle is sought for the extension of, and continued operations at, the Ardersier Energy Transition Facility (ETF). The ETF is intended to support the logistics, manufacturing, and assembly needs of the offshore wind sector. The Scottish Government's updated Offshore Wind Policy Statement (2026) sets an ambition of delivering up to 40GW of new offshore wind capacity by 2035–2040. In addition, the 2022 ScotWind leasing round approved approximately 28GW of offshore wind development off Scotland's North Sea coast. These commitments create a significant demand for extensive land areas capable of accommodating the construction, assembly, and supply chain activities associated with offshore wind projects. The proposed development would enable Ardersier ETF to become one of the largest dedicated offshore wind facilities in Europe, predicted to employ up to 2,500 people by 2035.
- 1.2 The planning history for this site is extensive, with the establishment of Ardersier ETF having extant Planning Permission in Principle 18/04552/PIP granted in February 2019, with a Harbour Revision Order (HRO) and Marine Licence being in place. This application seeks permission for the continued operation of Ardersier ETF and its extension to the south. Proposed works comprise:
- 80 ha port extension (bringing the total developable land area to 218 ha);
 - Site clearance including the felling of existing plantation woodland;
 - Demolition of existing dwellinghouses and associated buildings (Pine Trees and Juniper Cottage);
 - Land raising of the extension areas using dredged material to match the existing port site formation level;
 - Formation of a working platform capped with a crushed rock/stone placement;
 - Erection of security fencing to the outer edge of the extended site;
 - Biodiversity enhancement;
 - Surface water drainage;
 - Landscaping buffer to the outer site boundary; and
 - Noise attenuation bund to the southern boundary.
- 1.3 In terms of the wider 'project' for the purposes of Environmental Impact Assessment, this comprises the:
- existing port's operational land and its existing consented land use;
 - proposed extension area;
 - operations consented under the HRO;
 - variation of the HRO to include construction of an integration pocket;
 - operations consented under the marine license(s) for dredging and all port related shipping activity;
 - construction phases for offshore renewable energy projects supporting the assembly of turbines of up to a maximum height of 330m to blade tip; and

- The long term servicing and decommissioning requirements for the offshore renewable energy projects.

- 1.4 As this application seeks planning permission in principle, no details of proposed buildings at the site have been provided. The applicant anticipates that warehousing, storage, and office facilities will be required to support the development. These would be considered under future applications for Matters Specified in Conditions.
- 1.5 Surface water drainage generated within the site will be discharged via infiltration to groundwater, with the site platform comprising a permeable pavement with type-1 sub-base. Infiltration trenches are also proposed adjacent to internal access roads and at low points within yard areas. Incoming land drainage from areas adjacent to the site will be diverted around the site to the east, to an area of saltmarsh, and to the west, to an existing lagoon.
- 1.6 The proposed development includes several measures which aim to provide biodiversity enhancement in and around the application site. These measures include planting for pollinators, an extension to an island used by nesting terns, restoration of an artificial lagoon to provide wetland habitat, vegetation management on Whiteness Head Site of Scientific Special Interest (SSSI), creation of a new area of wetland habitat, and woodland enhancement within a 20m woodland buffer retained at the site boundary.
- 1.7 The applicant used the Council's Pre-Application Advice Service for Major Developments (24/05199/PREMAJ). The pre-application response stated the extension of the port is capable of being in overall conformity with the Development Plan but that it would be important to address several key issues as part of any future planning application, in particular flood risk, forestry loss, and biodiversity.
- 1.8 Pre-application consultation has been undertaken in accordance with statutory Major Application requirements. A Proposal of Application Notice (PoAN) was submitted to Highland Council on 22 May 2025. The first public event was held on 11 June 2025 between 3pm to 7pm at Ardersier War Memorial Hall. A further event followed on 27 August 2025 at the same time and location. Consultation material was also made available online. The applicant publicised the events by placing newspaper notices and notifying the two host community councils and two neighbouring community councils, as well as local ward members, MP and MSPs. A leaflet drop was also carried out to properties within a 7km radius of the site. Feedback received has informed the design, environmental mitigation, and scope of supporting assessments.
- 1.9 The application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) which was informed through EIA Scoping (25/00226/SCOP) submitted on 17 January 2025. The EIAR includes the following chapters: Introduction; Methodology; Project Description; Consultation; Supporting Information and Assessments; Airborne Noise and Groundborne Vibration; Landscape, Seascape and Visual; Historic Environment; Hydrology and

Hydrogeology; Coastal Processes and Geomorphology; Marine Mammals; Terrestrial Ecology; Ornithology; Cumulative Effects; Schedule of Mitigation and Enhancements. The application is also accompanied by a Pre-Application Consultation Report (PAC), Planning Statement, and Design and Access Statement.

1.10 The project includes marine construction and operational activities, including an extension to the quay wall, creation of an integration pocket and dredging. These elements constitute marine works and do not form part of this planning application. This application relates only to the elements of the development that are situated above Mean Low Water Springs and therefore fall within the terrestrial planning system. The following applications have been made to Marine Scotland:

- MS-00010860: Removal of existing hardstops to facilitate future dredging works;
- MS-00009479: Port entrance/inner channel dredging, quay wall construction/realignment and quayside (berthing) dredging; and
- MS-00010583: Capital dredging and sea disposal.

The wider project's marine infrastructure and construction works have been assessed within the planning application's Environmental Impact Assessment, with such marine activities integral to the port's lateral extension being subject to recommended planning conditions, including restricting the operational use of the port's extension area until a Marine Licence for further dredging is obtained.

1.11 The application has not been varied since submission however the applicant has provided further clarity on woodland removal, ecology, nuisance, roads, archaeology and conservation through submission of the following documents, with this information agreed by Officers to constitute further clarification, rather than further environmental information:

- Landscape Plan – Woodland Removal (003A) (10.03.2026);
- Woodland Removal/Compensation Planting Comparison Report (10.03.2026);
- Response to Ecology Team Comments (04.03.2026);
- Travel Plan Framework (04.03.2026);
- Technical Note – Responses to Comments on the Noise Impact Assessment (24.02.2026);
- Compensatory Planting Letter (18.02.2026);
- Response to Ecology Team Comments (18.02.2026);
- Forestry Supporting Note (18.02.2026);
- Tree Survey Schedule (18.02.2026);
- Response to Historic Environment Scotland comments (09.02.2026);
- Response to Historic Environment Team (HET) Conservation comments (09.02.2026);
- Response to HET Archaeology comments (09.02.2026); and
- Response to Petty and Ardersier Community Heritage Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (09.02.2026).

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The proposed development is located on the Ardersier peninsula, a landform which projects into the Moray Firth to the east of Inverness. The application site comprises 262ha of land, covering the extant port and proposed extension area. When accounting for the sites associated harbour area, the combined area is 387ha in total. The terrestrial site comprises generally level ground contains the existing port area, an extensive area of commercial Scots pine plantation and a smaller area of agricultural land. The agricultural land is primarily used as pasture and contains two residential properties which are vacant and to be demolished as part of the proposals. The port is sheltered from the northeast by Whiteness Head which is a sand and shingle spit.
- 2.2 The port area has a long-established history as an energy-related port, originally concerned with the manufacture of rigs for the oil and gas industry. Its current use as an ETF was granted planning permission 18/04552/PIP on 4 February 2019 with its description of development being:
- Establish a port and port related services for energy related uses, including marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, delivery and export of port related cargo and associated new road access, parking, infrastructure, services, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, re-grading and upfilling of landward areas and landscaping (Renewal of planning permission 13/01689/PIP).
- 2.3 The application site is located within a coastal plain landscape which extends along the Moray Firth to the east and west. Its surroundings are characterised by low-lying agricultural and forestry land. To the south, the land gradually rises toward the Monadhliath Hills, which form the southern backdrop. To the north, across the Moray Firth, the wooded slopes of the Black Isle provide the northern backdrop. The site falls within the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George Special Landscape Area, and is primarily within the Coastal Farmlands – Moray and Nairn 284 Landscape Character Type (LCT) with the western edge and access to the site also falling within the Beaches, Dunes and Links – Moray and Nairn 281 LCT.
- 2.4 Residential properties around the site are predominantly dispersed, consisting of individual dwellings or small clusters. The nearest settlement is Ardersier, located 3km to the southwest, while the larger town of Nairn lies 4.5km to the east of the main port area. In February 2026 an EIA Screening opinion 26/00687/SCRE was also submitted for a mix of uses including up to 600 homes east of Ardersier, with this proposal being 2.4km from the Ardersier ETF application site. Closer into the site, the nearest residential receptor lies 190m to the south of the site boundary and also accommodates a wellness and wellbeing business. The next nearest residential receptor is situated 860m to the south of the site boundary.

- 2.5 The application site is within the Inverness Coastal water catchment and there are no mapped or named watercourses present within the application site. There are no private water supplies within 2km of the application site. There is a Controlled Activities Regulations (CAR) licence for water abstraction within the site boundary. Groundwater is typically encountered at 3m below ground level and is likely to be tidally influenced. There is no peat identified within the site.
- 2.6 There are no designated heritage assets within the application site, however, the surrounding area contains archaeological evidence of human activity spanning from the Mesolithic period through to the 20th century. Notable heritage features in the vicinity include the Category A listed Fort George (LB1721), an 18th century artillery fortification; the Kebbuck Stone scheduled monument (SM9433), which evidences Pictish activity in the area; and the Category B listed Delnies Ice House and Bothy (LB52544), which evidences the area's historic fishing industry. The ZTV also encompasses a wider range of heritage receptors including additional scheduled monuments, listed buildings, conservation areas, Garden and Designed Landscapes, and an inventory battlefield.
- 2.7 The proposed extension area primarily comprises commercial Scots pine plantation with the easternmost area containing self-seeded birch woodland. Carse Wood, to the south of the application site, is recorded as being Long-Established (of plantation origin). There are no areas of ancient woodland within 5km.
- 2.8 Soil Class 0 (Mineral Soils) are present across the site with peatland soils not typically found. Superficial deposits primarily consist of raised marine deposits comprising sand and gravel. Soils at the site fall within land capability for agricultures classes 5.2 (Land capable of use as improved grassland, few problems with pasture establishment but may be difficult to maintain) and 6.2 (Land capable of use as rough grazings with moderate quality plants). The site is therefore not on prime soils.
- 2.9 The site has been subject to comprehensive habitat and ecological surveys, supported by desk-based research. Submitted reports have identified that the site supports or has suitable habitat capable of supporting: bats, badger, red squirrel, pine marten, otter, reptiles, and water vole.
- 2.10 The site is adjacent to the Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for its population of bottlenose dolphin and its subtidal sandbanks habitat.
- 2.11 There are several European sites designated for ornithological interest within 10km of the site, including the Moray Firth Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar Site, all designated for non-breeding populations of divers, grebes, sea ducks and shags, which are adjacent to the site. Field surveys identified several species of breeding birds, including 10 red/amber listed species and 3 UK Biodiversity Action

Plan priority species. 20 species of pinewood birds were also surveyed as well as 5 wader species.

- 2.12 The A96 forms the main arterial route through the area, linking Inverness to Aberdeen. Access into Ardersier Port is taken from the B9092 where road improvements, including the creation of a roundabout, have taken place as required by the site's extant planning permission. This access is linked directly to the A96 to the south via a 900m stretch of road. Road improvements required by the extant planning permission, including the creation of a roundabout on the A96 to serve the site, are now complete.
- 2.13 There are no Core Paths within or adjacent to the site however there are a number of other recreational interests in the wider area. These include beaches at Nairn and on the Black Isle, core paths and tourist routes running along the A96. There is also understood to be some recreational use of woodland paths and minor roads between the application site and Ardersier.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

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| 3.1 | 03.07.2025 | 25/01933/PAN: Continued port development and expansion of port related services for energy related uses, including marine dredging within the inner harbour, sea disposal or dredged sands, possible temporary stockpiling of dredged material, quay construction, erection of offices, industrial, and storage buildings, and associated infrastructure including manufacturing, assembly, delivery and export of port related cargo, parking, infrastructure, services, upfilling and re-grading/surfacing of new landward areas and landscaping | Reported to South Planning Applications Committee |
| 3.2 | 27.03.2025 | 25/00226/SCOP: Ardersier Port - Expansion of port for use by the energy industry including marine dredging, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings for the manufacture, assembly, delivery, and export of port related cargo along with all | EIA Scoping Response Issued |

		associated infrastructure and services including vehicular parking and landscaping	
3.3	27.03.2025	24/05199/PREMAJ: Ardersier Port - development and associated works for the expansion of port and port related services for use by the energy industry including marine dredging, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings for the manufacture, assembly, delivery, and export of port related cargo along with all associated infrastructure and services including vehicular parking and landscaping.	Major Pre-Application Response Issued
3.4	-	24/02260/MAR: Ardersier Port - Marine Construction License (MS-00009479) Request for Temporal Variation.	Pending Consideration
3.5	22.12.2025	24/02030/S42: Ardersier Port - Application under Section 42 for non-compliance with Condition 10 (i) of Planning Permission 18/04552/PIP requiring the upgrade of the site access road junction with the A96 Trunk Road	Withdrawn
3.6	15.05.2025	24/02114/MAR: Marine License (MS-00010583) Capital Dredging (Screening Opinion)	EIA Not Required
3.7	12.06.2024	24/01728/MAR: Ardersier Port - Marine Construction License (MS-00009479) Request for Temporal Variation	No Objection to Variation
3.8	17.06.2024	24/00787/S75D: Discharge of S75 relating to 12/04225/S42 and 05/01294/OUTIN masterplan	Application Permitted
3.9	20.02.2024	23/06034/MAR: Dredging works: i. Increase the dredge	Licence Granted

depth from the approved - 6.5m CD to -12.9m CD; and ii. Increase the associated dredging volume from the approved quantity of 4,600,000 wet tonnes

3.10	18.10.2023	23/04543/MAR: Marine works - capital dredging and deposit variation	Pre-Application Response Issued
3.11	01.09.2023	23/03373/SCRE: Marine works - capital dredging and deposit variation	Screening Consultation Response Issued
3.12	05.12.2023	23/03166/PREMAJ: Development of Green Freeport Site	Major Pre-Application Response Issued
3.13	05.07.2022	22/02821/MAR: MS-LOT consult screen - proposed variation of Ardersier Port	EIA Not Required
3.14	26.05.2022	22/02211/SCRE: Temporary extension to marine licence for dredging works	Screening Consultation Response Issued
3.15	25.11.2021	21/05428/SCRE: Proposed revision to conditions of dredging licence for capital dredge and sea deposit	Screening Consultation Response Issued
3.16	16.02.2023	20/00484/PIP: Mixed use masterplan for residential and leisure development including housing, marina, boat yacht club, visitor centre, nature conservation zones and hotel with supporting community facilities and sewage treatment plant (Renewal of Planning Permission in Principle 12/04225/S42 and 05/01294/OUTIN)	Withdrawn
3.17	10.12.2019	19/04622/PAN: Renewal of planning permission in principle application reference 12/04255/S42 (original application reference number 05/01294/OUTIN) for	Reported to South Planning Applications Committee

residential and leisure development including housing, marina, boat yard, yacht club, visitors centre, nature conservation zones and hotel with supporting community facilities and sewage treatment plant.

3.18	24.04.2019	19/01132/SCOP: Residential and leisure development	EIA Scoping Response Issued
3.19	20.02.2019	18/05998/MAR: MS-LOT Consult Licence: Ardersier Port Development - Capital Dredging and Construction works at Ardersier Port	Time Extension Granted
3.20	04.02.2019	18/04552/PIP: Establish a port and port related services for energy related uses, including marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, delivery and export of port related cargo and associated new road access, parking, infrastructure, services, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, re-grading and upfilling of landward areas and landscaping (Renewal of planning permission 13/01689/PIP)	Planning Permission Granted
3.21	08.08.2018	18/02489/PAN: Renewal of planning permission in principle application ref: 13/01689/PIP to establish a port and port related services for energy related uses, including marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings. delivery and export of port related cargo and associated new road access, parking,	Reported to South Planning Applications Committee

		infrastructure, services, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, regrading and upfilling of landward areas and landscaping.	
3.22	08.06.2018	18/01411/SCOP: The purpose of this Scoping Report is to agree the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report to accompany the above application submissions (13/01689/PIP)	EIA Scoping Response Issued
3.23	30.01.2014	13/01689/PIP: Establish a port and port related services for energy related uses, including marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings and associated infrastructure, delivery and export of port related cargo, marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings and associated new road access, parking, infrastructure, services, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, re-grading and upfilling of landward areas and landscaping.	Planning Permission Granted
3.24	09.04.2013	13/00682/S75M: Vary condition 1 of planning permission (05/01294/OUTIN) to extend time limit	Permission Granted
3.25	15.01.2013	13/00232/SCOP: Harbour revision order, marine licence and planning permission - EIA Scoping Request.	EIA Scoping Response Issued
3.26	25.01.2013	12/04893/SCOP: Scoping Opinion for a port and port related services for energy related uses, including	EIA Scoping Response Issued

manufacture, construction, assembly, repair, maintenance, marine storage and decommissioning of renewables including turbines and their constituent parts; including marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, offices, industrial and storage buildings and associated new road access, infrastructure, services, re-grading and upfilling of landward areas and landscaping.

3.27	25.01.2013	12/04894/SCRE: Screening for a port and port related services for energy related uses, including manufacture, construction, assembly, repair, maintenance, marine storage and decommissioning of renewables including turbines and their constituent parts; including marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, offices, industrial and storage buildings and associated new road access, infrastructure, services, re-grading and upfilling of landward areas and landscaping.	EIA Screening Opinion Issued – EIA Required
3.28	23.01.2013	12/04267/PIP: Erection of house	Withdrawn
3.29	25.02.2013	12/04225/S42: Vary condition 1 of planning permission 05/01294/OUTIN to extend the time limit of the consent	Permission Granted
3.30	14.11.2012	12/04266/SCRE: To vary the condition 1 of the outline planning permission 05/01294/OUTLN to extend the time limit the consent in respect of the land outlined in red on the enclosed plan.	EIA Screening Opinion Issued – EIA Not Required

3.31	23.04.2024	12/03978/PAN: Application for Planning Permission in Principle to establish a port and port related services for Energy and other uses	Reported to South Planning Applications Committee
3.32	2012	12/03503/PAN: Outline application for residential and leisure development including, housing, marina, boat yard, yacht club, visitors centre, nature conservation zones and hotel with supporting community facilities and sewage treatment plant	Reported to South Planning Applications Committee
3.33	20.06.2012	12/01519/PREAPP: Potential development of the Marina area for Harbour to facilitate development of the ground for construction, preparation, repair, renewal and maintenance of renewable turbines and their associated parts and related activities.	Pre-Application Response Issued
3.34	20.05.2009	09/00282/OHLIN: Additional pole on existing overhead line	Permission Granted
3.35	21.07.2008	07/01186/FULIN: Sewage pumping station and ancillary works	Planning Permission Granted
3.36	02.11.2007	05/01294/OUTIN: Outline application for residential and leisure development including, housing, marina, boat yard, yacht club, visitors centre, nature conservation zones and hotel with supporting community facilities and sewage treatment plant	Planning Permission Granted
3.37	18.07.2005	05/00721/DEMIN: Demolition of existing buildings on site	Permission Granted
3.38	04.08.2005	05/00345/FULIN: Siting of portacabin to replace the existing dilapidated gate house	Temporary Permission Granted

3.39	25.08.2005	05/00185/FULIN: Use of a former industrial building for storage	Planning Permission Granted
3.40	30.06.2004	04/00373/DEMIN: Former buildings to be demolished and removed from site and foundations to be levelled off	Permission Granted
3.41	19.12.2003	03/01242/DEMIN: Spool base - facility to be dismantled, not demolished	Permission Granted
3.42	02.12.2003	03/01162/DEMIN: Demolition of building which is no longer in use	Permission Granted
3.43	13.10.2003	03/01036/DEMIN: Prior Notification (Demolition)	Permission Granted
3.44	29.07.2002	02/00611/DEMIN: Demolition of building	Permission Granted

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Advertised: Schedule 3 / Unknown Neighbour / EIA Development

Date Advertised: Inverness Courier- 12.12.2025
Edinburgh Gazette- 12.12.2025

Representation deadline: 11.01.2026

Timeous representations: 1 Objection

Late representations: 0

4.2 Material considerations raised are summarised as follows:

- a) Effects on the Kebbuck Stone Scheduled Monument and Ardersier Conservation Area have not been assessed.

4.3 All letters of representation are available for inspection via the Council's eplanning portal which can be accessed through the internet <https://www.highland.gov.uk/planning/view-comment-planning-applications>.

5. CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 **Ardersier and Petty Community Council (host)** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.2 **Ardersier and Petty Community Council (Host)** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.3 **Cawdor and West Community Council (Host)** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.4 **Nairn River Community Council object** to the application. It raises concerns about the height of turbine and component storage including potential effects on Inverness Airport, MoD aircraft and radar. Reference is also made to the Safeguarding of Aerodromes Direction 2003. Concerns are raised about whether the visualisations meaningfully represent the scale and heights of the proposed wind turbines and other structures. Potential impacts on landscape, historic buildings, tourism and biodiversity are suggested, as well as the effect that towing the turbines out to sea will have on other users of the Moray Firth. It is suggested that it is unclear what part of the site will undergo land raising. It is suggested that a concrete batching plant may be constructed and concerns about the effect of this on water supplies are raised. Concerns are also raised about the effect that the use of Portland cement could have on people and the environment. The scale of felling required will harm the environment. Concerns are also raised about potential traffic impacts on Nairn.
- 5.5 **Nairn West and Suburban Community Council object** to the application. Concerns are raised about the extent of land raising, the scale of biodiversity loss, insufficient visual screening, impacts on water supply, potential for waste burning on site, visual effects, effects on Inverness Airport, and impacts on MoD assets.
- 5.6 **Other Community Councils consulted – the following neighbouring community councils did not respond to the consultation:**
- Auldearn Community Council
 - Avoch and Killen Community Council
 - Balloch Community Council
 - Cromarty and District Community Council
 - Croy And Culloden Moor Community Council
 - Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council
 - Nigg and Shandwick Community Council
 - Resolis Community Council
- 5.7 **Access Officer** does not object. A revised Access Plan should be required by condition to ensure compliance with Policy 77 of the HwLDP. Consideration should be given to developing/improving strategic multi-user routes both inland and along the coast. The Highland Council's Green Networks Supplementary Guidance should also be considered.

- 5.8 **Coastal Planning Officer** does not object. The proposed development is considered to accord with the relevant coastal development policies of both NPF4 Policy 10 and HwLDP Policy 49. This is because the proposed development supports the Blue Economy, contributes to net zero ambitions and supports the wider economy. The development does not increase the need for additional coastal protection measures.
- 5.9 **Development Plans Team** do not object. The principle of the development is consistent with the Development Plan. Conformity with the Development Plan on detailed matters, including flood risk, forestry, natural heritage and noise, are dependent upon the view of other relevant consultees. Developer contributions and/or direct provision of sustainable transport measures is likely to be required.
- 5.10 **Environmental Health – Contaminated Land** do not object. The extension area has an historic use as agricultural ground which may have resulted in land contamination. The Contaminated Land Chapter accurately describes earlier submissions and a review of a geo-environmental desk study report. A further ground investigation is understood to have taken place but the report has not been forwarded to Contaminated Land Officers. This report should be forwarded for review or, in its absence, a condition requiring a scheme for dealing with potential land contamination should be added to any grant of planning permission.
- 5.11 **Environmental Health – Environmental Protection** do not object subject to conditions. Concerns were raised that the baseline noise levels used in the Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) were too high and so the NIA's conclusions could not be relied upon. Nevertheless, it is recognised it is not possible to accurately predict noise impacts until such time as the operations of future users of parts of the port are known. Consequently, it is suggested that each future phase of the development should be subject to a Noise Impact Assessment. Baseline noise levels should be based on the 2013 background levels which are significantly lower than those used in the current NIA but which more closely correlate with the EHO's own on-site measurements. Conditions requiring a Construction Environmental Management Document, imposing noise limits, and requiring NIAs and Noise Management Plans for each future phase of development are recommended.
- 5.12 **Flood Risk Management Team** does not object. The site is considered an exemption under NPF4 Policy 22a and can be in a flood risk area. The submitted Flood Risk Assessment suggests mitigation, including land raising, which is acceptable. The Drainage Impact Assessment is also acceptable subject to a condition requiring review of the final surface water drainage design.
- 5.13 **Forestry Officer** does not object to the application, subject to conditions. An objection was initially raised on the basis that a Forestry Chapter should have been submitted as part of the EIAR. This objection was withdrawn following submission of a Woodland Removal/Compensation Planting

Comparison Report Rev. A, amongst other things. Whilst the level of information provided is still considered to fall short of what is expected in support of an EIA development, the objection was withdrawn subject to conditions requiring a tree survey report, a Tree Protection Plan (including the bund), and compensatory planting (CP). The CP sites are in acceptable locations.

- 5.14 **Historic Environment Team – Archaeology** do not object. The Cultural Heritage Chapter provides a useful level of information and assessment however it is unclear why the designated Kebbuck Stone (SM9433) and Ardersier Conservation Area have been omitted from assessment. Mitigation suggested within the EIA should be secured by a condition requiring a Programme of Archaeological Works.
- 5.15 **Historic Environment Team – Conservation** does not object to the application. The Historic Environment Team notes that the proposal to extend Ardersier Port does not detail the design, height, and massing of future buildings, making it difficult to fully assess potential impacts on nearby historic assets. While the site has an industrial history with previously modest building heights, future development could involve much larger structures which may detrimentally affect the settings of Fort George, Chanonry Point Lighthouse, and other listed structures. Although the current application mainly concerns extending the southern boundary and is expected to have a low to medium impact based on historic use of Ardersier Port, visualisations of possible future full-capacity development indicate potential for more substantial adverse effects. The team does not object to the present application but emphasises the need for careful design, siting, colour and mitigation in future proposals to minimise harm to the historic environment. The Historic Environment Team- Conservation initially objected to the application however this objection was withdrawn following explanation of the extant permission covering the existing port site.
- 5.16 **Landscape Officer** does not object to the application. The introduction of the proposed development into this low lying, open landscape with a strong horizontal emphasis will inevitably result in a considerable landscape and seascape change. The proposed development will introduce prominent new features, up to 330m in height to what is currently a relatively undeveloped coastline in terms of industrial development.

The LVIA has identified significant landscape, seascape and visual effects as a result of the proposed development which are largely uncontested. The main exceptions are an under-assessment at a number of viewpoints and receptors, and that two of the three Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George Special Landscape Area (SLA) would be compromised by the proposed development.

It is noted that the statement of significance in the Landscape, Seascape and Visual Impact Assessment (LSVIA) considers the additional effects of the proposed development as not significant which is contested as the scale of the proposed development including the assembly of wind turbines

to include structures up to 330m in height are going to result in significant landscape, seascape and visual effects within the surrounding area.

Whilst there are a large number of significant effects and a compromise to the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George SLA, it is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six to eight months a year), thereby being time-limited.

- 5.17 **Transport Planning Team** do not object. The proposed development and its relationship to the consented development in relation to traffic is acceptable. Alternative travel options are required for staff and visitors to reduce impacts on the road network.
- 5.18 **Civil Aviation Authority** did not respond to the consultation.
- 5.19 **Health and Safety Executive** do not object. Part of the proposed development lies within the inner, middle and outer consultation zones of a site with consent to hold hazardous chemicals (the McDermott Scotland site at Whiteness Head). There are no buildings proposed, at this stage, having more than 2 occupied stories or more than 100 occupants.
- 5.20 **Highlands and Islands Airport Limited (HIAL)** do not object. It has worked closely with the applicant since 2024 to understand the potential impacts of site operations on Inverness Airport services. Work to understand potential impacts on Instrument Flight Procedures and Communication Navigation Surveillance capability is ongoing. Outputs from this work will feed into future planning applications at the site. The current situation is that no spoil heights, plant, machinery, equipment, temporary works or stored material should exceed the limits shown on drawing reference IDL-019-1-DRW-055 Ardersier Port OSGB v2.0 dated 7 Dec 2023. Crane operations will also be required to comply with standard permit processes, which is the case at present.
- 5.21 **Historic Environment Scotland** do not object. It advises that the proposed development will result in significant visual and setting impacts on the Category A listed Fort George in the short term, including from proposed buildings. A significant adverse impact on the setting of enclosure 250m SW of Moor of Balnagowan, a scheduled monument, is also anticipated. It is noted that no mitigation is proposed however it is recommended that permanent buildings use natural materials in a recessive palette of colours to reduce the visual impact of the development in views to and from Fort George.
- 5.22 **NATS Safeguarding** do not object. The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with safeguarding criteria.
- 5.23 **NatureScot** do not object subject to conditions and make the following comments:

“Inner Moray Firth Special Protection Area (SPA), Moray Firth SPA: This proposal could be progressed with appropriate mitigation. However, because it could affect internationally important natural heritage interests, we object to this proposal unless it is made subject to conditions so that the works are done in accordance with the mitigation as outlined further below.

Inner Moray Firth Ramsar sandflat feature: There is not enough information available within the proposal documents to assess the impacts of the operational aspects of the proposal on this feature but we are expecting this detail to be available in a forthcoming Marine Licence consultation so we will assess at that point.

Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation (SAC), Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC, River Moriston SAC, Nairn and Moray Coast SPA and Ramsar site: There are natural heritage interests of international importance on the site, but our advice is that these will not be adversely affected by the proposal.”

- 5.24 **SEPA** do not object subject to conditions. It advises that the Flood Risk Assessment is based on appropriate methods and the representation of flood risk appears to be in line with available evidence. It is recommended that the finished floor levels of buildings are raised to provide freeboard although, as no overnight accommodation is proposed, there are no specific requirements in this regard. Raising of land in direct connection to the open coast is unlikely to increase risk elsewhere. The main north-flowing drainage feature and associated ditches are man-made so no objection to rerouting. Clear span bridge crossings should be used for watercourse crossings. Conditions relating to watercourse realignment works and the design of watercourse crossings are required.
- 5.25 **Scottish Water** do not object and has no further site or development specific comments to make.

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY

- 6.1 Appendix 1 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 Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. This means that the application requires to be assessed against all policies of the Development Plan relevant to the application, all national and local policy guidance and all other material considerations relevant to the application.

Planning Considerations

- 7.2 The key considerations in this case are:
- a) Planning History
 - b) Development Plan and Other Planning Policy
 - c) Energy and Economic Impact
 - d) Site Selection, Layout and Design
 - e) Landscape and Visual Impact
 - f) Natural Heritage, including Ornithology
 - g) Forestry, Woodland and Trees
 - h) Noise, Vibration and Dust
 - i) Roads, Transport and Access
 - j) Water, Flood Risk, Drainage and Soils
 - k) Built and Cultural Heritage
 - l) Other Material Considerations

Planning History

- 7.3 The application site has historically been used as an engineering yard associated with the North Sea oil and gas industry. The land area of the port was reclaimed from the foreshore in the 1970s using dredged sand behind a steel pile retaining wall. The use of the site in this period included the fabrication and construction of offshore platforms and employed up to 4,500 people at its height. This use began in 1972 and ceased in 2001, at which point the facility closed and the site was vacant for 18 years.
- 7.4 Following closure, the site was purchased by a local consortium with a view to re-developing the site. Outline planning permission for the establishment of a residential and leisure development, including housing, marina, yacht club and a visitors' centre, was granted in November 2007 (05/01294/OUTIN). These proposals were not progressed however.
- 7.5 Planning permission in principle was granted in January 2014 (13/01689/PIP) for the following:
- “Establish a port and port related services for energy related uses, including marine channel dredging, quay realignment, repair and maintenance, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings and associated infrastructure, delivery and export of port related cargo, associated new road access, parking, infrastructure, services, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, re-grading and upfilling of landward areas and landscaping.”
- 7.6 This permission was renewed in February 2019 (18/04552/PIP) and has since been implemented with the following works being carried out:
- Access channel;
 - Quay wall construction;
 - Main port activity area;
 - Port support/administrative buildings;
 - Port related light industrial uses;

- Temporary on-site storage area for dredge material; and
- Roundabouts on B9092 and A96, and new security gatehouse.

- 7.7 Importantly, planning permission 18/04552/PIP does not include any condition limiting the height of turbines or components to be stored or assembled at the site.
- 7.8 Approval of Matters Specified in Condition attached to 18/04552/PIP was granted for Phase 1a of the development under application 23/00499/MSC. This covered a new entrance gateway, security office, heritage centre and café, access and associated infrastructure. Pre-commencement conditions were discharged insofar as they relate to Phase 1a of the development.
- 7.9 In addition, The Port of Ardersier Harbour Revision Order 2014 (HRO) was made in August 2014. This established Ardersier Port as a harbour and the Company (Ardersier Port Limited) as the harbour authority. Section 4 of the HRO grants the Company the power to construct the following works:
- Removal of existing sheet piled quay walls and construction of new piled quay wall;
 - Construction of slipway system;
 - Formation of main dredge access channel and dredged access pocket; and
 - Construction of ship lift structure.
- 7.10 Section 5 of the HRO grants a limit of deviation for the above works whilst Section 6 allows subsidiary works within the limits of deviation.
- 7.11 Class 29 of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 (the GPDO) grants planning permission for the works authorised by the HRO; being the works at Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the HRO set out above.
- 7.12 In addition, Class 35 of the GPDO grants, subject to conditions, planning permission for the carrying out of development on operational land by statutory undertakers in respect of dock, pier, harbour, water transport, or canal or inland navigation undertakings, required:
- a) For the purposes of shipping;
 - b) In connection with the embarking, disembarking, loading, discharging or transport of passengers, livestock or goods at a dock, pier or harbour, or with the movement of traffic by canal or inland navigation or by any railway forming part of the undertaking; and
 - c) in connection with the provision of services and facilities.
- 7.13 The current planning position for the site is as follows: planning permission in principle 18/04552/PIP has been lawfully implemented, establishing the port. The Phase 1a works around the entrance have been approved and implemented under 23/00499/MSC. All remaining construction and operational activities have proceeded under the Harbour Authority's permitted development rights afforded by Classes 29 and 35 of the GPDO.

Development Plan and Other Planning Policy

- 7.14 The Development Plan comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) (2024), and various supplementary guidance documents associated with the Local Development Plans.
- 7.15 The extant port area is allocated as an industrial development site within IMFLDP2 (WH01: Whiteness) however the extension areas do not fall within the allocation, with this area constituting unallocated 'grey land' not specifically promoted for nor safeguarded from development. The IMFLDP2 identifies the proximity of the site to main centres of population, including Ardersier, Nairn, Tornagrain and Inverness, its direct access to the A96 trunk and marine access via its large quayside. It recognises that the site has potential to play a major role in the development of the renewables industry, to create significant employment opportunities, and to help bolster communities along the A96 corridor. It also notes the potential for the development to have adverse effects, along and in combination with other developments, on a number of interests, including designated sites.
- 7.16 Appendix 2 provides an assessment of the proposed development against the Development Plan and other planning policy. In summary, it is recognised that the proposed development stands to make a significant contribution towards meeting Scotland's net-zero and economic growth ambitions. The importance of addressing potential impacts is also recognised, including on natural and cultural heritage assets, road infrastructure and residential amenity. Nevertheless, the principle of the proposed development is found to be in compliance with the Development Plan taken as a whole.

Energy and Economic Impact

- 7.17 Ardersier Port is a component of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) which aims to accelerate economic growth, support the renewable energy transition, and secure long-term employment in the Highlands. The Green Freeport initiative brings together public and private investment whilst providing a package of devolved and reserved tax and other incentives. Green Freeports must support four key policy objectives:
- promoting regeneration and high-quality job creation – ICFGF's lead policy objective
 - promoting decarbonisation and a just transition to a net zero economy
 - establishing hubs for global trade and investment
 - fostering an innovative environment
- 7.18 The ICFGF has an ambition to create 18,300 jobs for the UK, of which 11,300 would be located in the Highlands. It aims to attract nearly £6.5 million of investment, with more than £3.5 billion forecast by 2029. Ardersier ETF is a designated tax site within the ICFGF area which unlocks various tax and customs incentives and associated benefits for businesses

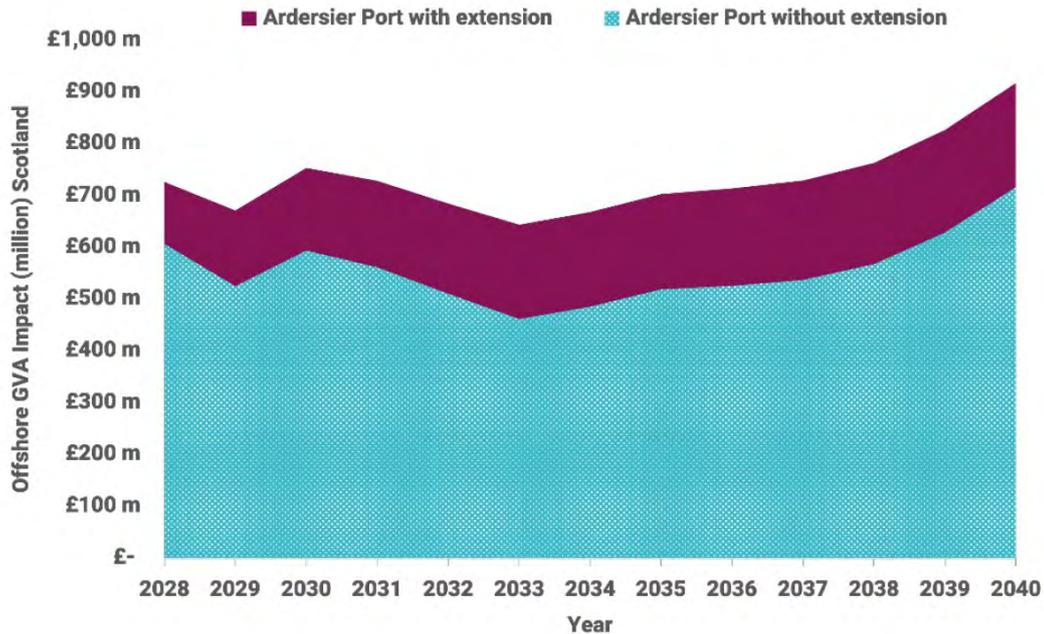
establishing facilities in the Green Freeport area. It is therefore a key component of the ICFGF, and its continued development is expected to play a significant role in delivering the substantial economic, social and energy-transition benefits anticipated from the Green Freeport.

- 7.19 The extension of Ardersier Port is expected to deliver significant support for the energy transition by strengthening Scotland's ability to assemble and deploy offshore wind at the scale required to achieve the net zero ambition. The applicant's submission details how a lack of suitable port space for marshalling, assembly, and manufacturing of large turbine components is one of the biggest bottlenecks to offshore wind development. The proposed development will deliver 80ha of additional operational land which will enable Ardersier ETF to become one of the largest facilities in Europe dedicated to offshore wind. The applicant has provided an estimate that, by 2040, approximately 8GW of additional floating offshore wind will be deployed in Scotland. Of this, around 6GW is expected to be associated with the Ardersier Port ETF.
- 7.20 National Development 3, as set out in NPF4, supports renewable electricity generation, repowering, and expansion of the electricity grid. This includes offshore wind developments that exceed 50MW. The proposed development is not National development itself but stands to make a significant contribution to the delivery of this National development for the reasons set out above.
- 7.21 The proposed development also stands to make a significant economic contribution at both construction and operational stages, with the application being supported by an Economic Impact Assessment. During the construction phase, activities are predicted to generate:
- £53.8 million Gross Value Added (GVA) and 464 years of employment in Moray and Highland;
 - £119.0 million GVA and 1,019 years of employment in Scotland; and
 - £284.9 million GVA and 2,662 years of employment in the UK.
- 7.22 During the operational phase, and excluding benefits associated with offshore wind sector, the extension of Ardersier Port is expected to deliver:
- 45.2 million GVA and 445 jobs in Moray and Highland;
 - £58.3 million GVA and 569 jobs in Scotland; and
 - £95.1 million GVA and 888 jobs across the UK.
- 7.23 As outlined above, the operational phase of the development will support the delivery of offshore wind projects from 2028/29 onwards. Scottish organisations are expected to secure contracts worth £16 billion with £4 billion being attributed to the extension of Ardersier Port.
- 7.24 Expenditure associated with Ardersier Port will drive economic activity which will support employment and generate GVA. This is expected to

increase throughout the 2030s such that, by 2040, the extended Ardersier Port is expected to generate:

- £720 million GVA and support c.800 jobs in Moray and Highland;
- £1.8 billion GVA and support c.2,000 jobs in Scotland; and
- £6.1 billion GVA and support c.7,100 jobs across the UK;

7.25 The below graph illustrates the Economic Impact Assessment’s evaluation of the effect that the extension of Ardersier Port will have on GVA associated with offshore wind development:



Source: BIGGAR Economics Analysis

7.26 The applicant predicts that employment at the site will increase from around 40 FTEs in 2026 to 2,510 by 2035, representing a significant increase in employment opportunities in the area. The Economic Impact Assessment recognises that the working population of Highland and Moray is forecasted to decrease by 10.6% between 2022 and 2043, a reduction of 21,670 people of working age. A key driver of depopulation in rural areas is the lack of high-quality employment opportunities which attract working age people and help to retain current residents as they enter the workforce. The extended Ardersier Port could become the largest site of private sector employment in the Highland and Moray region by the early 2030s. In so doing, it would make a meaningful contribution to reversing depopulation trends and supporting the sustainability of the regional economy.

Site Selection, Layout and Design

7.27 Large land areas are needed to fulfil the requirements of offshore wind projects and the supply chain businesses that play a part in assembling and building the equipment needed for offshore wind turbines. The availability of space at ports is recognised as a constraint to the future rollout of offshore wind. This application seeks to extend an existing port

which would create a larger working platform as required by the offshore wind industry.

- 7.28 The EIAR includes consideration of alternative locations for the proposed development. The application seeks to extend the existing port area to allow for activities which may include the import of materials, manufacturing, assembly and export. These activities on the extension area will require access to the deep-water quay. For this reason, separating the extension area from the main port area would create logistical challenges which the applicant advises would be likely to impact economic viability. It is accepted that there is a clear requirement for the extension to be connected and contiguous to the extant port area which limits the potential extension locations.
- 7.29 The application site adjoins sensitive natural heritage designations to the north, east and west. These include Whiteness Head SSSI, the Inner Moray Firth SPA and the Inner Moray Firth Ramsar site. The MoD has training areas and firing ranges to the south-west and there is a Noise Sensitive Receptor to the south. The EIAR considers these alternative locations for extension and concludes that the only viable location for a connected and contiguous extension to the extant port area is that covered by this planning application.
- 7.30 The design of the extended platform is required to be similar to the working platform already created, in terms of platform levels and finished surface materials, to ensure a continuous and coherent working space. Consequently, there is a limit to potential alternative designs that can be considered.
- 7.31 An indicative layout of the proposed development is provided at Figure 3.3 of the EIAR which indicatively zones areas of the port for different uses. These include the erection of blade and nacelle factories, the storage of turbine components, areas for the assembly of turbines, including the erection of a ring crane, and associated uses. For the purposes of assessment, the EIAR includes consideration of the erection of buildings (specified at up to 45m within the Historic Environment Chapter), wind turbine jackets at 110m, ring crane at 250m high at tallest configuration and would be lowered when not in use, and three turbines, at various stages of assembly, up to 330m high.
- 7.32 A range of mitigation measures are proposed to reduce the environmental impacts of the proposed development. Embedded mitigation measures relevant to the terrestrial planning application include the adoption of Highland Council's Guidance Note on the Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects and the offsite provision of 48.5ha of Scots pine as compensatory planting. In addition, the application includes mitigation measures relating to noise, landscape and visual effects, the historic environment, hydrology and hydrogeology, coastal processes and geomorphology, marine mammals, terrestrial ecology and ornithology. These include the installation of a noise bund to the south boundary, the retention of a 20m woodland buffer to the landward

boundary and maintaining appropriate buffers to relevant ecological and ornithological features.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- 7.33 A Landscape, Seascape, and Visual Impact Assessment (LSVIA) forms part of the EIAR and aims to enable the identification and assessment of the proposed development's likely significant effects on landscape, seascape and visual receptors.
- 7.34 The planning history of the site is relevant to the assessment of landscape, seascape and visual impacts. In particular, the extant planning permission (18/04552/PIP) permits the use of the existing port area as an ETF. The storage of wind farm components and the assembly of offshore wind turbines is covered by the extant permission. There is no explicit height limit on works carried out under the extant planning permission, or established within its EIA, subject to a requirement for consultation with Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd with regard to the safety of air traffic. As a consequence, works that would not require a further Matters Specified in Condition application (MSC) do not have a height restriction under the extant planning permission alone. It is recognised that the assembly of turbines of up to 330m, as indicated in the current proposal, could already take place on the established port area, subject to consultation with HIAL.
- 7.35 The LSVIA has been undertaken based on the indicative description of the proposed development at Chapter 3 (Project Description) of the EIAR. This includes blade storage, floating base storage and turbine integration. Floating bases are shown at 110m in height and a crane is shown at 250m in height. Fully assembled turbines are expected to be around 310m tall with a maximum envelope of 330m turbines having been adopted for the purposes of the EIAR.
- 7.36 Turbine assembly is expected to be a seasonal activity. The applicant anticipates that turbine assembly to maximum heights will only take place for 6-8 months per year. Some assembly may take place from February to a height of 168m, reflective of the height of the turbine tower sections without blades, but full turbine assembly is not expected to commence until March/April to avoid adverse winter weather conditions. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside at one time. These would be at various stages of integration with only two being fully assembled. "Cold" testing will take place at the quayside with blades rotating at a speed no greater than 1 rotation per minute (rpm). There would be no "hot" testing where blades spin at much higher speeds. The applicant's current maximum deployment assumption is one turbine towed every 10 days. The blades will be fixed during the tow-out process to the offshore arrays.
- 7.37 As this application is for planning permission in principle, detailed proposals for the extension areas have not been submitted at this point. The submitted indicative layout nevertheless suggests that its uses will include a floating base assembly factory and storage of 30m high floating

bases. A proposed turbine blades factory and blades storage straddles the existing and proposed port areas.

- 7.38 The Council's Landscape Officer advises that the approach of the LSVIA accords with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment 3rd Edition and is generally thorough.

Landscape and Seascape Effects

- 7.39 The application site falls within the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George Special Landscape Area (SLA). The proposed development is also across two Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and there is potential for the proposed development to directly impact these host LCTs. These are:

- 281 Beaches, Dunes and Links- Moray and Nairn; and
- 284 Coastal Farmlands- Moray and Nairn.

- 7.40 The LSVIA has overlaid the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) with LCT mapping to identify the LCT areas most likely to be subject to landscape impacts deriving from the proposed development. The following LCTs are included for assessment:

- 228 Rolling Farmland and Woodland;
- 343 Coastal Shelf;
- 345 Farmed and Forested Slopes – Ross and Cromarty;
- 346 Open Farmed Slopes; and
- 348 Cliffs and Rocky Coasts – Ross and Cromarty.

- 7.41 In addition, two seascape and coastal character types of Area 6 Moray Firth are included for assessment:

- Type 4: Outer Firth; and
- Type 11: Less Developed Inner Firths.

- 7.42 The Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George SLA encompasses some of the key landscape features of the Inner Moray Firth. It forms the gateway between the open coast and expansive waters of the Moray Firth and the intimate landscapes of the Cromarty and Inverness Firths. Its diverse coastal edge includes soft shingle bars and hard cliffs, developed and undeveloped land uses and distinctive coastal landforms, including Whiteness Spit. The SLA is assessed as being of High sensitivity.

- 7.43 There would be a direct alteration to land within the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George SLA with the removal of forestry, the introduction of buildings, and establishment of storage and assembly areas. The height of the under-assembly turbines, turbine components and buildings would be at substantial variance to the scale of the SLA landscape and seascape. The proposed development would be a defining feature of the SLA and would alter perceptions of the landscape and seascape within it. The proposal would compromise two of the three special qualities of the SLA which are “distinctive variety of coastal

scenery” and “expansive and containment”. The proposed development, overall, is anticipated to have a Major Adverse residual effect on the SLA which is considered Significant. It is nevertheless noted that these effects would largely relate to the existing port area and activities already consented there. The new effects of this application, primarily associated with the extension area, are not considered significant, given the lower anticipated height of development in these areas and their relationship to the established port.

- 7.44 The Beaches, Dunes and Links LCT (281) extends along the majority of the Moray and Nairn coastline. It is a large scale, mainly natural landscape dominated by coastal processes, with few sea defence structures and a low proportion of built coastal development. There are long distance views to the outer firth and the firth’s north coast which gives an increased perception of scale and the overriding horizontal landform.
- 7.45 The western extent of LCT 281 includes part of the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George Special Landscape Area (SLA), the overall LCT has a number of distinctive and valuable landscape components and includes a number of important ecological and recreational resources. The landscape is simple and open with low levels of tree cover and no large-scale or tall built form. The sensitivity of this LCT is therefore considered to be High.
- 7.46 The height of the overall proposed development would be at a substantial variance to the scale of the existing LCT 281 landscape. It would be significantly higher than any other built form in the area and will be visible along an extensive stretch of coast due to its open character. The turbines and crane will have a vertical nature at odds with the overriding horizontal landform. The proposed development would become a defining feature of LCT 281 close to the site. This would reduce at greater distances from the site however the proposed development will be visible along a significant stretch of coastline. The magnitude of the impact of the overall development on LCT 281 will be High resulting in a Major adverse effect which is considered to be Significant. These effects would primarily derive from the extant port area and its already approved activities however, with the proposed extensions being unlikely to add significantly to the overall effect given the lower expected height of development in those areas.
- 7.47 LCT 284 Coastal Farmlands – Moray and Nairn runs east-west between Inverness and Cullen. It lies on the coastal plain between the coastal shore and farms to the north and farmed and wooded foothills to the south. It is an expansive, open, flat to undulating coastal plain landscape with frequent small landforms. It is predominantly a simple agricultural landscape. The LSVIA assesses its Value and Susceptibility as both being Medium. The susceptibility of the LCT is nevertheless considered to be High-Medium given the type of development proposed against the limited to moderate levels of variety of landscape features and uses. The overall sensitivity of the LCT is considered to be High-Medium as a result.

- 7.48 The proposed development would be a prominent and noticeable feature within the LCT, being a defining feature close to the application site. The scale of the proposed development would significantly affect the coastal plain landscape and add to the occasional built elements within a relatively flat, open landscape. It will partially disrupt the expansive and open long-distance views. The LSVIA assesses the effect on this LCT as being Moderate adverse however this is considered to understate the effect. The effect of the proposed development on the LCT would be Major to Major-Moderate adverse and Significant. The effect of the proposed extension, and the expected development within it, is unlikely to add to the overall effect on this LCT however given the anticipated height of structures within the extant port area.
- 7.49 LCT 343 Coastal Shelf is located around the eastern perimeter of the area on the coastal edge at Rosemarkie, Morrich More, and the Dornoch Firth. It is a mainly natural coastal edge consisting of a variety of soft coastal features including dunes, wetlands, salt marshes, grasslands, raised beaches and beaches. There is a general absence of development with open views across the inner and outer Firths. Most of the LCT closest to the application site falls within the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George SLA. The LCT is considered to be of High sensitivity.
- 7.50 The part of LCT 343 closest to the application site is at Fortrose and Rosemarkie, to the opposite side of the Moray Firth, from where there would be direct views of the proposed development. The proposed development would constitute a substantial alteration to the setting of LCT 343 and would become a defining feature of the setting, forming a focal point on the horizon as viewed from the LCT. There would be a Major Adverse effect from the overall development on LCT 343 which would be Significant. Given the anticipated height of structures within the existing port area, the proposed extension, and any development likely to occur within it, is unlikely to result in any additional notable effects on this LCT.
- 7.51 LCT 345 Farmed and Forested Slopes – Ross and Cromarty exist in the northern Inner Moray Firth with a large tract covering the south side of the Black Isle. The LCT has a complex pattern of farmland, tree cover, forests and woodland on sloped, often terraced, land. There is an overall impression of a well-treed landscape but within which farming is the dominant land use. There are views from more open, terraced areas across lowlands or firths to hills or out to sea. The LCT is considered to be of Medium sensitivity.
- 7.52 The proposed development would be visible from south-facing slopes of LCT 345 from where it would be a notable addition to the setting, at odds with existing landscape features. It would become a focal point in views from the LCT. The overall impact of the development on the LCT is considered to be Moderate Adverse and Significant. It is noted, however, that these effects would predominantly relate to the existing port area and to activities already consented there. The additional effects arising from this application, mainly within the extension area, are unlikely to add to the

effects on this LCT due to the lower anticipated development heights and the approved activities within the established port.

- 7.53 LCT 348 Cliffs and Rocky Coasts- Ross and Cromarty occupies the majority of the southeast edge of the Black Isle and the headland from Nigg to west of Portmahomack. It is a rugged coastline of angular rocky cliffs and partially submerged rocky shores, interspersed with pebbly beaches and steeply eroded glacial till cliffs. It is considered to be of High sensitivity.
- 7.54 Open views across the Moray Firth are a key characteristic of LCT 348. The proposed development would constitute a notable alteration to the setting of LCT 348, forming a focal point on the opposite shoreline when viewed from the Black Isle in particular. The residual effect on the LCT is assessed as Moderate Adverse and Significant. As noted above, these effects would primarily arise from the existing port area, given the height of assembly and storage activities approved on the extant port area. Notable additional effects on the LCT from the extension areas, and anticipated buildings and activities within it, are unlikely.
- 7.55 Impacts on LCT 228 Rolling Farmland and Woodland and LCT 346 Open Farmed Slopes have both been assessed as being not significant. LCT 228 comprises a band of agricultural land and woodland to the west, south and east of Inverness. The woodland in particular reduces ZTV coverage in the LCT. It is assessed as having Medium sensitivity. The effect of the development on LCT 228 is assessed as being Minor Adverse and not Significant.
- 7.56 LCT 346 Open Farmed Slopes exists to the north and west of the Black Isle and around Nigg. It is assessed as having Medium Sensitivity. Much of the LCT will not have views of the proposed development however visibility will exist from its eastern extents. This area also has views of similar energy related developments in the Cromarty Firth. The residual effect is assessed as Minor Adverse and not Significant.
- 7.57 In terms of seascape impacts, the coastline of Type 4 Outer Firth of Area 6 Moray Firth is notably distinct and unusual including features such as the Sutors of Cromarty, Whiteness Head spit and Culbin Sand bars. Its western extent falls within the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George SLA. It is assessed as having High sensitivity. The proposed development would directly alter the area of Type 4 that is within the site boundary. The scale of the development proposed, including buildings, turbine assembly and component storage, would be at odds with the scale of Type 4 coastline features. The proposed development would become a defining feature of the Type 4 seascape character local to the site and will remain visible at greater distances. The impact of the overall development is assessed as Major Adverse and Significant. Whilst some effects on this coastline type from tree felling and the construction of buildings within the extension areas are likely, this is unlikely to add to the overall significance

of the effect given the scale of turbine assembly and storage activities approved within the extant port area.

- 7.58 Type 11 Less Developed Inner Firths of Area 6 Moray Firth is assessed as being of High sensitivity. Its eastern extent falls within the Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George SLA and the coastline includes notably distinct, unusual and valued coastal components. The proposed development would be clearly visible from Type 11 as far west as the Kessock Bridge. It would be a notable alteration to the setting of Type 11 and would form a focal point on the Moray Firth coast. The LSVIA assesses the proposed development as having a Moderate adverse and Significant effect on this seascape type however this is considered to understate the impact. The level of effect from the overall development is considered to be Major to Major-Moderate adverse and Significant. As noted elsewhere however, the height of turbine assembly activities and the storage of turbine components would be the main focal points with the extension areas and expected activities within them unlikely to add to the significance of the effect.
- 7.59 To summarise significant residual landscape and seascape effects associated with the entire site area are anticipated for the following receptors:
- Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George SLA;
 - LCT 281 Beaches, Dunes and Links – Moray and Nairn;
 - LCT 284 Coastal Farmlands – Moray and Nairn;
 - LCT 343 Coastal Shelf;
 - LCT 345 Farmed and Forested Slopes – Ross and Cromarty;
 - LCT 348 Cliffs and Rocky Coasts – Ross and Cromarty;
 - Area 6 Moray Firth Type 4 Outer Firth; and
 - Area 6 Moray Firth Type 11 Less Developed Inner Firths.
- 7.60 Critically, it should be noted that these findings of significant effects primarily relate to the tallest elements of the proposals, specifically the assembly of offshore wind turbines. These activities are required to take place adjacent to the quayside so would take place within the extant port area rather than within extension areas. As such, whilst the proposed extension increases the extent of the port, and is likely to accommodate both large buildings and the storage of large turbine components, the LSVIA concludes that, when viewed alongside turbine assembly activities, the landscape effects of extending the site would not be significant. The proposed lateral extension to the port is not therefore likely to give rise to any additional significant landscape effects over and above those already permitted by the ports extant planning permission, which is reflective of the site's industrial heritage.

Visual Effects

- 7.61 The LSVIA is supported by a viewpoint assessment which assesses the visual effects of the proposed development on visual receptors. These include views from residential properties, road users, cyclists and visitors to

attractions including historic sites and beaches. The viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate, and it is agreed that significant effects will be experienced at 16 of the 24 viewpoints (viewpoints 1-10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 21 and 24). It is considered that LSVIA underassesses the magnitude of change and level of effect at Viewpoints 3, 16, and 17 which would result in a higher significance of effect at these locations. Such significant visual effects are regarded not to be localised, extending across a vast area out to a distance of 18km. A summary of the applicant's assessment and officer appraisal of that assessment is included at Appendix 3.

- 7.62 There are scattered residential properties to the south of the application site with the nearest settlements being at Ardersier and Nairn. For the scattered residential properties closest to the site, existing plantation woodland will provide some screening. Nevertheless, the height of the proposed development, and the degree to which the under-assembly turbines and stored components would become prominent features across a large extent of skyline, suggest that Major adverse Significant effects to these properties are likely. These effects are likely to reduce to Moderate adverse, and still Significant, moving south away from the site. Significant effects are likely to remain until intervening vegetation, and the effects of distance, reduce the magnitude of change to low. These effects could already occur however given the extant permission that exists at the port. The additional effects associated with the current application, deriving from the port extension and anticipated buildings and activities within those areas, are unlikely to add to the significance of the effect on scattered residential properties.
- 7.63 The LSVIA also assesses Major adverse and Significant effects on residents in coastal settlements, including Rosemarkie and Nairn, with open views towards the application site. The level of effect would reduce with distance however would remain Moderate adverse and Significant until the proposed development is no longer a notable feature on the horizon. The LSVIA indicates that this would be to the north of Balintore and east of Findhorn. The new effects associated with this application, deriving from the extension areas and anticipated development within them, are unlikely to add to the significance of this effect given that they will be experienced alongside previously approved turbine assembly and storage activities within the extant port area.
- 7.64 The LSVIA, through its viewpoint analysis and discussion, assesses significant effects at visitor locations and recreational routes within proximity of the site and at coastal locations with open views across the Moray Firth to the application site. Major adverse effects would be experienced at the Nairn Secret Beach, Main Beach, Fort George, Chanonry Point, and the Black Isle coast looking south due to the large industrial scale of the development which would be inconsistent with the current visual baseline. In addition, users of Sustrans Route 1 and core paths in the area would also experience significant visual effects. As with other visual effects, significant effects could already occur within the extant area with turbine assembly and storage activities covered by the existing

permission. Consequently, the proposed extension is unlikely to add to the significance of these effects.

- 7.65 The LSVIA omits assessment of a number of long-distance tourist routes including the Highland Tourist Route, the John O’Groats Trail, the North Coast 500 and the Moray Firth Tourist Route. Of these, the Council’s Landscape Officer assesses significant effects on the John O’Groats Trail as it crosses the Kessock Bridge onto the Black Isle. At this distance, the effect would derive from the tallest elements of the development within the extant port area and would not be significantly added to by the proposed extensions and expected development within them.
- 7.66 Moderate adverse and Significant effects are predicted for users of road and rail routes through scenic areas within proximity of the site. This includes road users of the A96, B9039, and other minor roads to the south and vicinity of the site, A832 on the Black Isle and the Inverness – Aberdeen Railway Route. These effects would reduce at greater distances to become not significant at the point where the proposed development becomes more visually proportionate to local landscape features. The effects would not be significantly worsened, beyond the extant situation and works that can already take place, by the proposed extension and expected development at lower heights within them.

Cumulative Landscape, Seascape and Visual Effects

- 7.67 The LSVIA includes consideration of the potential for the proposed development to give rise to cumulative landscape, seascape, and visual effects in conjunction with other proposed developments in the vicinity. A 15km study area is used to identify sites with potential for cumulative effects. A mixed-use residential and recreational development at Delnies, between Nairn and the application site, and energy related port development at Invergordon Service Base are identified as requiring further consideration.
- 7.68 The mixed-use development at Delnies comprises the erection of housing, a hotel and golf course, amongst other things. It and the proposed development would be contiguous with each other, within the same landscape and seascape context and visible within some of the same viewpoints along the coast towards Nairn. Their contrasting typologies suggest that their visual effects and impacts on landscape and seascape would be distinctly different and so there would be no significant cumulative landscape, seascape or visual interaction or effect.
- 7.69 The Invergordon Service Base is of a similar nature however is located in a distinctly different landscape and seascape context due to Invergordon being within the Cromarty Firth to the north of the Black Isle. Similarly, opportunities for intervisibility are limited by the high ground of the Black Isle. The LSVIA concludes that there would be no significant cumulative landscape, seascape or visual effects between the proposed development and the development at Invergordon Service Base.

- 7.70 It is considered that the development is unlikely to give rise to significant cumulative effects.

Lighting Effects

- 7.71 Turbine assembly activities will require aviation lighting to ensure tall structures are visible during the hours of darkness. Aviation lighting can create a noticeable new source of illumination within a relatively dark coastal landscape. The lighting may draw the eye upwards and alter the night-time character of the area from predominantly low-level, dispersed lighting to one containing taller and more prominent illuminated structures. Its presence can erode the sense of darkness and tranquillity experienced from viewpoints and coastal settlements.
- 7.72 Lighting effects would be temporary however, with turbines being towed away from the site once completed and turbines not being assembled through the winter months. They would also be limited in number with only three turbines being constructed at one time and no more than two being assembled to full height. It is recommended that a condition be added to any grant of permission requiring an aviation lighting scheme to ensure best practice measures are followed. Subject to this condition, significant effects on landscape character or visual amenity are not anticipated.

Landscape and Visual Effects Conclusion

- 7.73 Although a large number of significant landscape visual effects have been identified, these are predominantly associated with the largest components of the proposed development, particularly the assembly of offshore wind turbines and the storage of turbine components. It should be noted that these activities can already be carried out within the existing port area under the extant permission, and these cannot therefore be regarded as being attributable to the port's proposed lateral extension.
- 7.74 The current application includes an extension to the port area, however, the assembly of turbines requires a quayside location and so the tallest elements of the proposal are unlikely to make use of the extension area. The extension area is instead anticipated to accommodate buildings and the storage of floating bases that are 30m high. Whilst these are likely to be large structures in their own right, the LSVIA concludes that the extension of the port area, in terms of visual effects, would not be significant when viewed alongside extant port activities. It is also important to recognise that the assessed visual effects are regarded to be a maximum envelope, thereby allowing for technological changes and the ability to respond to future market conditions.
- 7.75 Although the proposal to extend the port laterally is not therefore considered essential to the development of offshore turbine assembly at the port, the increased footprint would provide greater operating and storage capacity, and in turn result in a degree of intensification of port related terrestrial and marine activity. The applicant has sought approval from Scottish Ministers, under the HRO, for construction of a 130m x 120m integration pocket which effectively extends the length of the quay wall and

is shown on the proposed drawings that accompany this application. The resultant in combination landscape and visual effects of the totality of this proposal, must therefore be as apparent as the benefits this industrial development can bring to the region in terms of future growth and its socio-economic impact, as well as in terms of the sites contribution toward achieving net zero.

Natural Heritage (including Ornithology)

Designated Sites

- 7.76 The application site is adjacent to the following designated sites:
- A) Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar;
 - B) Moray Firth SPA;
 - C) Moray Firth SAC; and
 - D) Whiteness Head SSSI.
- 7.77 Additionally, the application site is within influence distance of the following potentially effected more distant sites:
- E) Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC
 - F) River Moriston SAC;
 - G) Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar.
- 7.78 As the proposed development has the potential to affect European Sites, the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') apply. Consequently, the Council is required to consider the effects of the proposal on the European Sites before the proposal can be consented (commonly known as Habitats Regulations Appraisal).
- 7.79 **A) The Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar** site are protected for their internationally important non-breeding populations of divers, grebes, sea ducks and shags. In addition, the Ramsar site is designated for its intertidal mudflats and sandflats, saltmarsh, sand dune and shingle habitats. The Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar site are within the broad zone of influence of the proposed works but the EIA states that there is no direct hydrological pathway that would result in waterborne pollution affecting the protected features. The proximity of the site means that construction or operational impacts such as noise, vessel movements, or changes in sediment dynamics, could directly affect the designated site's ornithological features, particularly foraging or roosting birds.
- 7.80 NatureScot advises that there is likely to be a significant effect on the Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar site and so an appropriate assessment is required. This forms Appendix 4 of this report and concludes that the proposed development would not adversely affect the integrity of either the SPA or Ramsar site. This is subject to compliance with mitigation measures identified within the EIAR including construction phase mitigation measures, a Turbine Towing Protocol (TTP), no "hot-testing" of turbines at the port, and the implementation of best-practice pollution controls. Subject

to these measures being secured by condition, NatureScot advises that the proposed development would not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA or Ramsar site.

- 7.81 For the Inner Moray Firth Ramsar sandflat feature, NatureScot however advises that there is not enough information available within the proposal documents to assess the impacts of the operational aspects of the proposal. NatureScot also acknowledge that the current application is for planning permission in principle and are therefore content for potential impacts on the sandflat feature to be assessed under a future Marine Licence application. This is because NatureScot only identify risks to the sandflat feature from operational vessel movements after dredging activity has taken place. The proposed dredging activity will require a Marine Licence through which the Habitats Regulations are required to be satisfied. Owing to the interdependence of these two consents the Council considers it imperative that a negative suspensive planning condition be imposed on any forthcoming planning permission, restricting the commencement of any post construction port related operational activity within the proposed extension area until such a Marine License is obtained, with the overall project's impacts on the Ramsar sandflat feature therefore being assessed by the Marine Directorate as the competent authority for the license. The inclusion of this suspensive condition is reflected in the appended appropriate assessment.
- 7.82 **B) The Moray Firth SPA** lies approximately 730 metres north of the site and falls within the broad zone of influence of the proposed works, with a direct hydrological pathway also present that could give rise to waterborne pollution and disturbance, including noise, affecting foraging or roosting SPA bird species. NatureScot has advised that the development is likely to have a significant effect on SPA waterbirds, requiring an appropriate assessment to consider potential impacts on the site's conservation objectives. To minimise potential effects, the applicant proposes scheduling high-disturbance works outside peak non-breeding periods where possible, and where seasonal constraints cannot be avoided, a suitably qualified ornithologist will be present to advise on and implement additional mitigation. Further measures include the application of a Turbine Towing Protocol (TTP) to reduce displacement pressures during towing operations, the use of visual and noise screening such as maintaining an existing 3 metre bund to limit wader disturbance, and the implementation of appropriate pollution controls. NatureScot has confirmed that, subject to securing the TTP by planning condition, the development will not adversely affect the integrity of the Moray Firth SPA. Given that the TTP relates to the overall operation of the site for port-related energy activities rather than solely marine works, it is considered relevant and appropriate to impose as a planning condition. The appropriate assessment, appended to this report, therefore concludes that subject to the imposition and compliance with the aforementioned mitigation measures the proposed development would not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA.

- 7.83 **C) The Moray Firth SAC** is also adjacent to the site and is protected for its bottlenose dolphin and sandbank habitat. NatureScot advises that marine works, dredging, sea disposal and operation are likely to have a significant effect on bottlenose dolphin. Whilst the marine works, dredging, and sea disposal will be covered by a marine licence, for which the Council would not be the competent authority, they form part of the overall project. In addition, the operational impacts of the development flow from the overall use of the site as an ETF so do require to be assessed by the Council. An appropriate assessment is appended to this report and concludes that, with adherence to mitigation measures, the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC.
- 7.84 **D) Whiteness Head SSSI** is a shingle spit forming the northeast side of the harbour area. It is protected for its populations of non-breeding bar-tailed godwit and knot, as well as its saltmarsh, sand dunes, sandflats and shingle habitats. These features are also protected under the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar site so do not require to be assessed again.
- 7.85 **E) Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC** is protected for a range of coastal and marine habitats, as well as harbour seal and otter. There is a designated harbour seal haul-out site nearby which is within connectivity distance to the SAC. NatureScot advises that the proposed development is likely to have a significant effect on harbour seal associated with the SAC. Consequently, an appropriate assessment is required. Adverse impacts on the remaining protected features are not anticipated. The application is supported by a Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan which includes the use of a marine mammal observer to monitor a 500m buffer zone during noisy construction activities. It is noted that vessel movements associated with the development will be slow and will use established vessel routes, to which harbour seals that use the area will be accustomed. Subject to the Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan being implemented, NatureScot advises that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC. The Council's appropriate assessment is appended to this report.
- 7.86 **F) The River Moriston SAC** - The entrance to Ardersier Port's harbour lies at the mouth of the Inverness Firth which is used by Atlantic salmon migrating to the River Moriston SAC. The SAC lies approximately 60km from the entrance to the Inverness Firth, which is approximately 4km wide at the harbour entrance. The main smolt running period is mid-April to mid-May, which is during the intended dredging window. However, the expansive width of the estuary (during high tides) should ensure free passage to smolts. Consequently, NatureScot advise that there is unlikely to be significant effects on the River Moriston SAC and so an appropriate assessment is not required.
- 7.87 **G) Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar** - The EIA and NatureScot's consultation response includes consideration of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar site, protected for red-breasted merganser, other waterfowl, osprey and all coastal/intertidal habitats. Potential impacts on

these designated sites derive from barge movements between dredging activities and the disposal site. As these works will be covered by Marine Licensing, for which the Council is not the competent authority, the Council is not required to carry out an appropriate assessment for the SPA and Ramsar site. NatureScot nevertheless advise that there will be no likely significant effect on the SPA or Ramsar site. This is due to an appropriate dredge window being selected, the fact that most SPA waterfowl are intertidal species so are unlikely to use waters along the barge route and the distance between the barge route and the coast/Ramsar habitats. Consequently, the impacts of the proposal on the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar site are considered acceptable.

Ornithology

- 7.88 EIA Chapter 13 Ornithology aims to enable the identification and assessment of likely significant effects on ornithology. Baseline conditions were established through a combination of a desk study and field surveys. This identified the following groups as receptors requiring further consideration:
- Breeding birds (42 species, including 10 red/amber listed and 3 United Kingdom Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) priority species);
 - Raptors (Schedule 1 species, field survey information included in Confidential EIA Appendix 13.7);
 - Pinewood birds (2 Schedule 1 species, 1 red listed species, and 3 amber listed species); and
 - Waders (SPA and SSSI features).
- 7.89 The wader species are all qualifying features of either the Moray Firth SPA, Inner Moray Firth SPA, or the Whiteness Head SSSI. These species have been assessed in this capacity in the preceding section and so are not considered further here.
- 7.90 The EIA identifies the potential for disturbance during the construction phase through visual and noise disturbance associated with construction plant, personnel and temporary lighting. These impacts could apply to breeding birds, raptors, and pinewood birds.
- 7.91 In addition, further direct and indirect impacts on the scoped-in groups of birds are possible. For breeding birds, the clearance of woodland, scrub, and grassland will result in the direct loss of habitat for a diverse assemblage of breeding birds. Indirect impacts on breeding birds include disturbance from increased noise, lighting and human activity. As a result, bird populations could become fragmented. These impacts are likely to be significant at the county/regional level for red/amber-listed species and UKBAP species if not mitigated.
- 7.92 For raptors, felling of woodland or disturbance near nest sites may destroy active nests or cause breeding failure. Increased human disturbance, noise and lighting, together with edge effects and fragmentation, could cause indirect effects. Again, these impacts are likely to be significant at the county/national level for schedule 1 species if not mitigated.

- 7.93 For pinewood birds, the loss or degradation of pinewood habitat will affect specialist species and have limited alternative habitat locally. Increased edge effects, disturbance and fragmentation may reduce breeding success and long-term viability of pinewood bird populations. These impacts are likely to be significant at the local level if not mitigated.
- 7.94 At the operational stage, no further habitat clearance is required however ongoing disturbance may cause an indirect impact. Loss of mature woodland and scrub may have long-term effects on population viability for woodland and pinewood specialists, unless compensatory planting and habitat management are successful.
- 7.95 The application is supported by an Outline Construction Environmental Management Document (CEMD) which incorporates the EIAR's Schedule of Mitigation. This includes the following mitigation measures relevant to all ornithological receptors:
- Adoption of Bird Protection Plan, Lighting Plan, Traffic Management Plan, and Raptor Plan;
 - Delivery of toolbox talks covering legal protections, buffers, lighting controls, traffic discipline, stop-work triggers and reporting lines;
 - Training records, daily briefings, permit-to-work conditions and spot-checks;
 - Monitoring and reporting, including corrective action tracker; and
 - Operational protocol for tall lifts to avoid collisions, avoiding prolonged static positions intersecting common flight bands, apply weather/tide-aware lift scheduling.
- 7.96 Mitigation measures specific to breeding birds comprises carrying out pre-works nesting bird checks within 48 hours of clearance works commencing within the bird breeding season, with buffers implemented and works paused until fledging if active nests found. In relation to raptors, mitigation comprises survey and mapping active nests, implementing species specific exclusion buffers and only obtaining a NatureScot licence if impacts are unavoidable. Specialist ornithological supervision and reporting will also be employed. For pinewood species, proposed mitigation comprises habitat management within retained areas of Scots pine plantation, creation of standing deadwood and phasing works to avoid breeding activity.
- 7.97 The Ornithology Chapter proposes artificial nest sites where practicable and if required as a compensatory measure. The EIAR concludes that, subject to the implementation of the identified mitigation and compensation measures, the residual effects on breeding birds, pinewood birds and raptors will not be significant. The Council's Ecologist raises no objection subject to the pre-construction surveys, a raptor survey and the protection of nesting birds, with these matters to be secured by condition.
- 7.98 In terms of impacts on birds, the proposed development includes appropriate measures to mitigate its potential impacts. These measures, outlined above, can be secured by condition.

Protected Species

- 7.99 The EIA identifies the following protected and notable species as environmental receptors for the site:
- Badger (Protection of Badgers Act 1992)– field survey information provided in Confidential EIAR Appendix 12.6;
 - Otter (European Protected Species [EPS]) – suitable habitat present, but no signs of activity recorded;
 - Water vole (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981)– suitable habitat, but no signs. Predators present and no historic records within 1km;
 - Pine marten (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981) – presence confirmed by scat and camera traps, no dens found but suitable denning features present;
 - Red squirrel (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981)– 36 dreys (34 active, 2 inactive), good habitat connectivity, healthy population confirmed;
 - Bats (EPS)– Potential roost features in trees, no tree roosts, two building roosts, multiple species recorded;
 - Great Crested Newt (EPS) and common amphibians – 7 ponds surveyed and no GCN eDNA found, poor habitat suitability, historic records nearby;
 - Reptiles – 10 common lizards, small and fragmented population; and
 - Invasive species – no Invasive Non-native Species (INNS) observed within the site.
- 7.100 Badgers could be impacted by damage to or the destruction of setts, disturbance, displacement and increased road mortality. Avoidance and mitigation measures are proposed including the preparation of a Species Protection Plan (SPP), appropriately timed repeat surveys and the appointment of an EnvCoW. If the destruction of setts is required, an artificial sett will be created, the existing sett will be closed under licence from NatureScot, and badgers will be led to the artificial sett by pre-feeding. These works would only be carried out between 1 July to 30 November. It is considered likely that a licence would be granted for the interference with a badger sett described. Subject to the avoidance and mitigation measures identified, the EIAR concludes that residual effects on badgers are not likely to be significant.
- 7.101 Otters may be impacted by damage to or destruction of holts, disturbance, displacement and increased road mortality. As avoidance and mitigation measures, the EIAR specifies that an otter SPP will be prepared, appropriately timed pre-construction surveys will be carried out, and toolbox talks will be delivered. The EnvCoW will monitor the site for fresh signs of otter. If a holt or resting place is identified and is likely to be affected, a NatureScot licence will be required, and it is again considered likely that the EPS licence tests can be met. Subject to these measures being implemented, residual effects on otters are not expected to be significant.

- 7.102 Pine marten could be impacted by damage to or destruction of dens, disturbance, displacement and increased road mortality. Avoidance and mitigation measures include the implementation of a pine marten SPP, appropriately timed pre-construction surveys, maintaining suitable buffers around dens and complying with seasonal constraints. If seasonal constraints cannot be complied with, a NatureScot licence will be required, and it is considered likely that the relevant tests can be met. It is also proposed to phase/stagger felling to encourage dispersal of the population and to place artificial dens within quiet areas of connected woodland. Residual effects on pine marten are expected to be Minor adverse.
- 7.103 Red squirrel could be directly impacted by the loss of nesting and foraging habitat through felling of Scots pine and mixed woodland on site. Further impacts could derive from the loss of active dreys, loss of habitat connectivity, and increased disturbance from human activity. The EIAR notes that, without mitigation, the proposed development would result in local population decline, potential displacement of individuals into suboptimal or already occupied habitats and a potential breach of legal protections given red squirrel protection exists under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Consequently, avoidance and mitigation measures are proposed. These include preparing a red squirrel SPP, phasing/staggering felling operations to encourage dispersal and installing artificial drey boxes in retained and compensation woodlands. So far as possible, felling will be scheduled to take place outwith February to September and an EnvCoW will be appointed to advise on avoidance and licencing. If seasonal constraints cannot be met, a NatureScot licence will be required. Trees will also be maintained around the landward perimeter of the site to provide connection to adjacent woodland.
- 7.104 Following consultation with the Council's Ecology Officer, it is recommended that the proposed planting along the site access road be enhanced with additional trees and bushes to form a nature corridor which will help connect the woodland habitat to be lost with existing woodland within the wider area. In addition, supplementary feeding is to be carried out within the proposed 20 metre-wide woodland buffer. The applicant has confirmed agreement to these additional measures. It is considered that a licence for the removal of red squirrel dreys is likely to be granted. Subject to the avoidance and mitigation measures identified, the residual effect on red squirrel is assessed as being Minor adverse.
- 7.105 Felling operations, demolition of buildings and increased activity within proximity to a confirmed roost could all impact on bats. The EIAR specifies that a Bat SPP will be prepared and, where possible, works will be scheduled to take place outwith occupancy periods. If seasonal avoidance cannot be achieved, a NatureScot licence will need to be obtained. Licences will also be required for works that result in the loss of roosts, including the demolition of buildings at Juniper Cottage. These demolition works will be carried out under licence to first exclude bats and then carry out a supervised demolition. Compensatory roosts will be installed in advance of demolition works and a purpose-built bat roost will be installed

to support maternity capability. It is also proposed that toolbox talks be delivered, emergency stop-work procedures be implemented and repeat surveys be carried out as necessary, amongst other mitigation. It is considered that a NatureScot licence for the proposed works is likely to be granted. Subject to these measures being implemented, the EIAR assesses no significant effect on bats.

- 7.106 Potential impacts on reptiles derive from habitat clearance which could lead to direct mortality, disturbance or fragmentation of habitat. It is proposed that a Reptile SPP be produced, toolbox talks be delivered, and relocation of reptiles to suitable retained habitat be carried out. Refugia, which are spots that provide shelter, protection of favourable basking conditions, will be dismantled by hand to avoid direct mortality. Subject to these measures being implemented, the EIAR assesses a Minor adverse effect.
- 7.107 The EIAR assesses all effects on protected species during the operational phase as being not significant, subject to the implementation of avoidance and mitigation measures. These include implementing SPPs, implementing species specific measures such as a bat barn and artificial dreys, implementing lighting controls, and traffic management measures to reduce wildlife collisions.
- 7.108 In terms of impacts on protected species, the Council's Ecologist raises no objection subject to conditions requiring species protection plans, a habitat management plan, a Construction Environmental Management Plan, and pre-construction surveys.
- 7.109 In summary, the EIAR concludes no likely significant effects on all terrestrial protected species. The greatest effects are predicted for pine marten, red squirrel and reptiles which are assessed as being Minor Adverse effects and not significant. Subject to the full implementation of the proposed avoidance and mitigation measures, the proposed development is not predicted to result in any significant residual adverse effects.

Biodiversity

- 7.110 Development proposals are required to deliver biodiversity enhancement in order to demonstrate compliance with NPF4 Policy 3. Whilst developers may choose to make use of a biodiversity metric, there is no requirement to do so in Scotland. In this case, it was agreed at Scoping stage that a qualitative rather than quantitative approach would be acceptable, in part due to the difficulties in quantifying some of the enhancement measures proposed. Works to establish the extant port area have already been completed and so additional impacts on biodiversity are primarily anticipated within the extension area.
- 7.111 The application is supported by a UKHab survey which identifies habitats within the extension area. The largest areas of the site to be cleared contain Scots pine woodland, wet heathland, mixed scrub and upland birch

woods. The site supports the following Annex 1 habitats which are also identified as Priority Habitats in the Scottish Biodiversity List (SBL):

- Dry heaths; lowland (h1a5);
- Acid peat-stained lakes and ponds (r1c7); and
- Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath; lowland (h1a7).

7.112 In addition to the above habitats, the following are also identified as Priority Habitats in the SBL:

- Lowland dry acid grassland (g1a);
- Upland birchwood (w1e); and
- Other lowland acid grassland (g1d).

7.113 Upland birchwood is also listed in the Highland Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The EIAR details how loss of habitat will be avoided where possible by retaining habitat margins and boundary features wherever practicable. The EIAR specifies 7 biodiversity enhancement measures:

- Planting for pollinators - 2km of verge side vegetation along the port access road will be enhanced to benefit pollinators by seeding, planting native trees and shrubs, and vegetation management;
- Invertebrates and brownfield plants - creation of “butterfly and bee banks”;
- Island extension (bird roosting and nesting area) - expansion of an island created by dredging activity to provide additional nesting and roosting space for seabirds, waders, and sea ducks;
- Wader and wetland biodiversity - reconnecting a lagoon by removing part of an artificial bund, creation of islands and pools to encourage use by SPA species;
- Whiteness Head SSSI vegetation management - removal of approximately 90% of gorse and reduce rosebay willowherb, both identified by NatureScot as being negative pressures on the SSSI;
- Wetland creation - creation of a permanent waterbody and a network of ephemeral pools within a 2ha area; and
- Woodland enhancement - a 20m strip of woodland is to be retained along the landward side of the site boundary which is presently Scots pine plantation; native broadleaf species will be introduced; deadwood created and selective felling carried out.

7.114 The proposed development is expected to deliver significant biodiversity enhancement onsite. A Habitat Management Plan condition is recommended to be added to any grant of planning permission, as well as a condition requiring submission of GIS shapefiles of the compensation and enhancement areas to ensure the measures are appropriately implemented and maintained for the lifetime of the development.

Forestry, Woodland and Trees

7.115 The proposed development includes the removal of mature Scot’s pine plantation woodland. The timber industry is important to the Highlands and in accordance with the Scottish Government’s Control of Woodland

Removal Policy (CoWRP), compensatory planting is usually required for any loss of productive commercial forestry. In terms of compliance with the CoWRP, it is recognised that the proposed development is expected to play a key role in “helping Scotland mitigate or adapt to climate change” through facilitating offshore wind developments. Such developments are considered acceptable for woodland removal provided compensatory planting is provided.

- 7.116 The developer has provided details of a compensatory planting scheme which will provide 50.6ha of commercial forestry on land near Tain. The applicant has submitted a Woodland Removal/Compensation Planting Comparison Report which assesses the quality of the existing and proposed areas of forestry using criteria including soil types, drainage and climate. That report states that commercial plantation loss at the application site comprises 48.6ha of mature Scot’s pine. It is situated on land identified within the Scottish Forestry Map Viewer as being Class F5 “Limited flexibility for growth and management of tree crops.” It has deep loamy sand soils with good drainage and flat topography. The crop is expected to be Yield Class 10-12. Forestry access is through a network of existing tracks or through the port area.
- 7.117 The Forestry Officer advises that there are areas of proposed woodland removal that have not been shown on the Woodland Removal Plan. The Forestry Officer has estimated the area of productive conifer to be lost would be 56.1ha, based on the Indicative Site Layout drawing (25-22 -MRH-006) and National Forest Inventory Scotland 2021 mapping. It is recognised that this figure is greater than the figure provided by the applicant. In order to ensure that the proposed compensatory planting is sufficient to compensate for the proposed woodland loss, it is recommended that the Compensatory Planting Plan be based on an updated Woodland Removals Plan first agreed with the Planning Authority.
- 7.118 The currently proposed compensatory planting covers 50.6ha and comprises a mix of Scot’s pine and Corsican pine. The site also has deep loam sandy soils with generally good drainage. The site is identified within the Scottish Forestry Map Viewer as being Class F2 “very good flexibility for growth and management of tree crops.” It has a good network of public roads and existing accesses associated with a disused air base. As noted above, the area of Compensatory Planting currently proposed may not be sufficient so is subject to review through the proposed Compensatory Planting condition.
- 7.119 The Woodland Removal/Compensation Planting Comparison Report concludes that the compensatory planting scheme replaces an equivalent area of woodland, is located on land of higher forestry suitability, offers improved access for long-term management, and is expected to deliver equal or enhanced productivity. While the loss of woodland within the application site is acknowledged, the compensatory planting scheme ensures no overall loss in woodland area, and an improvement in quality,

and resilience, aligning with sustainable development principles and forestry policy objectives.

- 7.120 The EIAR does not contain a Forestry chapter with the relevant information being provided within Chapter 12 Terrestrial Ecology, its appendices and other supporting documents, including the Woodland Removal/Compensation Planting Comparison Report. The Council's Forestry Officer now raises no objection to the planning application. Whilst it is recognised that the proposed woodland removal covers a large area, the woodland is of a type that can be supported under the CoWRP and suitable compensatory planting is proposed. It is understood that the woodland at the application site is approaching the time at which it would be harvested. The situation is therefore that commercial forestry at the application site is being removed around the time it was expected to be harvested and it is being compensated for with commercial forestry of equal or greater value. It is considered that sufficient information has been submitted to be clear that there are no net significant effects in forestry terms, and that the removal of forestry is otherwise acceptable in planning terms.
- 7.121 Subject to conditions to secure a Tree Protection Plan and a Compensatory Planting Plan, the proposed development will have an acceptable impact on forestry, woodland and trees.

Noise, Vibration and Dust

- 7.122 The construction phase comprises felling a Scots pine plantation, land raising, and the creation of a level hardstanding, among other ancillary works. These works have the potential to cause temporary impacts to residential amenity arising from construction traffic, noise, vibration and dust. The application is supported by an EIAR chapter on Airborne Noise and Groundborne Vibration. The chapter identifies Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSRs) in the vicinity of the application site, identifies their level of sensitivity, establishes baseline noise levels at the NSRs, assesses potential noise impacts associated with the development, determines design noise limits for external fixed plant, recommends noise mitigation measures and then assesses residual effects.
- 7.123 Four Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSRs) with potential to be impacted by the proposed development are identified. Two of these are now within the control of the applicant, are uninhabited and stand to be demolished as part of the current proposals. The remaining NSRS are:
- NSR-A: Residential property (wellness centre) 190m from site boundary, and
 - NSR-D: Residential property 860m from the site boundary.
- 7.124 The EIAR Chapter states that it was not possible to undertake a baseline noise survey due to construction works taking place within the extant port area. It considers that it would not be appropriate to use the survey data which informed the 2013 permission due to the age of the data. A baseline

noise level was therefore measured at a point where minimal works were taking place at Ardersier Port but prior to major construction works taking place. The resulting LAeq,T (dB) baseline noise levels used in the assessment are:

- Weekday daytime- 51dB
- Weekday nighttime- 49dB
- Weekend daytime- 48dB
- Weekend nighttime- 47.5dB

7.125 The Council's Environmental Health Officer (EHO) notes that baseline noise levels used in the current Noise Impact Assessment are significantly higher than those recorded in 2013:

- 2013 Daytime 30-33dB LA90; Night time 28-30dB LA90
- 2024 Daytime 42-47dB LA90; Night time 43-47dB LA90

7.126 The applicant responded to the EHO's concerns to note that it is not standard practice to use dated baseline noise levels due to potential changes in the interim. The response points towards increased noise emissions from Inverness Airport as one reason for the increase. Further assessment is provided based on data from the period before construction tasks are known to have occurred at the site, although it is acknowledged that some other low-level activities were taking place at the site. This response concludes that the applicant believes the baseline noise levels presented in the EIAR are representative of noise conditions at the site.

7.127 Environmental Health subsequently carried out background noise measurements at a location approximately 130m SE of NSR-A. Monitoring was undertaken between 1045 and 1230 hours and between 1345 and 1450 hours. It is recognised that this is a short-term measurement which only provides a snapshot of the background sound environment. Nevertheless, the results indicated that background noise levels were 27-28dB which is substantially lower than the figures reported in the EIAR and corresponds more closely with the 2013 measurements.

Construction Impacts

7.128 In terms of vibration impacts during construction, the distance between the nearest receptor and the closest works area that could generate vibration is greater than 100m. Consequently, the EIAR considers that no vibration impacts due to construction works will occur at the nearest receptors.

7.129 The EIAR makes use of the BS 5228-1 methodology to predict noise levels associated with construction activities. The predicted impact assumes the shortest distance between work areas and NSRs so represents a worst-case scenario. Some 162 work activities were considered in the chapter with 158 having negligible impacts on NSRs and 4 having Minor Adverse effects. The Minor Adverse effects were all caused by vegetation/tree clearance within the west extension area. These effects would occur during daytime due to no construction work taking place at nighttime. The EIAR

chapter recommends no specific mitigation measures beyond best practicable means as a result.

- 7.130 In addition to construction works on-site, the EIAR chapter includes consideration of construction traffic moving materials to and from the site by road. The EIAR anticipates the addition of a condition requiring a Traffic Management Plan to any grant of planning permission. The current application does not include changes to the existing access route into the site. As there are significant separation distances between the access route and NSRs, effects from construction traffic are considered to be negligible.
- 7.131 In terms of construction impacts, the EHO raises no objection to the application subject to a condition requiring a Construction Noise Mitigation Scheme as part of a Construction Environmental Management Document.

Operational Impacts

- 7.132 EIAR Chapter 6, Airborne Noise and Groundborne Vibration, includes an assessment of operational noise and vibration impacts. Predicted noise levels have been calculated based on the indicative site layout and guidance presented in BS 4142 and the Assessment of Noise Technical Advice Note. The noise model includes predicted sound levels from the use of cranes, the movements of vehicles including forklifts, and noise emanating from workshops. Noise levels were calculated at the NSRs for a worst-case scenario assuming all noise sources being operational simultaneously. There is presently no restriction on operating hours at the site, although a condition requiring a noise assessment to demonstrate that an acceptable noise environment for NSRs can be achieved does exist. On this basis, the same noise levels were used for assessing daytime and nighttime impacts.
- 7.133 The Airborne Noise and Groundborne Vibration Chapter uses the noise model to calculate noise levels at the NSRs. An acoustic character correction is then applied to produce a rating noise level. The rating noise level is then subtracted from the background noise level to calculate the following differences:
- NSR-A: 8.6dB daytime, 9.6dB nighttime
 - NSR-D: 1.2dB daytime, 2.2dB nighttime.
- 7.134 The EIAR concludes that there would be a Minor adverse effect on NSR-A and a negligible effect on NSR-D. As outlined above however, the background noise levels used in the EIAR are not agreed due to their significant increase over 2013 levels and their variance with the EHO's on-site measurements. It is therefore likely that baseline noise levels are lower than those reported, meaning that the difference in noise levels would be greater and therefore the magnitude of impact on NSRs would be larger than reported in the EIAR. Notwithstanding the EIAR Chapter's conclusion of no significant effect, it is considered possible that the operational phase

of the development could lead to significant impacts on NSRs, particularly NSR-A due to its proximity to the extension area.

7.135 It is recognised that the current noise assessment uses predicted noise levels based on an assumed layout due to the operations of future users of the site not being precisely known at this point. The Council's EHO recognises that there is no way of accurately predicting or assessing the noise impact until such time as this information is available. So, whilst the current indicative noise assessment does not demonstrate acceptable noise impacts can be achieved, Environmental Health are content to raise no objection on the basis that conditions are added which impose a noise limit of 5dB above baseline noise levels at NSRs and which require submission of a noise impact assessment prior to the occupation of any part of the development site. This would allow development of specific areas of the site to proceed subject to bespoke noise mitigation measures based on the more precisely known noise impacts of the development at that point. Subject to these conditions, no significant effects from operational noise at the site are anticipated.

Roads, Transport and Access

7.136 Vehicular access to the site is taken from the B9092 to the southeast of the site. This access is linked by public road to the A96 trunk road 900m further south. Upgrades to the B9092 and A96, including the construction of two roundabouts, have been carried out as required by the extant planning permission. There are no alterations to the site access proposed which therefore remains acceptable, having already been designed and enhanced to accommodate port-related vehicle movements.

7.137 The applicant has stated that traffic levels will remain broadly similar to those considered under the consented permission of 2018. The impacts of those traffic levels on the public road network have already been mitigated for by the aforementioned road improvement works carried out under the extant permission. The Council's Transport Planning Team raises no objection to proposed traffic levels on this basis.

7.138 Transport Scotland notes the applicant's assertions about traffic levels being similar to those previously assessed and raise no objection to the application subject to conditions requiring a Transport Statement for each phase or sub-phase of development, a Construction Traffic Management Plan for each phase or sub-phase, and a site-wide Travel Plan with each phase or sub-phase.

7.139 The application is supported by a Travel Plan which aims to reduce vehicle movement numbers by reducing reliance on the private car. Measures to encourage cycling are included as well as proposals relating to the provision of a bus service to the site. It is recommended that the implementation of a Travel Plan, updated alongside each future phase of development, be required by planning condition.

- 7.140 In terms of wider recreational access, it is recognised that the currently approved Access Management Plan will require updating to incorporate opportunities for improved recreational and active-travel routes. This should include consideration of the facilitation of enhanced connections to and from the site, particularly in light of anticipated residential development at Ardersier and to the west of Nairn. The Council's Access Officer raises no objection to the application subject to a condition requiring a revised Access Management Plan.
- 7.141 The proposed development is not expected to have significant effects with regard to roads, transport and wider recreational access.

Water, Flood Risk, Drainage and Soils

- 7.142 EIAR Chapter 9 Hydrology and Hydrogeology intends to enable the identification and assessment of likely significant effects on hydrology, flooding, drainage, soils, hydrogeology and water quality. The chapter is informed by a desk-based study and field investigations to establish baseline conditions including reviews of British Geological Survey (BGS) and SEPA mapping, a site walk-over and a LiDAR survey.
- 7.143 The Carbon and peatland 2016 map indicates that the site is covered by Class 0 soils which are mineral soils with no peatland vegetation. The EIAR includes reference to an historic BGS borehole within the application site which found dense grey silty fine sand to a depth of 60 feet underlain by layers of silt, sand and gravelly sand. Consequently, adverse effects on peat or carbon-rich soils are not anticipated. The site is also not located on prime agricultural land.
- 7.144 The main land drain running through the site originates to the south of the application site and has a catchment of 4.8km². The main land drain runs through the western extension area, connects to the site perimeter drain and is then culverted below the existing port area to discharge into the inner harbour. This forms part of the Hilton of Cadboll to Whiteness Head Coastal Water Body. Several smaller land drains within the western extension area flow into the perimeter drain. The eastern extension area drains to the Whiteness Head Saltmarsh via two culverts below the Ardersier Port access road. There is also a lagoon to the west of the western extension however it is understood that the lagoon no longer functions as part of a saltmarsh due to unapproved historical works.
- 7.145 National Vegetation Classification (NVC) surveys were undertaken for the eastern and western extension areas. No Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTEs) were identified within the western extension however potential GWDTEs were identified within the eastern extension. This is based on the plant communities identified and their associated potential for groundwater dependency. These are vegetation communities of MG10a (neutral grassland) and M23b (rush-pasture). In SEPA's most recent guidance, MG10a is no longer considered groundwater dependent so is not considered further. The identified M23b

community is located adjacent to an existing land drain in a location where bedrock and aquifer are at depth. The EIAR assesses that this community is dependent on precipitation and surface water flows. Consequently, site hydrology is not considered to support GWDTEs.

- 7.146 An abstraction licence exists within Ardersier Port however, as the works to the extension area are 273m away and comprise land-raising with no sub-surface activities, extraction or dewatering to be undertaken, it is considered that the abstraction would not be impacted by the proposed development.
- 7.147 A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been submitted at Appendix 9.3 of the EIAR. SEPA fluvial flood maps indicate flooding within the western extent of the extant port area and within the proposed western extension. The FRA notes that this is based on the incorrect assumption that the perimeter drain flows to the west rather than the east and the incorrect classification of excavated land drainage channels as watercourses. The applicant has undertaken site-specific modelling for 1 in 200 year plus climate change flood conditions with limited flooding from land drainage channels under low tide conditions and extensive site flooding during high tide conditions. The culvert of the main site drain is expected to surcharge regardless of tidal conditions.
- 7.148 SEPA maps indicate that surface water flood risk is minimal across the two extension areas. Surface water flood risk is more extensive across the extant port area however the FRA notes that this does not take into account platforming, releveling and site drainage provision which will address these issues.
- 7.149 The majority of the proposed extension site lies within an area at high risk of coastal flood, with site ground levels generally below 4m AOD. Platforming of the consented site will protect the extended areas from coastal inundation from the north however it will remain at risk from coastal inundation from the west.
- 7.150 The proposed development is considered to be a water compatible use, with regard to NPF4 Policy 22, in that the overall port use can be considered to fall within “docks, marinas and wharves.”
- 7.151 The site platform is to be raised to be above 4.24m AOD, which is the predicted 1 in 200 year plus climate change still water level. SEPA agrees with the FRA that the raising of land in direct connection with the open coast is unlikely to increase flood risk elsewhere from this source. The FRA includes measures to mitigate risk from wave action for any parts of the development located close to the coast. These include designing ground levels to fall towards the coast, avoid creation of topographic depressions close to the coastal interface, and placing pedestrian routes to the landward side of buildings. The Council’s Flood Risk Management Team has reviewed the FRA and are content with its conclusions and

recommendations relating to flood risk, subject to a condition requiring the final design of the watercourse realignment to be submitted for review.

- 7.152 SEPA advises that the main north-flowing water feature that flows through Carse Wood to the site is a man-made drainage ditch, rather than being a natural watercourse. SEPA is therefore also content for the smaller drains within the site to be considered manmade. Consequently, SEPA has no specific concerns with the proposed rerouting of these water features so long as it is done in a sensitive manner.
- 7.153 SEPA advises that two new crossings over the Eastern Drain are proposed and support the recommendation that these are designed as a clear span bridge crossing to ensure the flow of the drain is not constrained. SEPA is also satisfied that there is no significant increase in flood risk associated with the proposals and that the FRA recommendations are appropriate for the site for the realigned watercourses and watercourse crossings. Conditions to secure these recommendations are required.
- 7.154 The application is supported by a Drainage Impact Assessment (DIA). The site's drainage network will be designed to keep foul and surface water separate. Surface water run-off is to be collected and treated through a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS). Drainage of yard areas is to be designed in accordance with CD 531 – Reservoir pavements for drainage attenuation. All surface water run-off from internal site roads and marshalling areas not adjacent to proposed buildings or other critical infrastructure is to be discharged into the water environment through suitably sized infiltration devices. Surface water run-off from the proposed internal site road will also discharge to the water environment through infiltration devices sized in accordance with the Highland Council's Roads and Transport Guidelines for new Developments. There are no buildings or critical infrastructure proposed on the extension area at this point, meaning that surface water from larger storm events will be able to pond on the site without affecting any infrastructure.
- 7.155 The DIA considers potential sources of pollution and demonstrates that the use of permeable pavements of unbound granular material will provide acceptable SUDS treatment for surface water run-off.
- 7.156 Future occupiers of the port will be responsible for designing surface water drainage for areas that they lease, and acceptable design of the drainage infrastructure will be secured by way of planning condition. The Council's Flood Risk Management Team are content with the proposed drainage strategy subject to a condition requiring that the final surface water drainage design is submitted for review. This will need to include calculations that demonstrate that storms up to and including a 1 in 200 year plus climate change event will be managed within the site without flooding to buildings or increasing flood risk to others.

Built and Cultural Heritage

- 7.157 EIAR Chapter 8 Historic Environment assesses potential impacts of the development on historic environment assets, including archaeological features, built heritage and landscapes. Historic Environment Scotland (HES) welcome the inclusion of a historic environment chapter in the EIAR and consider that its contents are sufficient to reach a view on the proposed development. The chapter includes a discussion on the history of the wider area, beginning with Mesolithic hunter-gatherer activity along the Moray Coast and ending with the oil rig fabrication yard established at the application site during the 1970s. Records within the wider area provide evidence of Pictish activity, post-medieval land-use change, 18th century military infrastructure, and fishing activity in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 7.158 An historic environment baseline was established through a desk-based study and walkover survey. A study area of 1km was used to identify potential for direct and setting impacts on heritage assets. In addition, a further study area of 35km was used to identify heritage assets whose settings could potentially be affected by the proposed development.
- 7.159 There are no designated heritage assets within the site or within a 1km study area. There are nine non-designated heritage assets however, with five of these being within the application site. Of these five, three are within the extant port area with two being records of shipwrecks and the third being the oil rig fabrication yard itself. The two features within the extension areas are a farmstead and an unnamed building. The remaining features within the study area include farmsteads, a further wreck and a natural hollow associated with a local legend. In addition, there is potential for unknown historic environment assets and paleoenvironmental deposits to exist.
- 7.160 Whilst the three shipwrecks are recorded within the site boundary, they are not within areas that would be disturbed by construction or dredging so have been scoped out of further assessment. The farmstead that is within the extension area no longer appears to survive and would make a negligible contribution to our understanding of the past; it has also been scoped out. The remains of the oil rig fabrication yard have been removed so it is considered to be of negligible value and is scoped out of further assessment. The three further farmsteads and the natural hollow are all outwith the site boundary and considered to be of Low value so are also scoped out. An unnamed building (ORCA 09), recorded by walkover survey, is considered to be of Low value but would be directly disturbed by construction activities so is scoped in for further assessment. Similarly, unknown historic environment assets and paleoenvironmental records of up to Medium value may exist so are taken forward for assessment.
- 7.161 The ORCA 09 farmstead is to be recorded to ensure that a permanent record of it is made. The level of recording will be agreed with the Council through a Written Scheme of Investigation condition. Similarly, the approach to addressing any unknown historic environment remains

encountered will be secured by condition. This will include recording of archaeological features, protocols for archaeological finds and the provision of advice should further mitigation be necessary. A scheme for investigating potential paleoenvironmental records will also be agreed by condition. Subject to this mitigation being secured, the proposed development is not expected to have significant effects on known historic environment features within the site and a 1km buffer, either directly or to their settings. In terms of unknown historic environment assets, the site is considered to have low archaeological potential however, given the development requires the clearance of the site, the loss of any unknown archaeological features could be significant. Similarly, the site has low archaeological potential for paleoenvironmental interest however, in the unlikely event that such remains are found, they could range in value from negligible to medium. Depending on location, the impact could range from minor to major adverse and so impacts on paleoenvironmental interests have the potential to be significant.

- 7.162 The 35km study area is based on the ZTV, consultation with Historic Environment Scotland and the use of professional judgement. It identifies 13 designated heritage assets to be taken forward for setting impact assessment. These are the Category A Listed Fort George (LB1721) and Chanonry Lighthouse (LB31799), the Category B Listed Kirkton Old Burial Ground (LB1720) and Delnies Ice House and Bothy (LB52544), the Scheduled Monuments Moor of Balnagowan, enclosure (SM4737), Cromal Mount, mound and earthworks (SM2823), Easter Lochend, fort (SM11608), Ackron, three cairns (SM11607), Hangman's Hill, cairn (SM11603), the Conservation Areas Nairn Fishertown and Rosemarkie, the Gardens and Designed Landscape The Fairy Glen (GDL00357) and the Inventory Battlefield Battle of Culloden (BTL6). Category A Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Gardens and Designed Landscapes, and Inventory Battlefields are considered to be High value and Category B Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are considered to be Medium value.
- 7.163 EIAR Appendix 8.1, Annex 3 comprises a Setting Impact Assessment (SIA) which assesses the impact of the proposed development on the settings of the identified designated heritage assets within the 35km study area. It concludes no significant impact to all identified assets with the exception for the Category A listed Fort George.
- 7.164 Fort George was largely designed and built in a single phase between 1747 and 1769, and it is one of the most exceptional and intact examples of an 18th century artillery fortress in the world. It has been in continuous military occupation since with minor additions and alterations to service its use by the British Army. It occupies an exposed location which gives it a sense of remoteness and isolation. Despite its low profile, its scale makes it visible from much of the surrounding area, and from its ramparts there are long views in all directions. Its coastal setting on the Moray Firth is integral to its historic function, symbolic purpose and current heritage value. There are expansive, largely open views to and from the fort and

these are a fundamental part of its character and historic function. The low-lying land around the inner Moray Firth enhances the visual impact of the stone bastions and ramparts.

- 7.165 The application site is situated 3km to the northeast of Fort George and would introduce both temporary and permanent changes to its setting. The assembly of wind turbines and storage of floating bases will, due to their scale, draw visual attention and contrast with the historic and natural character of the setting. The SIA considers that these impacts will be temporary and limited in duration however, with turbines being towed away from the port once assembled and assembly activities not taking place through the winter months. The EIAR assesses that there would be a moderate short-term (temporary) adverse effect upon the setting of Fort George during periods of turbine assembly.
- 7.166 In addition to turbine assembly, the EIAR also considers the impact of any permanent buildings. It states that these would be seen within a complex of already consented buildings which would be behind a tree belt along the southwestern boundary of the development. Whilst additional permanent buildings within the extension areas would add to the scale and massing of built form at the site, the EIAR considers that they would not significantly change the setting of Fort George. The EIAR assesses a Major temporary effect on Fort George during periods of turbine construction which is Significant. It considers that the permanent effect of buildings would be Minor and Not Significant.
- 7.167 Historic Environment Scotland (HES) disagree that permanent buildings would not have a significant effect on the setting of Fort George. Whilst trees and other buildings may offer some screening, the buildings will be tall and plainly visible from elevated positions to the east within Fort George. It is also noted that the proposed extension brings the port area closer to Fort George. Consequently, HES advise that the effect of permanent buildings on the setting of Fort George would also be Significant. In addition, the Council's Conservation Officer assesses an extremely high impact, equating in EIA terms to a Major adverse and Significant effect on the setting of the Category A listed Fort George from the proposed development.
- 7.168 It is therefore considered that the assembly of turbines at the site would result in a Major and Significant impact on the setting of Fort George. The advice of HES and the Council's Conservation Officer is not disputed by Officers, and it is also agreed that the impact of permanent buildings would be Significant. The overall effect of the proposed development on Fort George would be Significant.
- 7.169 HES also disagree with the EIAR's finding of no significant effect on the setting of the Moor of Balnagowan, enclosure Scheduled Monument (SM4737). The proposals would introduce large scale, modern, industrial development into what would likely have been open views towards the sea when the monument was built and used. HES therefore advises that the impact on the setting of this Scheduled Monument would also be Significant, although not to a level where HES would object. This position is also agreed by Officers.

- 7.170 The Council's Conservation Officer further advises that the proposed development would have an extremely high significant impact on the Category A listed Chanonry Lighthouse, equating in EIA terms to a Major adverse and Significant effect. High negative impacts on the setting of the Category B listed Delnies Bothy and Icehouse and the setting of the Rosemarkie Conservation Area are also suggested to occur. Potential high negative impacts on the Fortrose and Ardersier Conservation Areas are also highlighted as being possible.
- 7.171 The Category A listed Chanonry Lighthouse is a visually prominent structure situated at Chanonry Point, a narrow spit of land projecting into the Moray Firth which demarcates the beginning of the Inner Moray Firth. Its setting comprises a largely undeveloped and open coastal setting. Its siting, projecting into the Moray Firth, enhances understanding of its functional navigational role. Its open setting enables the lighthouse to be appreciated in silhouette against the sea and sky, its visual isolation reinforces the aesthetic experience of the site. Expansive views across the Moray Firth and along the coastline enhance the spatial understanding of the lighthouse's historic function.
- 7.172 The Setting Impact Assessment (SIA) identifies that the high visibility of the lighthouse and its visual prominence contribute to its significance. It recognises that turbine assembly will result in tall structures however, they will be located 5.4km away from the lighthouse and will be static during their temporary presence. The SIA considers that the lighthouse's lower elevation and the site's location will mean that the proposed development site itself without any development would not be visible from the approach along the lighthouse's south wall due to the enclosing wall and would not be clearly visible from the point itself. It recognises that fully assembled turbines would be visible but that this would be a temporary effect. It assesses the magnitude of impact as being low, resulting in a minor short-term (temporary) adverse effect. The SIA considers that permanent buildings, of up to 45m in height, would be seen alongside permanent buildings within the extant port area and would also be behind a tree belt. The buildings would not significantly change the setting within the lighthouse's wider visual envelope. It assesses the effect as Minor and not significant.
- 7.173 Viewpoint 5 shows the view from Chanonry Point. The turbines and floating bases are at odds with the relatively flat surrounding landscape and draw the eye. It is recognised that the proposed buildings would be experienced alongside previously consented buildings and their prominence is softened by existing trees to a degree. Nevertheless, turbine assembly is expected to take place for a significant period of the year and, as up to 3 may be under assembly at one point, impacts could be continuous, to varying degrees depending on the stage of assembly, for that period. In addition, the scale of the floating bases and their bright colour will make them prominent features of the lighthouse's setting, even at a 5.4km distance. Nevertheless, HES consider that the contents of the EIAR are sufficient to reach a view on the proposed development and that its methodology is broadly acceptable. HES reviewed the EIAR in view of historic environment assets which are within their remit, which includes Category A listed buildings. HES did not challenge the findings of the EIAR in

relation to the impact of the proposed development on the setting of the Category A listed Chanonry Lighthouse. Consequently, Officers conclude that whilst it is recognised that the proposed development would have an adverse effect on the setting of the Chanonry Lighthouse for the reasons set out above, the additional impacts resulting in the ports proposed lateral extension and its associated use does not give rise to new significant adverse effects, which would not already have been consented to occur under the extant port's planning consent. The port's wider in-combination effects would however be Major and Significant, with this being most acute during periods of turbine assembly which would be intermittent.

- 7.174 The Category B listed Delnies Ice House and Bothy are the sole surviving remnants of the Easter Delnies Fishing Station, which played a significant role in the area's salmon and sea trout fishing industry during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The immediate setting of the buildings remains largely unaltered. The proximity of the Ice House to the shore underscores its functional necessity for quick access to the day's catch whilst the bothy's orientation towards the Ice House reflects the operational relationship between them. Their coastal setting enhances the historical context by illustrating the fishing industry that existed here. Views from the buildings to the shoreline and the firth are integral to understanding the operational environment of the fishing station.
- 7.175 The SIA states that views of the application site are not possible from the listed buildings due to topography and gorse. Turbines under assembly may be visible when at full height however will be static and non-operational during their temporary presence. Visibility of any permanent buildings at the site from the listed buildings would also be limited. The SIA assesses the impact of the proposed development on the Delnies Ice House and Bothy Listed Building as being negligible.
- 7.176 The applicant has provided further commentary in relation to the impact of the proposed development on the Delnies Ice House and Bothy. This states that the buildings are located within a low-lying, enclosed coastal hollow where dense gorse, undulating ground and the curvature of the land substantially restrict outward visibility. It suggests that the significance of the buildings is rooted in their functional relationship with the former Easter Delnies fishing station, their proximity to the shoreline and their surviving architectural and landscape context. The submission suggests that the proposed development would, for the most part, not be visible from the listed buildings, with only the tips of the tallest temporary elements being visible from the far western side of the asset.
- 7.177 A site visit to the Delnies Ice House and Bothy has not been carried out, however, from available online resources, including photographs of the listed building, it appears that the listed buildings are not on particularly low-lying land, with the Ice House in particular being elevated. Views from surrounding areas of the golf course would take in both the listed building and the taller structures at the application site, although it is acknowledged that the key views and relationships are between the buildings themselves and with the shore. The assembly of turbines, in particular, has the potential to draw the eye from the listed buildings and alter the way in which they are experienced. It is considered that, at a distance of 3km, the addition of permanent structures to the extension

areas of the port would not have a significant effect on the setting of the listed buildings. The assembly of turbines can already take place within the extant port area however and is not expected to take place on the extension area. The effect of the current application on the setting of the Delnies Ice House and Bothy is therefore assessed to not be significant.

- 7.178 Rosemarkie Conservation Area features a cohesive streetscape with traditional stone buildings, narrow lanes and a layout that has evolved organically over the years. Situated on the south coast of the Black Isle, the village has expansive views across the Moray Firth to Fort George, Chanonry Point and the Moray coastline. These are key elements of its setting.
- 7.179 The proposed development would be visible from the north end of the beach at Rosemarkie and from part of the lanes leading down from the High Street. The SIA considers that wind turbine assembly would not intrude upon the core streetscape but that their presence in key outward views may affect the visual relationship between the village and the Firth. The SIA assesses this effect as being a minor short-term adverse effect. The industrial character of new permanent buildings within the extension area would contrast with the historic and natural setting of the Conservation Area. They would be seen alongside development within the extant port however resulting in a negligible long-term adverse effect.
- 7.180 The Conservation Officer's concerns draw on Viewpoint 6 which shows the view from Rosemarkie Conservation Area. The proposed development is located approximately 7.5km to the east of Rosemarkie. At this distance, the primary impacts derive from the assembly of offshore wind turbines and the storage of offshore wind turbine components. Whilst this is acknowledged as a negative impact, these works could already take place within the extant port area and turbine assembly is unlikely to take place within the extension area due to the lack of quayside. The impact of permanent buildings on the setting of the Conservation Area at a 7.5km distance is not considered to be significant.
- 7.181 Ardersier Conservation Area is 2.5km to the southwest of the application site. Key views identified in the Highland Council's Ardersier Conservation Area Appraisal and the 2013 Rapid Assessment are directed internally along the historic east-west street pattern and outwards towards the Moray Firth and Fort George, which are central to the area's character and sense of place. Views towards the proposed development are not identified as contributing to the area's special interest. The applicant's field assessment found that the proposed development is not discernible from the Conservation Area due to local topography, mature tree belts and an inward-facing street pattern. The tallest elements of the proposed development, the assembly of offshore wind turbines, can already take place within the extant port area and so would not introduce new effects. New buildings may be constructed within the extension area and would be experienced alongside the extant port area with the overall effect of the proposed development on Ardersier Conservation Area is not considered to be significant.
- 7.182 The inclusion of Fortrose Conservation for heritage assessment was considered at scoping and pre-application stage but was omitted on the basis that no

intervisibility exists between the Conservation Area and the proposed development. Built-form, the eastern portion of the settlement and intervening topography block outward sightlines toward the application site. As with other heritage assets, any glimpsed views that may be possible would primarily be of turbine assembly activities and the storage of large turbine components which can already take place within the extant port area. The erection of permanent buildings and the storage of large turbine components could take place on the extension areas which would extend the extent of development at the port. At a distance of 7km however, and viewed alongside existing port infrastructure, the proposed development would not be expected to have a significant effect on Fortrose Conservation Area.

- 7.183 A letter of representation was also received which queried why the Kebbuck Stone Scheduled Monument (SM9433) and Ardersier Conservation Area were not included for setting assessment. Ardersier Conservation Area has been considered above and is not expected to endure significant effects. The Kebbuck Stone was excluded from assessment on the basis that the proposed development will not give rise to any direct, indirect, or setting effects on its significance. Intervening landform and forestry prevent intervisibility with the port. Whilst the taller elements of the proposal may have some visibility from the Scheduled Monument, particularly the assembly of turbines, this would take place on the extant port area so would not be a new effect. It should also be noted that Scheduled Monuments fall within the remit of HES who did not raise concerns about impacts on its setting. The proposed development is not expected to have a significant effect on the setting of the Scheduled Monument.
- 7.184 To summarise, the following significant effects on the historic environment are anticipated to occur as a result of the extension to the report proposed under this planning application:
- Potential impacts on unknown historic environment assets;
 - Potential impacts on deposits of paleoenvironmental interest;
 - Setting of Category A listed Fort George; and
 - Setting of Scheduled Monument Moor of Balnagowan, enclosure.

- 7.185 It should nevertheless be noted that Significant effects to the setting of Fort George and the Moor of Balnagowan enclosure could already occur due to activities that can occur within the existing port area under the extant permission; particularly the assembly of turbines and the storage of tall turbine components.

Other Material Considerations

- 7.186 The applicant is seeking planning permission in perpetuity for the development. However, in the event of decommissioning, this would be carried out in line with the best practice processes and methods at that time and managed through a Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan. This can be secured through a planning condition.
- 7.187 In terms of aviation interests, consultees have raised no objection subject to the application of planning conditions which have been incorporated

within the recommended conditions; this includes the preparation of an aviation lighting strategy.

- 7.188 The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) represents the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as a consultee in the UK planning system to ensure that development does not compromise or degrade the operation of defence sites. The DIO has identified potential impacts on RAF facilities and activities relating to the assembly and transport of offshore wind turbines and any other tall structures at the site and within the harbour area. These potential impacts can be suitably mitigated through the imposition of planning conditions setting an overall height limit, limiting the rotation speed of turbines, and requiring notification of MOD facilities ahead of turbine movements, amongst other things. It is recommended that these conditions be added to any grant of planning permission.
- 7.189 Given the complexity of the site and its multiple consenting requirements, 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.

Non-Material Considerations

- 7.190 None.

8.0 MATTERS TO BE SECURED BY LEGAL AGREEMENT / UPFRONT PAYMENT

- 8.1 On other applications, a section 75 legal agreement has been used to secure off-site compensatory/ enhancement measures. However, based on the latest advice from the Chief Planner and Minister (April 2025), there is a clear indication that the use of suspensive conditions to secure such matters can be appropriate. Given this advice, and the applicant's progression with a scheme for the delivery of offsite compensatory woodland planting, officers are content that this can be delivered through a planning condition, rather than through planning legal agreement.
- 8.2 A wear and tear legal agreement will also be required under Section 96 of the Roads (Scotland) Act. This would include the provision of a Road Bond or similar security. This is to cover the extent of the sites connection with the A96 with this agreement expected to be entered into associated with individual phased construction traffic management plans associated with subsequent applications for matters specified in condition.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 In summary, the proposed development is considered to comply with the Development Plan when taken as a whole. The extension of Ardersier Port will play a strategically important role in supporting Scotland's energy

transition, enabling the assembly and deployment of a significant proportion of Scotland's forecast offshore wind development. In this way, a significant contribution towards meeting Scotland's net-zero objectives would be made. Furthermore, the economic benefits associated with the development are substantial with direct and indirect employment anticipated, alongside wider social benefits for communities in the Highland and Moray regions.

- 9.2 The LSVIA's assessment of the overall proposal at the site, being the extant port and its proposed lateral extension, is that it will give rise to significant landscape, seascape and visual effects. However, these effects predominantly relate to activities already established within the extant port area and do not represent new impacts beyond those inherent in the existing consented use. While the extended footprint introduces additional areas of built development, the tallest and most prominent structures will remain concentrated within the already-operational port, and the extension does not materially increase the extent of significant landscape or visual effects.
- 9.3 It is acknowledged that the proposal is likely to have a significant effect, but no adverse effect on site integrity, on the Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar site, Moray Firth SPA, Moray Firth SAC, and Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC, subject to the implementation of agreed mitigation including the Turbine Towing Protocol, construction management measures and marine mammal safeguards. Whiteness Head SSSI will not be adversely affected and, in places, will benefit from targeted habitat management and enhancement. Impacts on all environmental designations are therefore capable of being effectively managed.
- 9.4 With respect to ornithology, and subject to the application of mitigation set out within the EIAR, no significant impacts on ornithological receptors are predicted. Similarly, no significant effects on protected species are anticipated with the proposals having been found to be capable of delivering biodiversity enhancement. No significant effects are expected for forestry once compensatory planting is secured, and no significant impacts on noise, vibration or dust are expected during construction. Although significant operational noise impacts cannot be ruled out at this stage, restrictive planning conditions will ensure that acceptable noise levels are achieved for nearby Noise Sensitive Receptors for any future phases of development.
- 9.5 The development is not predicted to result in significant residual effects on roads, transport or access, or on water environment, flood risk, drainage or soils. Potential impacts on unknown archaeological assets and paleoenvironmental deposits will be managed through an agreed programme of archaeological investigation. Significant effects on the setting of Fort George (Category A) and the Moor of Balnagowan enclosure (Scheduled Monument) are acknowledged; however, these can be mitigated to a degree through detailed design and material controls at the MSC stage.
- 9.6 Overall, it is considered that the environmental effects of the proposal can be satisfactorily addressed by mitigation secured through planning conditions. The principle of the development is in compliance with the Development Plan due, in part, to its important role in the energy transition and meeting net zero

ambitions, through enabling national renewable energy deployment, and the significant socio-economic benefits it will deliver. Adverse impacts are identified however these primarily relate to the extant port area and the activities that already consented within it. The lateral extension of the port, as proposed in this application, results in limited additional significant effects. The proposal is judged to be acceptable in planning terms and is recommended for approval.

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

10. IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Resource: Not applicable
- 10.2 Legal: If the Committee determines that the application should be refused, the application may be subject to an appeal to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division of the Scottish Government.
- 10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Not applicable
- 10.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: The application facilitates the construction of offshore wind farms which generate renewable energy and contribute to climate change targets.
- 10.5 Risk: Not applicable
- 10.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

11. RECOMMENDATION

Action required before decision issued N

It is recommended that planning permission in principle be GRANTED subject to:

- A. Members granting delegated authority to the Area Planning Manager – South to agree the finalised condition wording, with any substantive amendments to be subject to prior consultation with the Chair of the South Planning Applications Committee; and
- B. The following conditions and reasons.

1. Time Limit for the Implementation of Planning Permission

The development to which this planning permission relates must commence within SEVEN YEARS of the date of this decision notice. If development has not commenced within this period, then this planning permission in principle shall lapse.

Reason: In accordance with Section 59 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

2. **Scope of Planning Permission in Principle**

Planning Permission in Principle is hereby granted for a development to establish a port and undertake port related services for energy related uses developed in accordance with the Indicative Site Layout (Drawing No. 25-22 -MRH-006), taking full account of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), received 14.11.2025 and except in so far as amended by the terms of this consent or any future matters specified in conditions approval.

Reason: To identify the extent and terms of the development consent.

3. **Defining Phase A and Area B**

- (1) The extent of “Phase A” and “Area B” on the approved Phasing Plan (Ref: 25-22 -MRH-500 Rev. A) shall be interpreted as Phase A and Area B respectively for the purposes of all conditions attached to this planning permission.
- (2) No land within Area B shall be brought into operational use until a plan and accompanying written schedule detailing the works that have been completed under Phase A, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.
- (3) Without prejudice to the development permitted by the Harbour Revision Order (HRO), development shall be implemented in accordance with the approved Phasing Plan (Ref: 25-22 -MRH-500 Rev. A) appended to this decision notice, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority. Phase A of the approved Phasing Plan is defined as the extent of development already implemented at the site.
- (4) All development undertaken on Phase A shall be implemented in accordance with the details for which the written approval of the Planning Authority has previously been confirmed.
- (5) No development, other than the works permitted by the HRO shall commence on site unless a plan documenting the scope of agreed works on Phase A (as defined on drawing (Ref: 25-22 -MRH-500 Rev. A) shall have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Planning Authority. All works so far permitted or that have commenced on site but are not completed will continue without prejudice.
- (6) Prior to implementation of this planning permission, a plan illustrating the approved and agreed works on Phase A together with a written schedule of the same shall be submitted to and thereafter agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To provide clarity regarding the scope of the existing consent.

4. **Decommissioning and Restoration**

No Phase or Sub-Phase of development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, shall commence until a draft Decommissioning and Restoration Plan (DRP) covering the Phase or Sub-Phase has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. Thereafter:

- a) No later than 3 years prior to the decommissioning of the development, the draft DRP shall be reviewed by the operator and a copy submitted to the Planning Authority for their written approval; and
- b) No later than 12 months prior to the decommissioning of the development, a detailed DRP, based upon the principles of the approved draft plan, shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

The DRP shall include:

- i. Either the removal of all above ground elements of the development, including access tracks, or an alternative use plan which specifies why any or all above ground elements should be retained;
- ii. the treatment of disturbed and/or contaminated ground surfaces,
- iii. management and timing of the works,
- iv. environmental management provisions, and
- v. a traffic management plan to address any traffic impact issues during the decommissioning period.

The detailed Decommissioning and Restoration Plan shall be implemented as approved.

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

5. **Matters Specified in Conditions**

No development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, shall commence within each Phase, or Sub-Phase, until an application, or applications, for the approval of matters specified in conditions as they relate to or are relied upon by that Phase or Sub-Phase has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority in respect of the following

matters, insofar as they relate to the details of the proposed development taking full account of the Indicative Site Layout Plan referred to in Condition 2 above:

- a) A detailed Master Plan using the principles set out in the Indicative Master Plan and Environmental Impact Assessment Report, received 14.11.2025;
- b) The layout of the site, including building footprints, laydown storage areas, other structures, and site boundary treatment;
- c) Road layout including the road hierarchy, junction layouts and design;
- d) The siting, design and external appearance of all buildings and other structures, including the use of natural materials in a recessive palette of colours to all buildings;
- e) Details of finished site and floor levels;
- f) Details of external lighting to minimise sky glow;
- g) The provision of car and cycle parking;
- h) Means of dealing with commercial waste;
- i) Details of proposed water and waste water connections;
- j) The final surface water drainage design, inclusive of calculations that demonstrate that storms up to and including a 1 in 200 year plus climate change event will be managed within the site without flooding to buildings or increasing flood risk to others; and
- k) the details of, and timetable for delivery of, any and all landscaping.

Reason: To enable the Planning Authority to consider these aspects of the development in detail.

6. **Construction Environmental Management Plan**

No development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, shall commence until a Construction Environmental Management Document has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA. The Document shall include:

- a) An updated Schedule of Mitigation including
 - i. all mitigation proposed as set out in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, received 14 November 2025;

- ii. other relevant agreed mitigation (as required by agencies) and set out in the relevant planning conditions; and
 - iii. processes to control/action changes from the agreed Schedule of Mitigation.
- b) A risk assessment of potentially damaging construction-type activities on the environment;
- c) The following specific Construction and Environmental Management Plans (CEMP):
 - i. Habitat management plan that will protect water bodies from marine non-native species, and minimise the risk of spreading freshwater invasive species;
 - ii. Spit habitat protection and enhancement plan that will be designed to avoid disturbance to key roost sites on the spit and the bay to the west of the site and provide opportunity to create new roost sites;
 - iii. Marine mammal protection plan, including measures to protect marine mammals from on-shore activity;
 - iv. Pollution protection plan;
 - v. Dust management plan;
 - vi. a construction noise and vibration mitigation plan which demonstrates how the best practical means shall be employed to minimise the impact of construction noise;
 - vii. Site waste management plan;
 - viii. Sediment transport monitoring plan;
- d) Methods of monitoring, auditing, reporting and communication of environmental management on site and with the client, Planning Authority and other relevant parties and
- e) Statement of responsibility to 'stop the job/activity' if a potential breach of a mitigation or legislation occurs.

Development shall proceed in accordance with the approved CEMD.

Reason: To ensure that all construction operations are carried out in a manner that minimises their impact the environment, and that the mitigation measures contained in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report which accompanied the application, or as otherwise agreed, are fully implemented.

7. **Liaison Group**

The previously established community liaison group, established in collaboration with The Highland Council and local Community Council(s), shall continue and shall be maintained for the duration of construction activity on each Phase or Sub-Phase. The group shall act as a vehicle for the community to be kept informed of project progress and, in particular, should allow dialogue on the

provision of all mitigation measures and to keep these under review. The Liaison Group shall include, but not be limited to, Ardersier and Petty Community Council, Cawdor Community Council, Nairn West and Suburban Community Council, and Nairn River Community Council.

Reason: To assist with the provision of mitigation measures to minimise the effects on road users, including pedestrians, and neighbouring occupiers.

8. **Height Limit**

(1) No buildings, spoil heights, plant, machinery, equipment, temporary works or stored materials shall exceed 45m in height within the area identified as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Planning Authority.

(2) Notwithstanding part (1) of this condition, no spoil heights, plant, machinery, equipment, temporary works or stored materials, shall exceed the height limits shown on drawing reference IDL-019-1-DRW-055 Ardersier Port OSGB v2.0 dated 7 Dec 2023 and received on 9 January 2026. Any upward proposed variation to these heights shall be submitted for the prior written approval of the Planning Authority, in consultation with HIAL and the Approved Procedure Design Organisation (APDO) and thereafter implemented in accordance with the agreed protocol.

Reason: To ensure that the planning permission granted is within the parameters assessed within the EIAR, particularly with respect to visual, landscape and historic environment impacts, and in the interest of aviation safety.

9. **Construction Traffic Management Plan**

No development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order, shall commence within any Phase or sub-Phase until a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) for that Phase or sub-Phase has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland. The CTMP shall include, but not be limited to:

a) proposed construction traffic routing and volumes, demonstrating that impacts are consistent with, or no worse than, those assessed in the supporting planning permission 18/04552/PIP (dated 04 February 2019);

b) arrangements for the management and movement of abnormal loads;

- c) measures to minimise impacts on the A96 trunk road, including any temporary traffic management required;
- d) travel and parking arrangements for construction workers;
- e) delivery timing restrictions where necessary to protect the safe operation of the trunk road network.

Construction shall proceed in accordance with the approved CTMP.

Reason: To safeguard the safety and efficient operation of the trunk road during construction and to ensure construction traffic remains within the parameters assessed under the related planning permission.

10. **Operational Traffic Management Plan**

No development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, shall commence within any Phase, or sub-Phase, until an Operational Traffic Management Plan for that Phase, or Sub-Phase, has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

For the avoidance of doubt, the Plan shall include, inter alia, prescribed access routes, hours of operation, maximum vehicle movements, monitoring arrangements. The agreed Operational Traffic Management Plan shall thereafter be implemented in accordance with any timescales contained therein.

Reason: To safeguard the safety and efficient operation of the public road during operation.

11. **Travel Plan**

No development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, shall commence within any Phase or sub-Phase until a Site-Wide Travel Plan, covering both the proposed development and that previously consented under planning permission 18/04552/PIP (dated 04 February 2019), has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland. The Travel Plan shall include:

- a) a travel survey of existing employees on site;
- b) a summary of anticipated employee numbers, travel demand, shift patterns, and trip characteristics for the relevant Phase or Sub-Phase;
- c) measures to promote sustainable travel and reduce reliance on single-occupancy car trips;

- d) details of bus provision, cycle infrastructure, and connections to active travel routes;
- e) modal shift targets and associated monitoring indicators; and
- f) arrangements for management, monitoring, annual review and reporting to the Planning Authority.

The approved Travel Plan shall be implemented upon first occupation of any part of the development within the relevant Phase or Sub-Phase. The Travel Plan shall be updated and re-submitted for approval ahead of each phase of development, and a monitoring report shall be submitted annually

Reason: To promote sustainable travel patterns, reduce reliance on the private car, and ensure ongoing monitoring consistent with the requirements of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).

12. **Transport Statement**

No development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, shall commence within any Phase or sub-Phase until a Transport Statement for that Phase or sub-Phase shall have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland. The Transport Statement shall:

- a. set out the anticipated staff trip generation for the Phase or Sub-Phase;
- b. specify the expected traffic movements (including LGV, HGV and abnormal loads);
- c. demonstrate that the cumulative traffic flows at the site access road and its junction with the A96(T) remain within the peak-hour and daily volumes assessed in the Transport Assessment supporting planning permission 18/04552/PIP (dated 04 February 2019);
- d. identify any circumstances where the cumulative traffic flows would exceed those assessed parameters.

For the avoidance of doubt, where exceedance is identified, an operational assessment shall be submitted for the approval in writing of the Planning Authority, identifying any required mitigation measures. No occupation of any development within that Phase or sub-Phase shall take place until all such mitigation measures have been approved and implemented.

Reason: To ensure that traffic movements associated with each Phase or sub-Phase remain within the levels previously assessed,

and to safeguard the safe and efficient operation of the A96 trunk road and its junction with the site access road.

13. **Access Management Plan**

No post-construction operational development shall take place within Area B, as defined under Condition 3 of this permission, unless and until a revised Access Management Plan of public access across the site (as existing, during construction and following completion) shall have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority.

The approved Access Management Plan, and any associated works, shall be implemented in full prior to the first occupation of the development or as otherwise may be agreed within the approved plan.

Reason: To clarify access arrangements during the construction and operation of the development.

14. **Operational Environmental Management Plan**

(1) Other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, development shall not commence until the final Operational Environmental Management Plans (OEMP), Port Operational Environmental Management Plan (POEMP), and Habitat Management Plan (HMP) have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot. The POEMP shall include a Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan and a Biosecurity Plan.

(2) Development shall proceed entirely in accordance with the approved Operational Environmental Management Document and Plans (OEMP), Port Operational Environmental Management Plan (POEMP) and Habitat Management Plan (HMP) which shall be updated for each subsequent Phase and/or Sub-Phase and submitted for the approval in writing of the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA. Any mitigation measures and improvements approved by the Planning Authority shall be enacted prior to the first occupation of any development within the Phase/Phases, or Sub-Phases, to which they relate.

Reason: To protect the environment and amenity from the construction of the development.

15. **Aviation Lighting**

- (1) Other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, development shall not commence until an Aviation Lighting Scheme, covering the provision of aviation lighting on any tall structures and/or equipment required during construction and operation of the development, shall have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority, in consultation with Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and the Ministry of Defence. The approved scheme shall be implemented in full and complied with for the lifetime of the development, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.
- (2) For each subsequent Phase and/or Sub-Phase of the development, should any changes to the approved scheme be proposed, an updated Aviation Lighting Scheme shall be submitted for the approval in writing of the Planning Authority, in consultation with Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd and the Ministry of Defence.

Reason: In the interests of aviation safety and to ensure the development is appropriately lit so as not to pose a hazard to aircraft.

16. **Land Raising**

Any land raising works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved drawings and specifically drawing Ref: 25-22-MRH - 009 – Location of proposed temporary dredged material stockpile.

Reason: To ensure compliance with the proposal as assessed.

17. **Compensatory Planting**

Other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, no development, including tree felling, shall commence until a detailed Compensatory Planting Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, following consultation with Scottish Forestry, the Forestry Authority, and any other relevant stakeholders.

The Compensatory Planting Plan shall:

- i. Be accompanied by an updated Woodland Removal Plan which quantifies the area of productive conifer and native woodland removal;
- ii. Propose productive conifer woodland and native woodland compensatory planting which shall be at least equal in area

- to the areas of productive conifer woodland and native woodland that are to be removed, as quantified by the updated Woodland Removal Plan;
- iii. Provide all compensatory planting within the Highland Council area.
 - iv. Consider whether the requirements of The Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 apply;
 - v. Be in accordance with the “Process for preparing a woodland creation application” as set out in the Scottish Forestry publication: Woodland Creation Application Guidance;
 - vi. Specify future maintenance measures for the areas of compensatory planting;
 - vii. Be prepared by, and be implemented under the supervision of, a suitably qualified forestry consultant, first approved in writing by the Planning Authority.
 - viii. Include a detailed schedule of supervision, with compliance monitoring reports to be issued at agreed stages, prepared by the appointed forestry consultant.

The area identified as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission shall not be brought into operational use until the approved Compensatory Planting Plan has been implemented in full. The compensatory planting shall be maintained thereafter in accordance with the approved scheme, until established to the full satisfaction of the Planning Authority and then shall remain as woodland in perpetuity.

Woodland removal shall not commence until construction work is imminent. Should development fail to commence within 3 years of woodland felling, the land shall be reverted to forestry use and be replanted within the following 12 months. Replanting shall be carried out to a specification submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority within 3 years and 6 months of initial felling.

The area identified as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission shall not be brought into operational use until GIS shapefiles have been submitted to the Planning Authority which clearly identify the approved areas of woodland removal and the areas of compensatory planting.

Reason: To protect Scotland’s woodland resource, in accordance with the Scottish Government’s policy on the Control of Woodland Removal.

18. **Tree Protection Plan**

Other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, no development, site excavation or groundwork shall

commence until all retained trees have been protected against construction damage using protective barriers located as per the approved Tree Protection Plans and in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition & Construction, (or any superseding guidance prevailing at that time). These barriers shall remain in place throughout the construction period and shall not be moved or removed during the construction period without the prior written approval of the Planning Authority.

Reason: In order to ensure the protection of retained trees, which are important amenity assets, both during construction and thereafter.

19. **Contaminated Land**

No development shall commence within Area B until a scheme to deal with potential contamination on site has been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Planning Authority. The scheme shall include:

- a) the nature, extent and type of contamination on site and identification of pollutant linkages and assessment of risk (i.e. a land contamination investigation and risk assessment), the scope and method of which shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by with the Planning Authority, and undertaken in accordance with PAN 33 (2000) and British Standard BS 10175:2011+A2:2017 Investigation of Potentially Contaminated Sites - Code of Practice;
- b) the measures required to treat/remove contamination (remedial strategy) including a method statement, programme of works, and proposed verification plan to ensure that the site is fit for the uses proposed;
- c) measures to deal with contamination during construction works;
- d) in the event that remedial action be required, a validation report that will validate and verify the completion of the agreed decontamination measures; and
- e) in the event that monitoring is required, monitoring statements shall be submitted at agreed intervals for such time period as is considered appropriate by the Planning Authority.

No development shall commence until written confirmation has been received from the Planning Authority to confirm that the scheme has been implemented, completed and, if required, that monitoring measurements are in place, all to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure that any contamination within the site is appropriately investigated and remediated in the interests of protecting human health and the environment.

20. **Watercourse Realignment**

Prior to the commencement of development full details of the watercourse realignment works shall be provided for the approval in writing of the Planning Authority, in consultation with SEPA. The detailed design shall reflect the recommendations of the Flood Risk Assessment (Envirocentre, October 2025) comprising a two-stage channel, capable of conveying the design flows and incorporating meanders and other variations to achieve a more naturalised water feature and wetland with enhanced biodiversity value. The development shall thereafter be undertaken in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: To ensure acceptable watercourse design with regard to flood prevention and biodiversity enhancement.

21. **Watercourse Crossings**

All new watercourse crossings shall be bottomless and clear span designed to convey the 1 in 200 year plus climate change flood flows unless otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA.

Reason: To mitigate against flood risk.

22. **Written Scheme of Investigation**

No development or any other works shall commence within Area B unless an archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI), and a programme of archaeological works, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

The WSI shall include details of how the recording and recovery of archaeological resources found within the application site shall be undertaken, and how any updates, if required, to the written scheme of investigation will be provided throughout the implementation of the programme of archaeological works. Should the archaeological works reveal the need for post excavation analysis the development hereby approved shall not be [occupied/brought into use] unless a Post-Excavation Research Design (PERD) for the analysis, publication and dissemination of results and archive deposition has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The PERD shall be carried out in complete accordance with the approved details.

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

23.

Local Employment Scheme

Prior to the commencement of development, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, a Local Employment Scheme for the construction and operation of the development shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Planning Authority. The submitted Scheme shall refer to the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) (November 2025) and shall include the following:

- a) details of how the staff/employment opportunities at the development will be advertised and how liaison with the Council and other local bodies will take place in relation to maximising the access of the local workforce to information about employment opportunities;
- b) details of how sustainable training opportunities will be provided for those recruited to fulfil staff/employment requirements including the provision of apprenticeships or an agreed alternative;
- c) a procedure setting out criteria for employment, and for matching of candidates to the vacancies;
- d) measures to be taken to offer and provide college and/or work placement opportunities at the development to students within the locality;
- e) details of the promotion of the Local Employment Scheme and liaison with contractors engaged in the construction of the development to ensure that they also apply the Local Employment Scheme so far as practicable having due regard to the need and availability for specialist skills and trades and the programme for constructing the development;
- f) a procedure for monitoring the Local Employment Scheme and reporting the results of such monitoring to the Planning Authority; and
- g) a timetable for the implementation of the Local Employment Scheme.

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

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

24. **Planning Monitoring Officer**

No development shall commence, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works identified as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, until the Planning Authority has approved in writing the terms of appointment by the applicant of a suitably qualified environmental specialist to assist the Planning Authority in monitoring compliance with the planning permission and conditions attached to this consent. The terms of the Planning Monitoring Officer (PMO) appointment shall:

- a) Impose a duty to monitor compliance with the planning permission and conditions attached to this consent;
- b) Require the PMO to submit a report at least every three months to the Planning Authority, or monthly at the further written request of the Planning Authority, summarising works undertaken on site; and
- c) Require the PMO to report to the Planning Authority any incidences of non-compliance with the planning permission and conditions attached to this consent at the earliest practical opportunity.

The PMO shall be appointed on the approved terms throughout the period from the commencement of development to completion of post construction restoration works.

Reason: To enable the development to be suitably monitored to ensure compliance with the consent issued.

25. **Environmental Clerk of Works**

No development shall commence, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works identified as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, until the terms of appointment of an independent Environmental Clerk of Works ("ECoW") by the Company have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The terms of appointment shall:

- a) Impose a duty to monitor compliance with the environmental commitments provided in the EIA Report, as well as the following (the ECoW works):
 - i. The Pre-Construction Ecological Survey under Condition 27;
 - ii. The Construction Environmental Management Plan under Condition 6;

- iii. The Habitat Management Plan under Condition 14;
 - iv. The Compensatory Planting Plan under Condition 17;
 - v. Require the ECoW to report to the nominated construction project manager, developer and Planning Authority any incidences of non-compliance with the ECoW works at the earliest practical opportunity;
- b) Require the ECoW to submit a monthly report to the construction project manager, developer and Planning Authority summarising works undertaken on site.

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

The ECoW shall be appointed on the terms approved throughout the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development

Reason: To secure effective and transparent monitoring of and compliance with the environmental mitigation and management measures associated with the development during the construction, decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases.

26. **Data**

GIS Shapefiles of the biodiversity compensation and enhancement areas shall be supplied to the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works within the area identified as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission.

Reason: To allow the compensation and enhancement areas to be mapped to ensure no developments occur on these sites for a minimum of 30 years.

27. **Pre-Construction Surveys**

Development shall not commence, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, until a pre-construction survey report has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The report shall be based on a pre-construction survey undertaken not more than 3 months prior to the

commencement of development. The survey shall cover both the application site and an appropriate buffer from the boundary of application site and the report of survey shall include mitigation measures where any impact, or potential impact, on protected species or their habitat has been identified. Development and work shall progress in accordance with any mitigation measures contained within the approved report of survey and the timescales contain therein.

Reason: To ensure that the site and its environs are surveyed and the development does not have an adverse impact on protected species or habitat.

28. **Raptor Survey**

Development shall not commence, other than the works permitted by the Harbour Revision Order and those works defined as Phase A under Condition 3 of this permission, within the raptor breeding bird period (January-August, inclusive) until a Raptor Survey has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The Raptor Survey shall cover the application site, as shown on drawing number 25-22 -MRH-006, and the species-specific disturbance distances.

Reason: To ensure that the site and its environs are surveyed for raptors.

29. **Rating Level**

The Rating Level of Noise arising from operations associated with this development shall not exceed the previously approved background level, established by the Environmental Impact Assessment Report accompanying planning application 18/04552/PIP, by more than 5 dB(A) as measured or calculated at the curtilage of any noise sensitive property in accordance with BS4142:2014 +A1:2019, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Planning Authority

Reason: In the interests of safeguarding residential amenity.

30. **Operating Noise**

All plant, machinery and equipment associated with the operational phase of the development shall be so installed, maintained and operated such that any associated operating noise does not exceed NR20 when measured or calculated within any noise-sensitive property with windows open for ventilation purposes between the hours 2300-0700.

Reason: In the interests of safeguarding residential amenity.

31. **Noise Impact Assessments**

No Phase or Sub-Phase of development within the area defined as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission shall be brought into operational use until a Noise Impact Assessment (NIA) covering that Phase or Sub-Phase has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The NIA shall:

- i. be undertaken in accordance with BS 4142:2014+A1:2019;
- ii. take into account cumulative noise emitting from the application site;
- iii. demonstrate compliance, including the implementation of noise mitigation measures if necessary, with the limits set out at Conditions 29 and 30 of this permission;

The approved NIA shall be implemented in full for the duration of the Phase or Sub-Phase. For the avoidance of doubt, this requirement extends to each new Phase or Sub-Phase as development at the site progresses. Each subsequent assessment shall demonstrate that cumulative noise from the development site will meet the noise limits.

Thereafter, the development of each Phase or Sub-Phase shall proceed in accordance with its associated approved NIA.

Reason: In the interests of safeguarding residential amenity.

32. **Noise Management Plan**

Prior to the occupation of any part of the development site within the area identified as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission, the applicant shall submit, for the written approval of the Planning Authority, a noise management plan which clearly outlines the noise mitigation measures and management arrangements regarding noise arising from the development site as a whole.

The plan shall set out the management arrangements for the mitigation of noise arising from the site, identifying the roles and responsibilities of the relevant persons.

The plan shall include arrangements for compliance noise monitoring to be undertaken, either on a permanent basis or long-term basis, or following the introduction of new noise generating activities on site.

Thereafter the development shall proceed in accordance with the approved noise management plan.

(*) Note - The applicant's attention is drawn to the Environment Agency guidance Noise and vibration management: environmental permits which includes a section on noise management plans.

While this guidance is aimed at activities requiring an environmental permit, the principles of noise management can be applied to any industrial activity.

Reason: In the interests of safeguarding residential amenity.

33. **Biodiversity Enhancement**

The area identified as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission shall not be brought into operational use until a Biodiversity Enhancement Scheme has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The Scheme shall be based upon the enhancement measures included in EIAR Chapter 15 Schedule of Mitigations and Enhancements and shall include:

- Measures to ensure the successful implementation of each enhancement measure;
- Details of how each enhancement measure shall be maintained; and
- A timeframe for the implementation of each enhancement measure.

The approved Biodiversity Enhancement Scheme shall thereafter be implemented in full unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To ensure the delivery of significant biodiversity enhancement.

34. **Turbine Towing Protocol**

Wind turbines shall not be towed from Ardersier Port other than in compliance with the following measures, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot and the Marine Directorate following bird monitoring during turbine towing operations:

- 1) Turbine towing shall only occur between the months of April and September, inclusive;
- 2) During the months of April and September, turbine towing shall not occur more frequently than once a week, shall only occur during daylight hours, and shall not be initiated earlier than one hour after sunrise;
- 3) Turbines shall not be towed at speeds exceeding 4 knots;
- 4) Once turbine towing starts, it shall continue in one single continuous operation, until the turbine has passed the area of shallow water known as the Riff Bank and has exited harbour limits.

Reason: To mitigate impacts on the qualifying features of the Moray Firth SPA.

35. **Protection of Sandflat Habitat**

The area identified as Area B under Condition 3 of this permission shall not be brought into operational use unless and until a Marine Licence for dredging, which includes consideration of potential impacts on the Inner Moray Firth Ramsar sandflat feature, has first been obtained.

Reason: To ensure The Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 are satisfied with respect to the impact of the proposed development on a European Site.

36. **Turbine Dimension Limits**

Any complete floating wind turbine which is assembled, stored/held, or received in a complete and operational state on land at the port site or within the waters contained within the port area, or on the waters of the associated harbour limits, shall have a maximum rotor blade length of no more than 127m and a total height to blade tip not exceeding 311m above sea level, unless prior written approval has been obtained from the Ministry of Defence (not to be unreasonably withheld or unreasonably conditioned) and thereafter submitted to and approved by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

37. **Turbine Rotation Limit**

Any assembled floating wind turbine in a complete and operational state, which is deployed, moored or installed within the port site or within the waters of the Statutory Harbour Authority, shall only rotate its rotor blades at a maximum speed of 1 revolution per minute, unless prior written approval has been obtained from the Ministry of Defence (not to be unreasonably withheld or unreasonably conditioned).

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

38. **Rotor Blades Locked During Towing**

The rotor blades of any assembled floating wind turbine in a complete and operational state shall be locked in place to prevent them rotating whilst they are being towed within the Statutory Harbour Authority limits.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

39. **Request to Fix Turbine Blades Beyond Harbour Limits**

The Statutory Harbour Authority shall request that any third parties, involved in the transport of any assembled floating wind turbine in a complete and operational state to or from the port for maintenance, storage or any other purpose, will ensure that the rotor blades of any such turbine are locked in place for the duration that it is under tow whilst outwith the statutory harbour limits.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

40. **Microwave Link Safeguarding 1**

No part of any fully assembled floating wind turbine shall be permitted to be deployed, moored or installed in the waters in the microwave link safeguarding corridor or, if deployed, moored, or installed adjacent to the microwave link safeguarding corridor, be permitted to project into the airspace above the microwave link safeguarding corridor, where the microwave link safeguarding corridor falls within the statutory harbour limits, as defined in the 'Ardersier Port Harbour Limits - Microwave Link Safeguarded Corridor' plan ref. DIO10062140 - 13032026, as submitted to the Planning Authority on 18 March 2026.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

41. **Microwave Link Safeguarding 2**

No part of any vessel, platform or any other structure that has a height exceeding 180m above mean sea level may be deployed, moored or installed in the waters within the microwave link safeguarding corridor or, if deployed, moored, or installed adjacent to the microwave link safeguarding corridor, be permitted to project into the airspace above the microwave link safeguarding corridor where the microwave link safeguarding corridor falls within the statutory harbour limits as defined in the 'Ardersier Port Harbour Limits - Microwave Link Safeguarded Corridor' plan ref. DIO10062140 -13032026, as submitted to the Planning Authority on 18 March 2026.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

42. **Ministry of Defence Notification**

The Ministry of Defence Low Flying Cell, Air Traffic Control at RAF Lossiemouth and range control at Tain Air Weapon Range shall be notified in writing and provided with details of the times, route, and expected duration of any such transit movements at least 24 hours before any assembled floating

wind turbines in a complete and operational state are towed to or from the port, excluding any journeys made solely within the statutory harbour authority limits. Copies of such written notifications shall be provided to the local planning authority upon request.

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

43. **Towed Movements Limit**

No more than 1 towed movement of a fully assembled floating wind turbine(s) either to or from the harbour limits shall occur in any 24 hours, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority, in consultation by the Ministry of Defence (in each case such approval not to be unreasonably withheld or unreasonably conditioned).

Reason: To maintain aviation safety.

REASON FOR DECISION

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

REASONED CONCLUSION

The Council is in agreement with the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report that the: Port extension and continued use of the existing port facility for port-related services associated with energy-related uses including demolition and site clearance, upfilling and regrading / surfacing of new landward areas, and creation of hardstanding surface, quay construction, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, and associated works including manufacture, assembly, storage and delivery of port related cargo, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, bunding, parking, security fencing, site drainage, services, landscaping and biodiversity enhancement; is unlikely to give rise to any new or other significant adverse impact on the environment, other than those reported in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, received 14.11.2025, and a Significant effect on the setting of the Moor of Balnagowan, enclosure Scheduled Monument (SM4737. The Council is satisfied that all other environmental effects of this development can be addressed by way of mitigation. The Council has incorporated the requirement for a schedule of mitigation within the conditions of this permission. Monitoring of operational compliance has been secured through Conditions 6, 24, 25, and 31 of this permission.

INFORMATIVES

Initiation and Completion Notices

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

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

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

Flood Risk

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

Scottish Water

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

Septic Tanks and Soakaways

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

Local Roads Authority Consent

In addition to planning permission, you may require one or more separate consents (such as road construction consent, dropped kerb consent, a

road openings permit, occupation of the road permit etc.) from the Area Roads Team prior to work commencing. These consents may require additional work and/or introduce additional specifications and you are therefore advised to contact your local Area Roads office for further guidance at the earliest opportunity.

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

Further information on the Council's roads standards can be found at:

<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourenvironment/roadsandtransport>

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

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

Mud and Debris on Road

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

Construction Hours and Noise-Generating Activities

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

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

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

Protected Species – Halting of Work

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

<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/protected-areas-and-species/protected-species>

Nesting Birds

Construction works have the potential to disturb nesting birds or damage their nest sites, and as such, checks for nesting birds should be made, not more than 24 hours prior to the commencement of development if this coincides within the main bird breeding season (March-August inclusive). This survey should include the redline boundary. All wild bird nests are protected from damage, destruction, interference and obstruction under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Some birds (listed on schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act) have heightened protection where it is also an offence to disturb these birds while they are in or around the nest.

MoD Conditions

For the purpose of conditions 36- 43, the Statutory Harbour Authority limits are as defined in The Port of Ardersier Harbour Revision Order 2014 (or as may be defined in any such revised or replacement harbour order or statutory instrument).

Signature: Bob Roberston
Designation: (Acting) Planning Manager – South
Author: Jack Wiseman
Background Papers: Documents referred to in report and in case file.
Relevant Plans: Plan 1 - 25-22-MRH-001 Site Location
Plan 2 - 25-22-MRH-002 Proposed Extension
Plan 3 - 25-22-MRH-003 HRO Boundary
Plan 4 - 25-22-MRH-004 Site Access
Plan 5 - 25-22-MRH-005 Approved Layout
Plan 6 - 25-22-MRH-006 Indicative Site Layout
Plan 7 - 25-22-MRH-007 Buffer Zones

Plan 8 - 25-22-MRH-008 Buffer Zones Sections

Plan 9 - 25-22-MRH-009 Proposed Extension

Plan 10 - 003a Woodland Removal Plan

Plan 11 - 25-22-MRH-500 Rev. A Phase A and B

Plan 12 - DIO10062140 -13032026 Ardersier Port Harbour Limits -
Microwave Link Safeguarded Corridor

Plan 13 - IDL-019-1-DRW-055 Ardersier Port OSGB v2.0

Appendix 1 – Development Plan and Other Material Policy Considerations

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

National Planning Framework 4 (2023) (NPF4)

- A1.1 1 - Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises
- 2 - Climate Mitigation and Adaptation
- 3 - Biodiversity
- 4 - Natural Places
- 5 - Soils
- 6 - Forestry, Woodland and Trees
- 7 - Historic Assets and Places
- 10 - Coastal Development
- 11 - Energy
- 12 - Zero Waste
- 13 - Sustainable Transport
- 14 - Design Quality and Place
- 18 - Infrastructure First
- 22 - Flood Risk and Water Management
- 25 - Community Wealth Building
- 26 - Business and Industry
- 29 - Rural Development

Highland Wide Local Development Plan 2012 (HwLDP)

- A1.2 28 - Sustainable Design
- 29 - Design Quality and Place-making
- 30 - Physical Constraints
- 31 - Developer Contributions
- 36 - Development in the Wider Countryside
- 41 - Business and Industrial Land
- 42 - Previously Used Land
- 49 - Coastal Development
- 51 - Trees and Development
- 52 - Principle of Development in Woodland
- 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
- 64 - Flood Risk
- 65 - Waste Water Treatment
- 66 - Surface Water Drainage
- 72 - Pollution
- 73 - Air Quality
- 74 - Green Networks

Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (2024) (IMFLDP2)

- A1.3 The extant port area is allocated as an industrial development site within IMFLDP2 (WH01: Whiteness) however the extension areas do not fall within the allocation, with this area constituting unallocated 'grey land' not specifically promoted for nor safeguarded from development.

Highland Council Supplementary Planning Guidance

- A1.4 Developer Contributions (March 2018)
Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment (Jan 2013)
Green Networks (Jan 2013)
Highland Historic Environment Strategy (Jan 2013)
Highland's Statutorily Protected Species (March 2013)
Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines (May 2006)
Physical Constraints (March 2013)
Special Landscape Area Citations (June 2011)
Standards for Archaeological Work (March 2012)
Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)
Trees, Woodlands and Development (Jan 2013)

OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Other National Policy and Guidance

- A1.5 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)
The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)
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)
Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (2019)
Scheduled Monuments Consents Policy (2019)
PAN 1/2011 - Planning and Noise (2011)
Developing with Nature Guidance (NatureScot 2023)
Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects (2010)

Appendix 2 – Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy

A.2.1 The Development Plan comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the adopted Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) and any statutory supplementary guidance.

National Planning Framework 4

A2.2 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 and includes six spatial principles (just transition / conserving and recycling assets / local living / compact urban growth / rebalanced development / rural revitalisation. Part 1 sets out that there are eighteen national developments to support the spatial strategy and regional spatial priorities, which includes single large scale projects and networks of smaller proposals that are collectively nationally significant.
- Part 2 – sets out policies for the development and use of land that are 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.
- Part 3 – provides a series of annexes that provide the rationale for the strategies and policies of NPF4. The annexes outline how the document should be used and set out how the Scottish Government would implement the strategies and policies contained in the document.

A2.3 The Spatial Strategy acknowledges that Scotland is facing unprecedented challenges, particularly the need to cut greenhouse-gas emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. It recognises Scotland's environment as a vital national asset that underpins our economy, identity, health and wellbeing. The strategy emphasises that informed choices are required to ensure natural resources are used sustainably in ways that support communities.

A2.4 Reflecting legislative requirements, the Spatial Strategy makes clear that planning decisions must serve the long-term public interest. This involves directing development to the most appropriate locations, identifying the infrastructure needed to support it, and safeguarding key environmental assets so they continue to benefit future generations.

A2.5 The Spatial Priorities focus on creating sustainable places, where emissions are reduced and biodiversity is restored and better connected, liveable places, where people can enjoy healthier and higher-quality lives and productive places, where a greener, fairer, and more inclusive wellbeing economy can grow.

- A2.6 The proposed development is not a National Development but is expected to play a significant role in delivering National Development 3: Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure through its support for the construction of offshore wind farms.
- A2.7 NPF4 Policies 1 (Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises), 2 (Climate Mitigation and Adaptation), and 3 (Biodiversity) 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 must 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.
- A2.8 NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Places) reinforces these considerations by stating that development proposals which, due to their type, location or scale, would have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment will not be supported. The policy further explains how this applies to different environmental designations. Proposals that may have significant effects on European sites (SACs or SPAs) must be subject to appropriate assessment. In addition, development affecting a National Park, National Scenic Area, or Site of Special Scientific Interest will only be supported where: i) the objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the area are not compromised; or ii) any significant adverse effects on the designated qualities are clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits of national importance. In this case, and as outlined in more detail in Section 7 of this report, it is considered that the integrity of the relevant natural heritage designations would not be compromised by the proposed development.
- A2.9 Similarly, NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Places) affords protection to areas designated in Development Plans for local nature conservation or as Special Landscape Areas (SLAs). Development in such locations will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that it would not give rise to significantly adverse effects on the area's qualities or integrity, or where any such effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits of at least local importance.
- A2.10 NPF4 Policy 5 (Soils) aims to protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development. Policy 6 (Forestry, Woodland and Trees) aims to protect and expand forests, woodland and trees. In this case, the development is not on carbon-rich soils or on prime agricultural land. The proposal involves the felling of commercial plantation and native forest and the implementation of compensatory planting at another site. There is therefore no overall net loss of forestry.
- A2.11 NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places) aims to protect and enhance historic environment assets and places, and to enable positive change as a catalyst for the regeneration of places. It states that development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset. The

application includes sufficient information to identify significant effects on the historic environment which are taken into account in the planning balance.

- A2.12 NPF4 Policy 10 (Coastal Development) intends to protect coastal communities and assets and support resilience to the impacts of climate change. NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy) promotes all forms of renewable energy development, including associated enabling works. The proposed development is an acceptable form of coastal development and will facilitate the development of offshore wind farms, making a contribution to the development of renewable energy projects.
- A2.13 The reuse of materials on-site is consistent with NPF4 Policy 12 (Zero Waste) in terms of compliance with the waste hierarchy. A Travel Plan, to be updated by planning condition, also ensures compliance with NPF4 Policy 13 (Sustainable Transport) in terms of promoting sustainable transport modes.
- A2.14 NPF4 Policy 14 (Design Quality and Place) aims to encourage, promote and facilitate well designed development that makes successful places by taking a design-led approach and applying the Place Principle. NPF4 Policy 18 aims to encourage an infrastructure first approach to land use planning, and it is noted that infrastructure, such as road improvements, has been put in place in advance of this application. NPF4 Policy 22 (Flood Risk and Water Management) seeks to strengthen resilience to flood risk as a first principle and reducing the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding. Appropriate site drainage and flood mitigation measures are proposed accordingly.
- A2.15 NPF4 Policy 23 (Health and Safety) aims to protect people and places from environmental harm. Whilst the site has a HSE licence, HSE does not advise against proposal in compliance with this policy.
- A2.16 Community wealth building is proposed by NPF4 Policy 25 (Community Wealth Building). It is recognised that the proposed development stands to make a significant contribution to local employment and economic development. A Local Employment Scheme further secures this. The development of business and industry uses, and the rural economy are supported by NPF4 Policies 26 (Business and Industry) and 29 (Rural Development), respectively.

Highland-wide Local Development Plan

- A2.17 HwLDP Policy 36 Development in the Wider Countryside supports the principle of this type of development in countryside locations subject to detailed considerations, including siting, design and existing development patterns. HwLDP Policy 41 also gives support for the principle of this type of proposal outwith allocated sites subject to detailed considerations, including amenity and environmental impacts
- A2.18 HwLDP Policies 51, 52 and 57 presume against the loss of woodland, particularly native woodland. In this case, all woodland loss is to be compensated for.

- A2.19 Assessment of the impacts of the development on protected species, other important species and habitats have been adequately informed by the EIAR and appropriate mitigation proposed, in accordance with HwLDP policies 58, 59 and 60.
- A2.20 Landscape impacts have also been assessed through a Landscape, Seascape and Visual Impact Assessment in accordance with HwLDP Policy 61.
- A2.21 HwLDP Policies 64, 65 and 66 relate to flood risk, waste water treatment and surface water drainage. Acceptable water management, informed by a Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Impact Assessment, is secured by condition in compliance with these policies.
- A2.22 The approach to the development 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.

Area Local Development Plans- IMFLDP2

- A2.21 The application site is within the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) plan area. The existing port area is allocated for industrial development although the extension is not, nor is it safeguarded from development. Policy 7 gives support for the principle of this type of proposal outwith allocated sites subject to detailed considerations, including amenity and environmental impacts.

Appendix 3 – Viewpoint Assessment Appraisal – Visual Impact

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Major / Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 1: Easter / Wester Bog	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
Distance: 0.9km North	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.1a to 7.5.13: Viewpoint 1: Easter / Wester Bog.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by residents of properties located south of the site within the vicinity of Carse Wood. View across an open, relatively flat, agricultural field towards plantation woodland. Ardersier Port is located beyond the plantation woodland, and the existing port infrastructure is not visible within the view. Susceptibility: High Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane and stored jackets (tops of) would be visible above the intervening plantation woodland. Buildings and ground level activities would be screened by the intervening plantation woodland. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a large part of the skyline above the plantation woodland. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered</p>							

Viewpoint	Proposed Development					Cumulative		
	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>							
Viewpoint 2: Ardersier Cemetery	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
Distance: 1.9km Northeast	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.2a to 7.5.2e: Viewpoint 2: Ardersier Cemetery</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by cemetery visitors. A slightly elevated view across relatively flat, coastal farmland towards plantation woodland located between coastal farmland and the firth beyond. Ardersier port is located beyond the woodland and, bar the tip of a crane, is screened from view by intervening trees. To the left of the image, the elevated land of the Black Isle, across the firth, is visible in the background. Susceptibility: High Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse</p>							

Viewpoint	Proposed Development					Cumulative		
	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane, stored jackets, and buildings (top of) would be visible above the intervening plantation woodland. Ground level activities would be screened by the intervening plantation woodland. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial features into the sky above the plantation woodland. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>							
Viewpoint 3: B9039 Old Military Road west of Ardersier	App	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Significant	Medium	Medium	Major Adverse
	THC	High-Medium	High-Medium	Major Moderate Adverse	Significant	High-Medium	High-Medium	Major Moderate Adverse
Distance: 4.6km Northeast	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.3a to 7.5.3e: Viewpoint 3: B9039 Old Military Road west of Ardersier</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u></p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative			
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance	
			<p>Represents views experienced by vehicular drivers and passengers who take an interest in the views along this coastal road when travelling through the area. View across a bay towards the coastal village of Ardersier and the elevated farmland beyond. To the left of the image, the elevated land of the Black Isle, across the firth, is visible in the background. The horizon is relatively complex, including wooded areas, fields and elevated hills. Ardersier port is located beyond the localised rise in topography and screened from view by topography and trees.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High-Medium Value: High-Medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Moderate Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane and stored jackets (tops of) would be visible above the intervening plantation woodland. Buildings and ground level activities would be screened by the intervening plantation woodland. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a large part of the skyline above the plantation woodland. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>THC consider the applicant has under-assessed the magnitude of change and level of effect at Viewpoint 3 which would result in a higher significance of effect at this location. THC assess the magnitude at this location as High-Medium resulting in a Major-Moderate adverse and Significant visual effect. The proposed development, in particular the turbines, would appear to impose upon the settlement of Ardersier seen in the direction of travel for road users and would change the user experience as one travels along this route thereby resulting in a greater visual effect at this location.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u></p>						

Viewpoint	Proposed Development					Cumulative		
	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.							
Viewpoint 4: Fort George – northeast bastion	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
Distance: 3km East	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.4a to 7.5.4e: Viewpoint 4: Fort George – northeast bastion.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by visitors to Fort George. View from the northeast bastion of Fort George towards coastal farmlands and plantations east of the fort. There are glimpsed views of Ardersier port related features such as ships, cranes and built structures above intervening vegetation. The horizon is complex with stretches defined by water, vegetation and open hill tops.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect:</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
<p>The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane, stored jackets and floating bases, and buildings would be visible on the horizon. Ground level activities would be partially screened by intervening vegetation. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features across a large extent of the view. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>								
Viewpoint 5: Chanonry Point	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
Distance: 4.7km East	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.5a to 7.5.5e: Viewpoint 5: Chanonry Point</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by Visitors to Chanonry Point. View from the shoreline at Chanonry Point over the Moray Firth towards Fort George and Ardersier village. Ardersier port is located beyond the fort. The horizon is complex with stretches defined by water, vegetation and open hill tops. Upland hills and mountains are visible in the distant background.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High</p>							

Viewpoint	Proposed Development					Cumulative		
	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane, stored jackets and floating bases, and buildings would be visible on the horizon. Ground level activities would be partially screened by intervening vegetation. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features across a large extent of a relatively simple view with a strong horizontal emphasis. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>							
Viewpoint 6: Rosemarkie beachfront	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.6a to 7.5.6e: Viewpoint 6: Rosemarkie beachfront								

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Distance: 5.5km East			<p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by Rosemarkie beachfront visitors take an interest in the view across the firth. View across the Moray Firth from the Black Isle towards the southern Moray Firth shoreline. An open view with direct views towards Ardersier Port, Fort George and Ardersier village. The inland backdrop is formed by distant upland hills and mountains.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane, stored jackets, floating bases and turbine components, and buildings would be visible on the horizon. Ground level activities would also be visible. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a relatively simple view with a strong horizontal emphasis.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>					

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 7: Headland north of Rosemarkie	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
Distance: 6.1km East	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.7a to 7.5.7e: Viewpoint 7: Headland north of Rosemarkie</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by residents on the headland with south facing views. View from an elevated position over farmed and wooded slopes towards the Moray Firth and the landscape beyond. The elevated position affords open downward views of Whiteness Head spit, Ardersier port, Carse Wood, Fort George and Ardersier Village. Nairn beach and town are visible beyond Whiteness Head. Upland hills and mountains, which include the Hills of Cromdale, Cairngorm and Monadhliath Mountains are located in the far distance and form the backdrop to the view</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The entire site would be visible from this elevated location. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a view where the foreground and midground contains very little existing built form. The development would appear to 'jut' out into the Moray Firth. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered.</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>							
Viewpoint 8: Learnie Red Rocks	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
Distance: 4.8km Southwest	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.8a to 7.5.8e: Viewpoint 8: Learnie Red Rocks</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by cyclists following Sustrans National Cycle Network Route 1. View from an elevated position over coastal edge fields, tree groups and wooded areas towards the Moray Firth and the landscape beyond. The elevated position affords open downward views of Whiteness Head spit, Ardersier port, Carse Wood and Nairn beach and town. Vegetation limits views of Fort George and Ardersier Village. Upland hills and mountains, which include the Hills of Cromdale and Cairngorm are located in the far distance and form the backdrop to the view.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: High</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
<p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The entire site would be visible from this elevated location. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a view where the foreground and midground contains very little existing built form. The proposed development would occupy a prominent location on the opposite coastline and would extend over a large part of the view. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>								
Viewpoint 9: Hilton of Delnies / The Secret Beach	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.9a to 7.5.9e: Viewpoint 9: Hilton of Delnies / The Secret Beach							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Distance: 2.2km West			<p>Sensitivity Considerations Represents views experienced by visitors to Hilton of Delnies / The Secret Beach. View along the coastal edge at Carse of Delnies northwest down Whiteness Head spit towards elevated landscape of the Black Isle which forms the backdrop of the view. Distant hills and uplands are visible but faint and blend into the sky. Ardersier Port cranes are viewed against the Black Isle farmed and wooded slopes. Carse Wood plantations screen views of the coastal farmland south of Ardersier Port.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: High</p> <p>MoC considerations Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The entire site would be visible from this low-level location. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a view where the foreground and midground contains very little existing built form. The proposed development would occupy a large extent of the view. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight</p>					

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative			
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance	
			months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.						
Viewpoint 10: Nairn Beach	App	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse	
	THC	High	High	Major Adverse	Significant	High	High	Major Adverse	
Distance: 5km West	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.10a to 7.5.10e: Viewpoint 10: Nairn Beach</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by visitors to Nairn Beach. View west along the shoreline which, in the foreground, includes residential properties and Nairn Golf Club. Further along the shore Carse Wood and Ardersier Port earthworks, cranes and boats are visible. Open views across the Moray Firth towards the farmed and forested slopes and coastal cliffs of the Black Isle. The distant hills and uplands of Ben Wyvis, Easter Ross and Monadhliath Mountains are visible. The view includes features such as the transmitter masts on the Black Isle and Novar Wind Farm near northwest of AIness.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: High</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The entire site would be visible from this low-level, open, shoreline location. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a view where the foreground and midground contains very little existing</p>								

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative			
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance	
			<p>built form. The proposed development would occupy a moderate extent of the view. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be substantially altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / major adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>						
Viewpoint 11: A96 at Delnies	App	Medium	Low	Low	Not Significant	Medium	Low	Minor Adverse	
	THC	Medium	Low	Low	Not Significant	Medium	Low	Minor Adverse	
Distance: 3.9km West	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.11a to 7.5.11e: Viewpoint 11: A96 at Delnies.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by A96 road users travelling west towards Inverness. View across the A96 over the under-construction Land at Delnies mixed use development. A hedgerow with trees, located in the mid-ground, limits and frames the view further northwest. Framed views of the farmed and forested slopes of the Black Isle are available where there are larger gaps in the midground vegetation.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium Value: Low</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u></p>								

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>Size and scale of effect: Minor Adverse Scale of Effect is Not Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane, stored jackets and buildings would be partially visible above the slight rise in topography and through the intervening trees. Ground level activities would be screened by the intervening topographical rise. The under-assembly turbines would be the most notable of the large-scale industrial features associated with the proposed development where they extend above the backdrop formed by the Black Isle. The proposed development would be located within a contained part of the view. The proposed development would be at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be slightly altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / minor adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>							
Viewpoint 12: Rail crossing near Flemington	App	Medium	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	THC	Medium	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.12a to 7.5.12e: Viewpoint 12: Rail crossing near Flemington							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Distance: 3.8km North		<p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by Old Military Road users. View across large, open, broadly flat agricultural fields with subtle topographical undulations and ditches. Isolated properties, such as Flemington Farm, are visible and set into the wooded coastal landscape beyond the open fields. Longer range views are typically limited by woodland blocks but elevated areas of the Black Isle are visible in the distance above the intervening woodland blocks. There are glimpsed views of fields beyond the woodland blocks where there are stands of clear-stem trees. Ardersier port is not visible, screened from view by the intervening vegetation.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium Value: Medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Moderate Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane and stored jackets (tops of) would be visible above the intervening woodlands and tree line vegetation. Ground level activities would be screened by the intervening vegetation. The proposed development would introduce notable, large-scale, industrial features into the skyline above the landscape of agricultural fields and plantation woodlands. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / moderate adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u></p>						

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.							
Viewpoint 13: B9090 near Royal Brackla Distillery	App	Medium	Low	Low	Not Significant	Medium	Low	Minor Adverse
	THC	Medium	Low	Low	Not Significant	Medium	Low	Minor Adverse
	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.13a to 7.5.13e: Viewpoint 13: B9090 near Royal Brackla Distillery.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by A96 road users travelling east towards Nairn. View across open agricultural fields with long range views over the coastal farmland landscape. Inverness Airport runway is located in the midground, and airport infrastructure such as windsocks, signs and towers are visible. Ardersier village, located beyond the runway, is partially visible. The localised topographical rise beyond Ardersier Village screens Ardersier Port. The Moray Firth isn't visible, but the elevated landscape of farmed and forested slopes and cliffs of the Black Isle are visible in the distance. The Black Isle Mount Eagle transmission tower is visible above the elevated landscape horizon.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium Value: Low</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Minor adverse Scale of Effect is Not Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect:</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
<p>The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane and stored jackets (most of) would be visible above the intervening topography and vegetation. Ground level activities would be screened by the intervening topography and vegetation. The proposed development would introduce notable, large-scale, vertical, industrial features into the skyline. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / minor adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>								
Viewpoint 14: A96 layby near Culblair	App	Medium	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	THC	Medium	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
Distance: 6.2km North	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.14a to 7.5.14e: Viewpoint 14: A96 layby near Culblair.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by A96 road users travelling east towards Nairn. View across open agricultural fields with long range views over the coastal farmland landscape. Inverness Airport runway is located in the midground, and airport infrastructure such as windsocks, signs and towers are visible. Ardersier village, located beyond the runway, is partially visible. The localised topographical rise beyond Ardersier Village screens Ardersier Port. The Moray Firth isn't visible, but the elevated</p>							

Viewpoint	Proposed Development					Cumulative		
	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p>landscape of farmed and forested slopes and cliffs of the Black Isle are visible in the distance. The Black Isle Mount Eagle transmission tower is visible above the elevated landscape horizon.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium Value: Medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Moderate adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The under-assembly offshore wind turbines, crane and stored jackets (most of) would be visible above the intervening topography and vegetation. Ground level activities would be screened by the intervening topography and vegetation. The proposed development would introduce notable, large-scale, vertical, industrial features into the skyline. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / moderate adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>							
	App	High	No change	No change	Not Significant	No change	No change	Negligible

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 15: Culloden Battlefield	THC	High	No change	No change	Not Significant	No change	No change	Negligible
	Distance: 13.3km Northeast	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.15a to 7.5.15e: Viewpoint 15: Culloden Battlefield.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by Visitors to Culloden Battlefield and Visitor Centre. View across the Culloden Battlefield and Visitors Centre meadow towards Culloden Forest plantation woodland in the midground. The woodland encloses the view, screening views of the landscape beyond. Where there is a localised drop in woodland, there are distance views of Assich Forest. Built form within the view includes Battlefield Bar and Restaurant and a cluster of properties around the B851 / crossroads at Leanach.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: No change</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: No Change / Negligible Scale of Effect is Not Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The proposed development would be entirely screened by intervening plantation woodlands. The overall composition of the view would remain unaltered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / negligible magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u></p>						

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
<p>It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>								
Viewpoint 16: Avoch	App	High	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	THC	High-Medium	High-Medium	High-Medium	Significant	High-Medium	High-Medium	Major Moderate Adverse
Distance: 10km East	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.16a to 7.5.16e: Viewpoint 16: Avoch</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by residents of Ormonde Terrace. View across Avoch Bay into the Moray Firth. Avoch Harbour, located further east along the coast is visible in the view, set into the Black Isle farmed and forested slopes and cliffs. Built form within Fortrose is also visible further east along the shoreline. From this position, Chanonry Point and Fort George promontories appear to join and form a continuous band of land across the view. Ardersier Port and Ardersier village are visible across the water. Planes coming into land at Inverness airport add movement into the view. There are faint views of upland hills and mountains in the far distance.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High-Medium Value: High-Medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Moderate adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
<p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The majority of the site would be visible across the open water of the inner Moray Firth. The proposed development would introduce prominent, large-scale, industrial, vertical features across a notable extent of a relatively simple view with a strong horizontal emphasis. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>THC consider the applicant has under-assessed the magnitude of change and level of effect at Viewpoint 16 which would result in a higher significance of effect at this location. THC assess the magnitude at this location as High-Medium resulting in a Major-Moderate adverse and Significant visual effect. The proposed development would completely change the strong horizontal extent of this landscape and seascape of the inner Moray Firth. The scale of the proposed development would be at odds within this wide view resulting in a greater visual effect at this location.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>								
Viewpoint 17: Sutors of Cromarty (South Sutor) Distance: 8.1km South	App	High	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	THC	High-Medium	High-Medium	High-Medium	Significant	High-Medium	High-Medium	Major Moderate Adverse
	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.17a to 7.5.17e: Viewpoint 17: Sutors of Cromarty (South Sutor).</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u></p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
			<p>Represents views experienced by visitors to the Sutors of Cromarty (South Sutor). View over the headland of grassland, path patches of scrub and blocks of trees, towards the Moray Firth and the landscape south of the firth. Views of the firth are partially screened by vegetation and topography. The open view across the water from this elevated location affords direct views of the southern shoreline of the Moray Firth and both Nairn and Ardersier Port are visible. Upland hills and mountains including the Hills of Cromdale and Monadhliath Mountains area visible in the distance.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High-medium Value: High-medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Major Moderate adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The entire site would be visible from this location. The proposed development would introduce notable, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a view where the foreground and midground contains very little existing built form. The development would be seen against the backdrop of hills and, apart from turbine tips, not break above the skyline formed by the hills. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>THC consider the applicant has under-assessed the magnitude of change and level of effect at Viewpoint 17 which would result in a higher significance of effect at this location. THC assess the magnitude at this location as High-Medium resulting in a Major-Moderate adverse and Significant visual effect. The proposed development would be clearly visible from this elevated viewpoint where there is very little built-form and a strong emphasis on the seascape, and it would detract from the characteristic of the view.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u></p>					

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.							
Viewpoint 18: Findhorn	App	High	No change	No change	Not Significant	No change	No change	Negligible
	THC	High	No change	No change	Not Significant	No change	No change	Negligible
Distance: 23.2km Southwest	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.18a to 7.5.18e: Viewpoint 18: Findhorn.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by users of the Moray Coast Trail at Findhorn. View over the coastal margin of sand dunes and shoreline rock armour protection towards Culbin Forest and the Sutors of Cromarty. The sand dunes provide a degree of low-level screening of the coast west of Findhorn and Culbin Forest limits the views west of the forest. Beyond the Moray Firth and the Sutors of Cromarty, upland hills and mountains, including Ben Wyvis, Easter Ross, are visible in the distance. Built form within the view includes properties located inland from the sand dunes and buildings associated with Findhorn Marina.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: No change</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Negligible Scale of Effect is Not Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The proposed development would be entirely screened by intervening topography. The overall composition of the view would remain unaltered.</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
			<p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / negligible magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>					
Viewpoint 19: Burghead visitor centre	App	High	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
	THC	High	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Distance: 30.9km Southwest	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.19a to 7.5.19e: Viewpoint 19: Burghead visitor centre.</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by visitors to Burghead Visitor Centre. View across the open water of the Moray Firth with direct views of distant coastlines including the coast between Roseisle Forest and Findhorn. Beyond the Moray Firth and the Sutors of Cromarty, upland hills and mountains, including Ben Wyvis (Easter Ross) are visible in the distance. Three wind turbines near Kinloss Barracks are visible in the view.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: Negligible</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Negligible Scale of Effect is Not significant</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative			
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance	
			<p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The proposed development would be barely perceptible and difficult to pick out within the view. Any visual change would be so small such that the view would be widely regarded as unaltered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / negligible magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>						
Viewpoint 20: A9 south of Inverness	App	Medium	Medium	Medium	Not Significant	Medium	Medium	Negligible	
	THC	Medium	Medium	Medium	Not Significant	Medium	Medium	Negligible	
	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.20a to 7.5.20e: Viewpoint 20: A9 south of Inverness.</p> <p>Distance: 18km Northeast</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by A9 road users travelling towards Inverness. View cross the A9 over an adjacent open field. Plantation woodlands limit visibility to the south and east. A drop in elevation opens up a framed view of the Moray Firth. The Black Isle is visible in the distance. Structures visible within the view include a radio station tower and pylons.</p> <p>Susceptibility: Medium Value: Medium</p>								

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
	<p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Negligible Scale of Effect is Not Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The proposed development would be entirely screened by intervening woodlands. The overall composition of the view would remain unaltered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / negligible magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>							
Viewpoint 21: Kessock Bridge Cycleway	App	High	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	THC	High	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	Distance: 16.3km Northeast	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.21a to 7.5.21e: Viewpoint 21: Kessock Bridge Cycleway</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by cyclists using the Kessock Bridge Cycleway. Elevated view from the Kessock Bridge over the open waters of the Moray Firth towards the coastal farmland landscape west of Inverness. The view includes the northern and southern Moray Firth shorelines.</p>						

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative							
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance					
			<p>The farmed and forested slopes of the Black Isle are visible north of the firth, and rolling farmland and woodland rise up inland from the southern coast. The promontories at Chanonry Point and Fort George overlap on the horizon. Mount Eagle transmission tower is visible in the view.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: Medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Moderate Adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: Most of the proposed development would be visible across the open water of the inner Moray Firth. Ground level activity would be barely perceptible at this distance. The proposed development would introduce notable, large-scale, industrial, vertical features within a contained extent of a relatively simple view with a strong horizontal emphasis. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / moderate adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>										
	App	High	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible					

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
Viewpoint 22: Aultvaich Distance: 29.7km East	THC	High	Negligible	Negligible	Not Significant	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.22a to 7.5.22e: Viewpoint 22: Aultvaich</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by residents of Aultvaich. View towards the Beaully Firth and the Kessock Bridge of settled, farmed and forested slopes and farmed river plain landscapes. Built form within the view includes individual properties, Muir of Ord Industrial estate sheds, and the southern extent of Muir of Ord settlement. Pylons and wooden telegraph poles are visible.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: Negligible</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Negligible Scale of Effect is Not significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The proposed development would be barely perceptible and difficult to pick out within the view. Any visual change would be so small such that the view would be widely regarded as unaltered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / negligible magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative			
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance	
			months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.						
Viewpoint 23: Pitmaduthy	App	High	No change	No change	Not Significant	No change	No change	Negligible	
	THC	High	No change	No change	Not Significant	No change	No change	Negligible	
Distance: 18km South	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.23a to 7.5.23e: Viewpoint 23: Pitmaduthy</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by residents of Pitmaduthy. View across a large, open agricultural field in the direction of Nigg. Woodland south of the fields limits views further south. The elevated landscape within the vicinity of the Hill of Nigg is visible above the intervening vegetation. Built features within the view include individual properties and farm sheds.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: No change</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Negligible Scale of Effect is Not significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect: The proposed development would be entirely screened by intervening plantations and woodlands. The overall composition of the view would remain unaltered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a not significant / negligible magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p>								

			Proposed Development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
<p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u> It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>								
Viewpoint 24: Balintore	App	High	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
	THC	High	Medium	Medium	Significant	Medium	Medium	Moderate Adverse
Distance: 18.3km South	<p>Baseline is as described in EIAR Chapter 7 (Landscape, Seascape and Visual), and EIAR Appendix 7.4, and Figures 7.5.24a to 7.5.24e: Viewpoint 24: Balintore</p> <p><u>Sensitivity Considerations</u> Represents views experienced by visitors to Balintore Seafront. View across the grassed seafront open space over the Moray Firth towards the southern coastline of the Moray Firth. The Sutors of Cromarty northern Sutor is a notable elevated area of landscape within the view. The southern coastline of the Moray Firth is visible in the distance, and the upland hills and mountains are faintly visible in the far distance.</p> <p>Susceptibility: High Value: Medium</p> <p><u>MoC considerations</u> Size and scale of effect: Moderate adverse Scale of Effect is Significant</p> <p>Geographical extent receptor would experience the effect:</p>							

Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Susceptibility / value of the view)	Proposed Development			Cumulative		
			Magnitude of change (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration)	Scale of Effect (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance (Major and Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant)	Magnitude of Change (Scale / Extent / Duration)	Additional Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor)	Significance
			<p>The entire site would be visible from this location, but the ground level activities would be barely perceptible at this distance. The proposed development would introduce notable, large-scale, industrial, vertical features into a view where the foreground and midground contains very little existing built form. The development would be seen against the backdrop of hills and, apart from turbine blades, not break above the skyline formed by the hills. The proposed development would be entirely at odds with the existing characteristics of the view. The view would be notably altered.</p> <p>The applicant's assessment of a significant / moderate adverse magnitude of change is reasonable, and the viewpoint assessment is broadly appropriate.</p> <p><u>Duration and reversibility of effect</u></p> <p>It is recognised that the proposed development does not include permanent and fixed structures, and that many of the activities associated with the proposed development, particularly turbine assembly, would be transient and seasonal (up to six-eight months a year), thereby being time-limited. A maximum of three turbines will be at quayside, and these will be in various stages of the integration process.</p>					

Appendix 4 - Appropriate Assessments

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

INNER MORAY FIRTH SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA) AND RAMSAR SITE

25/04362/PIP

Ardersier Port - Port extension and continued use of the existing port facility for port-related services associated with energy-related uses including demolition and site clearance, upfilling and regrading / surfacing of new landward areas, and creation of hardstanding surface, quay construction, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, and associated works including manufacture, assembly, storage and delivery of port related cargo, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, bunding, parking, security fencing, site drainage, services, landscaping and biodiversity enhancement.

**Former Fabrication Yard
Ardersier**

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS AFFECTING EUROPEAN SITES

The status of the Inner Moray Firth SPA means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') or, for reserved matters the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended apply. The Inner Moray Firth SPA is also designated as a Ramsar site. The requirement to consider this Ramsar site reflects the recent Scottish Government policy change set out in the Chief Planner's letter (9th July 2025) that Ramsar sites in Scotland should be treated as if they were European sites for the purposes of land use change decision making. The following appraisal refers to 'Natura 2000 sites' throughout, which are European sites. For the purpose of this appraisal, Ramsar sites are treated as if they were European sites to reflect the recent Scottish Government policy change.

Where a plan or project that is not directly connected with or necessary to the management for nature conservation of a Natura 2000 site is likely to have a significant effect, the Council, as competent authority must undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications for the conservation objectives for the qualifying interests of the designated site. The need for Appropriate Assessment extends to plans or projects out with the boundary of the site in order to determine their implications for the interest protected within the site.

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

- Consider whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the SPA/Ramsar for conservation; and, if not,

- Consider, on a precautionary basis, whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the SPA/Ramsar either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- Make an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the plan or project for the SPA/Ramsar in view of the SPA/Ramsar's conservation objectives.

In light of the conclusions of the assessment, the competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA/Ramsar, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Where it cannot be ascertained that there will be no adverse effects on site integrity, and the competent authority is satisfied there are no alternative solutions, the plan or project can only be allowed to proceed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, which can include those of a social or economic nature. In the event of no alternative solutions and imperative reasons of overriding public interest tests being satisfied, the competent authority must secure necessary compensatory measures to ensure the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network is protected.

LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar sites are protected for their internationally important non-breeding populations of divers, grebes, sea ducks and shags. In addition, the Ramsar site is designated for its intertidal mudflats and sandflats, saltmarsh, sand dune and shingle habitats.

The proposal is not connected with or necessary to management of the SPA/Ramsar site for conservation. Based on information provided by the applicant, and advice from NatureScot (dated 16th January 2026), the proposal is considered to have a likely significant effect on the SPA/Ramsar site, in view of its potential impacts on the non-breeding waterfowl and common tern qualifying interests of the SPA/Ramsar site.

Consequently, the Highland Council, as competent authority, is required to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the proposal on the Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar, in view of the SPA/Ramsar's conservation objectives of the above-mentioned qualifying interests.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Under regulation 48(3) of the Habitats Regulations, the competent authority is legally obliged to consult NatureScot (including in Scottish Territorial Waters) and to have regard to NatureScot's advice at the appropriate assessment stage. The Appropriate Assessment is informed by advice provided by NatureScot and information submitted by the applicant.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL APPRAISAL

The Inner Moray Firth SPA/Ramsar sites are within the broad zone of influence of the proposed works. The proximity of the site means that construction or operational impacts

such as noise, vessel movements, or changes in sediment dynamics, could directly affect the designated site's ornithological features, particularly foraging or roosting birds.

In terms of impacts on the waterfowl qualifying interest, NatureScot advise that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site subject to the following mitigation:

- The final Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP), Port Operational Environmental Management Plan (POEMP) and Habitat Management Plan (HMP) are agreed with Highland Council in consultation with NatureScot before any works commence on site.

In terms of impacts on the common tern qualifying interest, NatureScot advise that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site subject to the following mitigation:

- Construction phase mitigation (Section 1.2 Appendix 13.4 of the EIAR) should be amended so that the noise and visual screening mitigation ("noisy works such as piling will be programmed to avoid peak periods of sensitivity, including the wader breeding season") clearly applies to the common tern breeding season, not just the wader breeding season.
- The final Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMP), Port Operational Environmental Management Plan (POEMP) and Habitat Management Plan (HMP) are to be agreed with Highland Council in consultation with NatureScot before any works commence on site.

The mitigation advised by NatureScot has been secured through the recommended planning conditions.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

MORAY FIRTH SPECIAL PROTECTION AREA (SPA)

25/04362/PIP

Ardersier Port - Port extension and continued use of the existing port facility for port-related services associated with energy-related uses including demolition and site clearance, upfilling and regrading / surfacing of new landward areas, and creation of hardstanding surface, quay construction, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, and associated works including manufacture, assembly, storage and delivery of port related cargo, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, bunding, parking, security fencing, site drainage, services, landscaping and biodiversity enhancement.

**Former Fabrication Yard
Ardersier**

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS AFFECTING EUROPEAN SITES

The status of the Moray Firth SPA means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') or, for reserved matters the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended apply. The following appraisal refers to 'Natura 2000 sites' throughout, which are European sites.

Where a plan or project that is not directly connected with or necessary to the management for nature conservation of a Natura 2000 site is likely to have a significant effect, the Council, as competent authority must undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications for the conservation objectives for the qualifying interests of the designated site. The need for Appropriate Assessment extends to plans or projects out with the boundary of the site in order to determine their implications for the interest protected within the site.

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

- Consider whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the SPA for conservation; and, if not,
- Consider, on a precautionary basis, whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the SPA either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- Make an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the plan or project for the SPA in view of the SPA's conservation objectives.

In light of the conclusions of the assessment, the competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Where it cannot be ascertained that there will be no adverse effects on site integrity, and the competent authority is satisfied there are no alternative solutions, the plan or project can only be allowed to proceed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, which in can include those of a social or economic nature. In the event of no alternative solutions and imperative reasons of overriding public interest tests being satisfied, the competent authority must secure necessary compensatory measures to ensure the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network is protected.

LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The Moray Firth SPA is protected for its internationally important non-breeding populations of divers, grebes, sea ducks, and shags.

The proposal is not connected with or necessary to management of the SPA site for conservation. Based on information provided by the applicant, and advice from NatureScot

(dated 16th January 2026), the proposal is considered to have a likely significant effect on the SPA, in view of its potential impacts on its marine waterbirds qualifying features.

Consequently, the Highland Council, as competent authority, is required to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the proposal on the Moray Firth SPA, in view of the SPA's conservation objectives of the above-mentioned qualifying interests.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Under regulation 48(3) of the Habitats Regulations, the competent authority is legally obliged to consult NatureScot (including in Scottish Territorial Waters) and to have regard to NatureScot's advice at the appropriate assessment stage. The Appropriate Assessment is informed by advice provided by NatureScot and information submitted by the applicant.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL APPRAISAL

The Moray Firth SPA is within the broad zone of influence of the proposed works, with a direct hydrological pathway also present that could give rise to waterborne pollution and disturbance, including noise, affecting foraging or roosting SPA bird species. Disturbance from vessels, which includes assembled turbines under tow, is also possible.

NatureScot advise that, provided the proposal is carried out in accordance with the mitigation outlined within the Port of Ardersier Turbine Towing Protocol, the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site.

The mitigation advised by NatureScot has been secured through the recommended planning conditions.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

MORAY FIRTH SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

25/04362/PIP

Ardersier Port - Port extension and continued use of the existing port facility for port-related services associated with energy-related uses including demolition and site clearance, upfilling and regrading / surfacing of new landward areas, and creation of hardstanding surface, quay construction, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, and associated works including manufacture, assembly, storage and delivery of port related cargo, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, bunding, parking, security fencing, site drainage, services, landscaping and biodiversity enhancement.

**Former Fabrication Yard
Ardersier**

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS AFFECTING EUROPEAN SITES

The status of the Moray Firth SAC means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') or, for reserved matters the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended apply. The following appraisal refers to 'Natura 2000 sites' throughout, which are European sites.

Where a plan or project that is not directly connected with or necessary to the management for nature conservation of a Natura 2000 site is likely to have a significant effect, the Council, as competent authority must undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications for the conservation objectives for the qualifying interests of the designated site. The need for Appropriate Assessment extends to plans or projects out with the boundary of the site in order to determine their implications for the interest protected within the site.

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

- Consider whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the SAC for conservation; and, if not,
- Consider, on a precautionary basis, whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the SAC either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- Make an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the plan or project for the SAC in view of the SAC's conservation objectives.

In light of the conclusions of the assessment, the competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Where it cannot be ascertained that there will be no adverse effects on site integrity, and the competent authority is satisfied there are no alternative solutions, the plan or project can only be allowed to proceed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, which in can include those of a social or economic nature. In the event of no alternative solutions and imperative reasons of overriding public interest tests being satisfied, the competent authority must secure necessary compensatory measures to ensure the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network is protected.

LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The Moray Firth SAC is designated for features of international conservation importance, most notably bottlenose dolphins and subtidal sandbanks.

The proposal is not connected with or necessary to management of the SAC site for conservation. Based on information provided by the applicant, and advice from NatureScot (dated 16th January 2026), the proposal is considered to have a likely significant effect on the SAC, in view of the potential impacts from marine works, dredging, sea disposal and operation on its bottlenose dolphin qualifying features.

Whilst the Highland Council is not the competent authority for marine works, impacts on bottlenose dolphin from the operation of the site, such as from operational vessel movements to and from the port, are associated with the use of the site as an Energy Transition Facility and so require to be assessed by the Council.

Consequently, the Highland Council, as competent authority, is required to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the proposal on the Moray Firth SAC, in view of the SAC's conservation objectives of the above-mentioned qualifying interests.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Under regulation 48(3) of the Habitats Regulations, the competent authority is legally obliged to consult NatureScot (including in Scottish Territorial Waters) and to have regard to NatureScot's advice at the appropriate assessment stage. The Appropriate Assessment is informed by advice provided by NatureScot and information submitted by the applicant.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL APPRAISAL

The Moray Firth SAC is within the broad zone of influence of the proposed works and the operation of the port is likely to have a significant effect on the SAC's bottlenose dolphin qualifying feature.

NatureScot advise that the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site due to the following factors:

- Vessel movements associated with the Port of Ardersier extension (including marine works, sea deposit and operation) will be slow and utilise the established vessel route from the Port into the Moray Firth. The Conservation and Management Advice document for this SAC, indicates no further assessment is required for commercial shipping using existing routes.
- With the implementation of the proposed best practice marine mammal mitigation measures detailed within the draft Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan (EIAR Appendix 11.7) submitted with this application, there should be no adverse effect on site integrity for bottlenose dolphins.
- Mitigation measures proposed include, for example, a marine mammal observer (MMO) to monitor a 500m mitigation zone during noisy construction, a 200m mitigation zone around sea disposal activities and use of a passive acoustic monitor (PAM) when visibility is poor (e.g. sea state >4, after dark, foggy) etc.

The mitigation advised by NatureScot has been secured through the recommended planning conditions.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

DORNOCH FIRTH AND MORRICH MORE SAC

25/04362/PIP

Ardersier Port - Port extension and continued use of the existing port facility for port-related services associated with energy-related uses including demolition and site clearance, upfilling and regrading / surfacing of new landward areas, and creation of hardstanding surface, quay construction, erection of offices, industrial and storage buildings, and associated works including manufacture, assembly, storage and delivery of port related cargo, temporary stockpiling of dredged material, bunding, parking, security fencing, site drainage, services, landscaping and biodiversity enhancement.

**Former Fabrication Yard
Ardersier**

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS AFFECTING EUROPEAN SITES

The status of the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') or, for reserved matters the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended apply. The following appraisal refers to 'Natura 2000 sites' throughout, which are European sites.

Where a plan or project that is not directly connected with or necessary to the management for nature conservation of a Natura 2000 site is likely to have a significant effect, the Council, as competent authority must undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications for the conservation objectives for the qualifying interests of the designated site. The need for Appropriate Assessment extends to plans or projects out with the boundary of the site in order to determine their implications for the interest protected within the site.

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

- Consider whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of the SAC for conservation; and, if not,
- Consider, on a precautionary basis, whether the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the SAC either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.
- Make an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the plan or project for the SAC in view of the SAC'S conservation objectives.

In light of the conclusions of the assessment, the competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the SAC, alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

Where it cannot be ascertained that there will be no adverse effects on site integrity, and the competent authority is satisfied there are no alternative solutions, the plan or project can only be allowed to proceed if there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest, which can include those of a social or economic nature. In the event of no alternative solutions and imperative reasons of overriding public interest tests being satisfied, the competent authority must secure necessary compensatory measures to ensure the overall coherence of the Natura 2000 network is protected.

LIKELY SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS

The Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC is protected for a range of coastal and marine habitats and populations of harbour seal and otter.

The proposal is not connected with or necessary to management of the SAC site for conservation. Based on information provided by the applicant, and advice from NatureScot (dated 16th January 2026), the proposal is considered to have a likely significant effect on the SAC, in view of its potential impacts on the harbour seal qualifying feature of the SAC.

Consequently, the Highland Council, as competent authority, is required to undertake an Appropriate Assessment of the implications of the proposal on the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC, in view of the SAC's conservation objectives of the above-mentioned qualifying interests.

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Under regulation 48(3) of the Habitats Regulations, the competent authority is legally obliged to consult NatureScot (including in Scottish Territorial Waters) and to have regard to NatureScot's advice at the appropriate assessment stage. The Appropriate Assessment is informed by advice provided by NatureScot and information submitted by the applicant.

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL APPRAISAL

The Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC is in proximity to a designated harbour seal haul-out site which is within connectivity distance to the SAC.

NatureScot advise that, subject to the following mitigation, the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site:

- With the implementation of the proposed best practice marine mammal mitigation measures detailed within the draft Marine Mammal Mitigation Plan (EIAR Appendix 11.7) submitted with this application, there should be no adverse effect on the population of harbour seals as a result of this proposal.

- Mitigation measures proposed include, for example, a marine mammal observer (MMO) to monitor a 500m mitigation zone during noisy construction activities such as piling and use of a passive acoustic monitor (PAM) when visibility is poor (e.g. sea state >4, after dark, foggy) etc.
- Vessel movements associated with this development (including marine works, sea deposit and operation) will be slow and utilise the established shipping route from the Port into the Moray Firth. Harbour seals using the nearby waters and haul out on Whiteness Sands will be used to regular vessel traffic.

The mitigation advised by NatureScot has been secured through the recommended planning conditions.