Agenda Item	**6.1**
Report No	**PLS/36/26**

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: South Planning Applications Committees

Date: 17 June 2026

Report Title: 25/03986/S37: Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Plc

Land 1525M SE of Finglack, Culloden Moor, Inverness

Report By: Area Planning Manager – South

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Beauly to Peterhead 400kV OHL - Install, operate and keep installed 186km of new 400kV overhead transmission line (OHL), supported on steel lattice tower structures, between proposed new substations at Fanellan (NH 48321 42717) in the area of Beauly, Greens (NJ 81960 47587) in the area of New Deer and Netherton (NK 05761 45576) in the area of Peterhead; associated crossing works, temporary diversions and permanent realignment to 14.7km of existing 132kV and 275kV OHLs, and ancillary development and associated works.

Wards: 12 – Aird and Loch Ness
15 – Inverness Ness-side
18 – Nairn and Cawdor
19 – Inverness South

Development Category: National Development

Reason Referred to Committee: National Development (Section 37 Application)

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

Recommendation

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

1.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

1.1 The Highland Council has been consulted by the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit on an application made under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended), and for deemed planning permission under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, to construct and operate electricity infrastructure comprising a new 400 kilovolts (kV) overhead transmission line (OHL) on steel lattice towers, and ancillary works to connect into proposed new substation sites at Beauly, New Deer, and Peterhead. It will extend over a distance of approximately 186km and is referred to as the Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV OHL Project. This application is a "National Development" as set out in the Scottish Government's fourth National Planning Framework Plan (NPF4).

1.2 The proposed development will pass through the local planning authority areas of Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire. This report assesses the proposed development in terms of the sections that are located within the Highland Council Planning Authority area, unless otherwise stated.

1.3 The proposed development covers 56km in length of OHL alignment in the Highland Council area. From the proposed Fanellan Substation in Beauly, the line would travel northeast then east, crossing the River Beauly twice, the A833 and then runs parallel to the A862 to Easter Moniack. The proposed OHL would then travel southeast, past the Reelig and then east across The Aird, passing over the Great Glen Way, then dropping down into the Great Glen to cross the A82, Caledonian Canal and River Ness. The proposed OHL follows similar alignment to the existing OHL between Beauly and Easter Moniack, at which point the proposed OHL would take a more southeasterly approach than the existing OHL to Essich / Knocknagael Substation. From there, the proposed alignment would continue southeasterly, passing Essich and Drummossie Muir, then east to cross the A9 north of Daviot. The OHL would continue east, passing to the south of Saddle Hill, then south of Assich Forest to Mains of Clunas. It then travels southeast through Newlands of Fleenas Wood, crossing the River Findhorn and passing south of Ferness, at which point the OHL continues east into the Moray Council area.

1.4 The proposed development also involves removal and realignment of portions of existing OHLs, permanent modifications and temporary OHL diversions:

- Following construction of the proposed OHL, the proposal includes the removal of the existing 132kV OHL over length 16.9km between Beauly and Knocknagael Substations. This existing OHL runs across the River Beauly east towards Inchberry Hill, and onwards passing Dunain Hill, the A82, Caledonian Canal and the B852;
- There will also be 1km of underground cabling removed that connects to the existing Knocknagael Substation;
- A 2.6km length of the Beauly to Blackhillock 275 kV OHL south of Ferness is to be realigned and the redundant section will then be removed; and
- An existing 275 kV OHL to the northeast of Knocknagael Substation is to be crossed by the proposed OHL, requiring a "diamond crossing" whereby the existing OHL is split into two circuits and ducks under the proposed OHL, via

two flat formation towers, to each side of a pylon (detailed at paragraph 3.7.5 of the EIAR).

1.5 The application also involves ancillary development to facilitate construction and operation of the proposed development, for which deemed planning permission is sought. Ancillary Works comprise:

- removal and realignments of existing OHLs;
- upgrade and creation of bell mouths and public road access points;
- formation of access tracks (permanent, temporary and upgrades);
- installation of bridges and culverts;
- working areas around infrastructure for construction;
- equipotential zones for pulling conductors during construction;
- tree and vegetation clearance and management;
- temporary protective measures for roads and water crossings during construction; and
- public road improvements (Appendix 3.2 – Indicative Public Road Improvement (PRI) Works).

1.6 The proposal is classified as Schedule 1 development under the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 ('The EIA Regulations') meaning an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) must be undertaken. There are also associated works to the wider transmission network, required to facilitate construction of the proposed development or would occur because of its construction and operation. These associated works are noted in EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 3, however, are not assessed as part of the EIA for the proposed development. The associated works for the proposed development are proposed to be subject to separate planning applications and relevant consents undertaken by Scottish Hydro Electric Power Distribution (SHEPD). These works comprise:

- substations at Fanellan (near Beauly), Greens and Netherton in Moray and Aberdeenshire respectively;
- borrow pits and quarries;
- temporary construction compounds;
- workers accommodation; and
- other modifications to the existing distribution network.

1.7 The judgment in Raeshaw Farms Ltd v Scottish Ministers [2026] CSIH 10 has brought renewed focus to the need to accurately define the scope of "the project" for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) purposes. In this case, the EIAR does not treat the associated works identified in the above paragraph as forming part of the project. The adequacy of that approach is ultimately a matter for Scottish Ministers as decision-maker.

1.8 In terms of impacts within Highland, Officers are content that the likely significant effects associated with Fanellan substation have been considered within the Council's report of handling, and that cumulative effects are addressed within the EIAR for this application. However, Officers are not in a position to conclude that the cumulative assessment is adequate, particularly in relation to transport impacts.

1.9 At the Pre-Examination Meeting, the applicant advised that borrow pits would not be required. Subsequent submissions from the applicant, however, have left open the possibility that borrow pits may be used. Should borrow pits be required, Officers consider that they would form part of the EIA project. The same would apply to temporary construction compounds and any modifications to the existing distribution network necessitated by the proposed development. Officers accept, however, that construction accommodation may serve multiple projects and may therefore fall outwith the scope of this particular project.

1.10 Temporary construction compounds and modifications to the distribution network have not been fully assessed within the EIAR. Nor has it been demonstrated, on the available information, that such effects are not identifiable or capable of meaningful assessment at this stage. In the absence of such assessment or justification, there is a reasonable basis for concluding that the requirements of the EIA Regulations have not been satisfied and that Regulation 3 prohibits the grant of consent. It is recommended that this forms a reason for raising objection to the application.

The applicant has advised the Reporters, as part of the ongoing inquiry process, that no borrow pits or quarries are currently proposed. The applicant's position is that all aggregate would be imported to site, and this is the basis on which the transport assessment has been carried out.

However, if borrow pits or quarries are later required they would form part of the same project as the proposed development and could have significant environmental effects, either on their own or together with the development. They should therefore be subject to any necessary consent and supported by full EIA, or any further environmental information required to assess their environmental effects.

In addition, any Construction Environmental Management Plan required by condition should make clear that, if borrow pits or quarries are proposed at a later stage, they must be properly assessed and approved before they are used.

Proposed Design

1.11 The 400kV OHL will be entirely supported by grey galvanised steel lattice towers. Three basic types of towers will be used: suspension, angle/tension and terminal towers. The applicant has indicated four different tower designs for different aspects of the proposed development:

- New 400kV OHL: AS4 Tower Suite, with an average height of 58m. A notable exception is use of a special tower of 97m in height at the Caledonian Canal;
- Realignment of existing 275kV Beauly to Blackhillock OHL at Ferness (not in Highland): L2 Tower Suite, with an average height of 47m;
- Modification of 275kV and 400kV existing OHL infrastructure: L8 Tower Suite, with an average height of 30m; and
- Modification of 132kV existing OHL infrastructure: L4 Tower Suite, with an average height of 22m.

1.12 As a point of reference, the largest transmission towers currently used in Highland are used on the Beauly to Denny 275/400kV transmission line, measuring between

42m and 65m in height. For the proposed 400kv OHL 58m high towers, the span length (distance between towers) will vary depending on topography, constraints and land use factors; however, the average span length will be approximately 338m, with a maximum of 517m. For all towers, the permanent above ground footprint would be typically 1m^2 at the base of each of the four legs.

1.13 The application is for the line to be sited and contained within a routing corridor, known as a horizontal Limit of Deviation (LoD). The LoD is designed to allow flexibility in the final siting of individual towers, poles, and other infrastructure to reflect topographical, engineering, and environmental constraints. The following typical parameters have been identified for horizontal LoD for the OHL Infrastructure (steel lattice towers, working areas, conductors and forestry operational corridor):

- Suspension towers: 100m LoD radius around the tower position;
- Tension towers: 200m LoD radius around the tower position;
- OHL conductors: 100m LoD either side of the alignment centre line; and
- All construction working areas must remain within the LoD (Public Road Improvement (PRI) works are excluded from this).

1.14 The following typical parameters have been identified for the LoD for the access tracks beyond the OHL Infrastructure LoD (distance either side of the track centre line):

- 100m LoD for new temporary or permanent access tracks;
- 100m LoD for upgrades to existing tracks in very poor condition;
- 50m LoD for upgrades to existing tracks in very good, good, fair, or poor condition; and
- Where access tracks are within the OHL infrastructure LoD, the LoDs would be merged.

1.15 The LoD for the OHL would be widened in areas of forestry and woodland to 145m either side of the centreline, to allow for movement to the forestry operational corridor in the event of tower micro-siting. The proposal is also expected to result in additional “management felling” whereby areas of forestry adjacent to the operational corridor are felled back to a “windfirm” edge. This does not form part of the Proposed Development and would be subject to separate Forestry consents.

1.16 The applicant has noted several areas/locations that would be excluded from the micro-siting zone, due to residential dwellings, ancient woodland, planning consents, public water supplies, protected sites, third party landholdings, road junctions, and designated heritage assets. These are set out in Table 3.1 of EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 3.

1.17 The applicant has also included a vertical LoD of 9m, meaning any height increase or decrease to a steel lattice tower’s design would be no greater than 9m from the height stated in the proposed tower schedule (Appendix 3.1 – Tower Schedules). Exceptions to this vertical LoD are set out in Table 3.1 of EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 3.

1.18 Pending the granting of consent, and subsequent discharge and satisfaction of any planning conditions, the applicant anticipates construction and commissioning would take place over a four-year period, however more detailed programmes of

works would be agreed between the applicant and the principal contractor. These timescales are based on the proposal for works to be undertaken 7 days a week, with special arrangements and measures implemented where works are in proximity to sensitive receptors.

1.19 The proposed OHL would not have a fixed operational life, but it is expected insulators and conductors would require replacement after approximately 40 years, and repainting of towers would be occurring every 15-20 years. OHLs require low levels of maintenance, however, regular inspections are undertaken to identify deterioration to be replaced.

Consultation

1.20 The applicant undertook public consultation on the proposed OHL alignment corridor in September 2022, prior to commencing the Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) process. The proposed route was then consulted upon in April 2023 with the refined route's consultation undertaken between February and March 2024. Subsequently, Stage 1 PAC events were carried out at Nairn, Culloden, Inverness, Beauly and Kiltarlity between 18 and 20 June 2024. In total, there were 227 attendees. A project website was established and maintained including links to all published material and a virtual exhibition. Stage 2 PAC events were then held at locations in Nairn, Inverness, Kiltarlity and Beauly between 17 and 20 February 2025. There were 294 attendees in total. The application is supported by a Pre-Application Consultation Report which documents the consultation undertaken and sets out how the applicant responded to the responses received.

1.21 The applicant has utilised the Council's Pre-Application Advice Service for Major Developments (THC Ref: 24/00571/PREMAJ), and advice was issued on 17 July 2024. The Council's advice set out that little detail was provided at that stage for commitments regarding existing OHL removal, community wealth building, biodiversity enhancement (including compensatory planting), and community benefit. Mitigation would also require avoiding, reduce or offset adverse impacts on a variety of heritage and other features. Concerns were raised regarding the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed OHL in relation to the Aird, as the corridor would be opened up in woodland and forestry in this area. The height of the proposed towers to cross the Caledonian Canal was of principal concern, with these towers likely to be highly prominent and none of the options presented appearing to adequately deal with this potential impact. Officers queried if undergrounding at this section could be considered. Concerns were raised that there could be likely significant effects on designated assets, particularly Scheduled Monuments associated with Culloden Battlefield. Overall, the Council's pre-app advice indicated general support for generation and transmission of renewable energy. However, support for the project would be possible provided the concerns of Council officers, communities and other key consultees regarding the OHL route and substation are satisfactorily addressed.

Submitted Information

1.22 The application is supported by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) which assesses the proposal in terms of: Landscape and Visual Impact; Ecology; Ornithology; Water and Geological Environment; Cultural Heritage; Forestry; Transport; Recreation and Tourism; Noise and Vibration; and a Cumulative Assessment. The EIAR also contains a schedule of environmental mitigation.

1.23 Post submission, there have been no further consultations undertaken other than the Council Officers holding progress meeting with the applicant.

Amendments

1.24 No variations have been made to the proposal during the consultation process. Further clarification on landscape and visual matters was made by the applicant by

way of a Technical Note submitted on 22 May 2026. The Technical Note (TN) covered four sections of the line for which it provided additional justification and detailed potential additional mitigation measures. The TN makes clear that the potential mitigation measures are for further discussion only at this point, and do not form part of the application. For completeness, the TN suggested measures are referred to later in the report in boxed text to differentiate from the current application. These measures comprise:

- Area A: Crossing of the A862 to Easter Moniack - Constraints related to existing residential properties explained and assertion that undergrounding would not be feasible;
- Area B: Caledonian Canal crossing - Alternative tower siting suggested which removes towers from the "vista" view available at Dochgarroch Locks;
- Area C: Scaniport- Alternative tower siting suggested to move a tower further away from a residential property; and
- Area D: South of Culloden – Slight reduction in tower heights suggested as well as tower painting, planting within the operational corridor, and tower pad and access track reinstatement.

1.25 In addition, the applicant also provided a response dated 23 March 2026 to Historic Environment Scotland's (HES) consultation response including consideration of micro-siting two towers to the west of the River Beauly to the northwest, within the LoD, to mitigate impacts on the Beaufort Castle Garden and Designed Landscape. HES raise objection to the application unless permission is granted subject to a condition requiring the implementation of this mitigation.

Determination Procedure

1.26 The application relates to an Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment (ASTI) project, which the Scottish Government has indicated should be determined within a 52-week timeframe, beginning from the date that the application is submitted. Following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the South Planning Applications Committee, Officers raised a timeous objection to the application under delegated powers on 16 December 2025.

1.27 In terms of the two other Council areas impacted, Moray Council's Planning and Regulatory Services Committee raised objection on the 16 December 2025 whilst Aberdeenshire Council raised no objection subject to conditions under delegated authority on 18 December 2025.

1.28 In view of the objections raised by statutory consultees, and the accelerated timeline identified, the application has been passed to the Planning and Environmental Appeals Division (DPEA) for a Public Local Inquiry (PLI) to be held. This process has commenced with a Pre-Examination Meeting held on the 23 April 2026 and a combination of hearing and inquiry sessions due to be held between 18 and 27 August 2026. The decision of Committee will therefore determine the Council's position and grounds at PLI. Following PLI, the application will be determined by Scottish Ministers.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The proposed development site extends across 56km of the Highland Council area from Fanellan near Beauly, to Ferness, east of Nairn, where it crosses into the Moray Council area and onwards to Peterhead in Aberdeenshire. In the Highland Council area, the landscape within and surrounding the proposed development site comprises a mix of open uplands and moorlands, glens, mountains, small villages, watercourses and farmed landscapes.

2.2 The route of the proposed line and LoD corridor does not run through any national or regional landscape designation however is in proximity to the following within the Highland Council area.

Distance	Designated and Protected Landscape
1km south of the proposed development	Drynachan, Lochindorb, and Dava Moors Special Landscape Area (SLA)
6km from proposed development	Central Highlands Wild Land Area 24 (WLA)
>10km from study area	Cairngorms National Park

2.3 The proposal is also located within proximity to the following designations for nationally and internationally important ecological and ornithological features.

Distance	Site Name
0.2km north	Beauly protected seal haul out area
0.3km south	Moniack Gorge SSSI and SAC
0.3km north	Cawdor Wood SSSI and SAC
0.5km north	Beauly Firth SSSI
0.5km north (Beauly River corridor, The Aird, River Ness/Caledonian Canal corridor, Drummossie Muir to River Nairn Corridor)	Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar Site
0.85km north (Beauly River corridor, The Aird, River Ness/Caledonian Canal corridor, Drummossie Muir to River Nairn corridor)	Moray Firth SPA
1.1km north	Moray Firth SAC

1.5km south	Carn nan Tri-tighearnan SSSI and SAC
2.9km south (River Ness/Caledonian Canal Corridor, Drummossie Muir to River Nairn Corridor)	Loch Ashie SPA
3.6km north (Dulsie Wood and associated woodlands, Dava moorlands, Bednawinny Moss Moorlands and Newtyle forest)	Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA
5.5km north (Assich forest/Strathdearn foothills)	Loch Flemington SPA
7.5km north	Monadh Mor SAC
8.4km north	Conon Islands SAC
8.8km south of Beauly River corridor, the Aird, River Ness/Caledonian Canal corridor	North Inverness Lochs SPA
8.9km west	Strathglass Complex SAC
9.9km west of Beauly River corridor	Glen Affric to Strathconon SPA
11.2km north (Beauly River corridor)	Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar Site

2.4 The line crosses a multitude of landscape character types as classified by NatureScot. These comprise:

- LCT 220 – Rugged Massif – Inverness
- LCT 221 – Rolling Uplands – Inverness
- LCT 222 – Rocky Moorland Plateau – Inverness
- LCT 225 – Broad Steep-Sided Glen
- LCT 227 – Farmed Strath – Inverness
- LCT 228 – Rolling Farmland and Woodland
- LCT 229 – Enclosed Farmland
- LCT 290 – Upland Moorland and Forestry
- LCT 291 – Open Rolling Moorland
- LCT 342 – Farmed River Plains
- LCT 345 – Farmed and Forested Slopes – Ross and Cromarty
- LCT 346 – Open Farmed Slopes

2.5 The site and its environs support a range of protected species including badger, bats, hares, beavers, deer, wildcat, otter, pine marten, red squirrel, reptiles and water vole; a range of invasive non-native species have also been recorded. The route of the line also requires watercourse crossings which support a range of aquatic habitats. Notable species include brown/sea trout and Atlantic salmon. The line also intersects areas of forestry and sections of ancient woodland.

2.6 There are numerous visual receptors along the route of the line with building-based receptor locations, roads, Core Paths and other recreational routes and known outdoor locations where the view is one of the principal reasons for being at the location, such as parking and viewing areas, local outdoor visitor attractions having been assessed. The key recreational interests in this area include walking, cycling, birding / wildlife watching, fishing and water sports.

2.7 The EIAR sets out there are a number of cultural heritage assets within the LoD, comprising both designated and non-designated features. More designated assets are located within the surrounding 2km study area, as well as beyond the study area. Of particular note, but not limited to, in the Highland Council area are: Culloden Battlefield, Culloden Muir Conservation Area, Beaufort Castle Garden and Designed Landscape, Caledonian Canal Scheduled Monument, and Mains of Daviot Farm ring cairn and stone circle Scheduled Monument.

2.8 The EIA considers two forms of cumulative assessment: A) in-combination effects and B) effect interactions. A) In-combination effects refer to the combined impact of the Proposed Development with other reasonably foreseeable developments and are assessed within each topic chapter of the EIAR. This is undertaken using a two-stage approach, firstly assessing cumulative effects with associated SSEN Transmission projects to understand the wider network impacts, and secondly considering all other relevant developments to determine overall in-combination effects. B) Effect interactions, addressed in a separate EIAR chapter, consider the combined or synergistic influence of multiple effects on a single receptor, where the interaction of different impacts may result in a greater overall effect than when considered individually.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 Appendix 1 details the planning history for the route of the proposed development. Owing to the line's geographical extent, details of the planning history for the site given is not comprehensive, focusing only on pertinent recent planning application activity:

4.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 As a Section 37 application the public participation process is managed by the Energy Consents Unit. At the time of writing, 2,401 public comments were received by the Energy Consents Unit; none were received by the Highland Council. The key issues raised include:

- Landscape and visual impact;
- Ecology and biodiversity harm;
- Peatland, soils carbon impacts;
- Water environment and flood risk;
- Loss of agricultural land and associated economic impacts;
- Woodland loss;
- Cultural heritage impacts;
- Traffic, access and construction impacts;
- Public health and amenity concerns;

- Cumulative impacts;
- Conflict with policy and statutory requirements;
- Consultation and procedure concerns; and
- Limited local benefit.

5.0 CONSULTATIONS

5.1 **Beauly Community Council object** to the application. This is due to cumulative impacts arising from multiple major energy infrastructure projects in and around Beauly, including substations, battery storage facilities and other OHL schemes. Other concerns raised in the objection relate to impacts of the proposal on traffic volumes, pedestrian safety, residents in the village of Beauly, local tourism, economy, events and visitors to the area, recreation, pollution, damage to roads and bridges, facilities and services. Several mitigation measures relating to these issues have been requested, should consent be granted.

5.2 **Dores and Essich Community Council object** to the application due to visual impacts, loss of trees and land use. They consider the applicant has erred in the selection of Alignment 6B in preference of 6A to the north by giving undue weighting to the protection of poor-quality forestry over the retention of significant landscape trees. They note the applicant's technical reports have advised both routes are equally feasible, though Alignment 6B might be easier to construct.

5.3 **Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Council object** to the application for the reasons as follows. There is no justifiable need for the proposed development, which is designed to facilitate a new wave of wind farm development, rather than to connect to the grid what is already built, consented, in planning or at scoping. The proposal is not in accordance with the development plan, in particular, NPF4. The proposal is not in accordance with the Electricity Act 1989 as insufficient mitigation has been provided; and significant additional information is required. The objection letter also notes the Community Council would support the holding of a comprehensive Public Local Inquiry (PLI).

5.4 **Lochardil and Drummond Community Council object** to the application. This is due to lack of assessment of cumulative and overall effects, contrary to the intent of the EIA Regulations; the applicant's needs case does not provide quantifiable evidence; lack of consideration for alternatives; cultural heritage impacts; traffic impacts; impacts on residents, and impacts on Core Paths in Inverness. They consider the proposal fails to safeguard natural habitats, carbon-rich soils, important food-growing agricultural land, historic assets and community wellbeing. They consider it has not been demonstrated that significant adverse effects on visual receptors, disturbance to peatlands and forestry, and loss of biodiversity can be mitigated, or if proposed mitigation would be successful; nor how these impacts are outweighed by public benefits.

5.5 **Muir of Ord Community Council object** to the application, until the unified statement issued by over 50 Highland Community Councils on 14 June 2025 in Beauly supported by 11 MP/MSPs has been debated in Parliament, addressing cumulative effect, economic impact assessment and clear national energy policy have been published.

5.6 **Strathnairn Community Council object** to the application for the reasons as follows. Lack of demonstrable alternatives, including offshore cabling, have been explored. Cumulative effects and negative impacts on local communities and landscape being disregarded. Electromagnetic radiation and proximity to EMF scoped out too easily and too early. Lack of protection against Landscape Visual Impact in and around Culloden Moor and Culloden Battlefield. Non-existent and unenforceable plan in place for nature restoration works across the extent of the site prior to consent being sought. Documentation submitted by the applicant is fraught with get-out clauses on the issues for objection noted.

5.7 **Access Officer** does not object to the application. However, they note it is not clear the applicant is aware of the extent of the access resource, or certainty of the proposal's impact on this resource. They note some omissions and errors in the baseline information. The Access Officer recommends a condition for an Outdoor Access Plan to be submitted and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, should consent be granted.

5.8 **Development Plans Team** support the principle of the development as it is classified as a national development under NPF4 and will be a major positive in climate change and renewable energy terms. However, recognition as a national development, and contribution towards meeting Scotland's net zero emissions targets, does not provide unqualified support for the development. It is noted the development does not lie within any specific land allocation in IMFLDP2, nor does it overlap with or constrain any existing or likely shorter term future plan allocations or settlement development areas. It is noted the Council's Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) may prove useful to assess impacts of the development, particularly as the developments within a number of areas where Landscape Sensitivity Appraisals (LSA) have been completed. These are: Black Isle, Surrounding Hills and Moray Coast LSA, and Loch Ness LSA. It is also noted the proposed development is approximately 1km south of the boundary of the site of the Essich Road Masterplan Consent Area (MCA), which is in the early stages of development, however, it is important that the applicant is made aware of it to consider potential future implications. Compliance with relevant topic-based development plan policies is dependent upon the views of other consultees. Other pertinent policy issues and documents are raised, such as local place plans, community wealth building, new-style Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP), developer contributions, cumulative transport contributions, site specific transport contributions, public art, water and waste, green infrastructure.

5.9 **Ecology Officer objects** to the application. This is due to insufficient information having been provided to allow adequate assessment of the biodiversity enhancement requirements of the development. In particular, information is required regarding the exact offsite location(s), or broad area where enhancement will be delivered, and baseline information for the offsite areas in terms of current habitats and ecological value. At the time of writing, no sites have been brought forward for consideration. Furthermore, outline plans that describe enhancement measures are required, and specify how much of an uplift is predicted at the offsite location(s). It is noted the proposed development would cross through an existing Habitat Management Plan area for Cairn Duhie Wind Farm. It is expected the habitat management area would be avoided, however if this is not possible, additional

enhancement would be expected to compensate for this loss. Concerns have also been raised regarding reduced protected species survey effort, and associated methodology, which was agreed with NatureScot prior to the formation of the Highland Ecology team. Regarding habitats, it is considered the embedded mitigation measures for protecting habitats and biosecurity measures are satisfactory. Conditions have been proposed relating to mitigation measures for ecological and ornithological features if consent is granted.

5.10 **Environmental Health Officer** does not object to the proposed development subject to conditions being attached if consent is granted. The primary concerns relate to potential impacts during the construction phase, specifically in relation to noise, vibration, dust emissions, private water supplies, as well as potential adverse impact from operation noise once the OHL is installed. It is noted the EIA predicts significant impacts on several noise sensitive receptors that would exceed limits by a significant margin. A detailed construction noise assessment within a construction noise management plan (CNMP) will need to be undertaken by the principal contractor. Cumulative operational noise impacts have been considered to not be significant. Where receptors are already exposed to high levels of daytime construction noise during the week, additional construction in evenings and at the weekends are unlikely to be acceptable. Construction can induce vibration; however, these have been assessed as low or negligible in the EIA. The implementation of mitigation measures would further reduce impacts from vibration during construction. It is recommended that a scheme of mitigation is included in the CEMP to address construction dust. Regarding Private Water Supplies (PWS), it is recommended a PWS Monitoring Plan is prepared by the principal contractor prior to construction, setting out all mitigation measures to be delivered to secure the quality, quantity and continuity of water supplies; this should also include provision to monitor water quality. Impacts on PWS have been assessed to be minor. It is also advised that Scottish Forestry guidance on managing forestry operations to protect PWS should be followed to avoid impacts on PWS where felling is required to accommodate the proposed development. Noise impacts arising during operation have also been considered in the EIA and assessed as having a negligible impact on potential receptors. A suitably worded condition is recommended to minimise any potential Aeolian noise which can occur during operation.

5.11 **Flood Risk Management Team** do not object to the proposal and have provided comments in relation to flooding and drainage. As part of the EIA, a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been undertaken which indicates the proposed infrastructure is of very low vulnerability to flooding and it is expected to operate during a 200 year + climate change storm event. The extent of the proposed development within the Highland Council area does not give rise to significant flood risk, and on ground infrastructure is unlikely to be of significance, and access tracks (both new and existing to be upgrade) in general avoid flood risk areas.

5.12 **Forestry Officer** does not object to the application. Whilst the proposals give rise to conflicts with NPF4 Policy 6 and the HwLDP, these primarily arise from a lack of detailed information and can be mitigated through appropriate conditions. A conflict with NPF4 Policy 6 (b) would remain however, primarily due to impacts on Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland which cannot be fully mitigated. When considered in the

context of the scale and nature of the development, the constraints identified through the alternative alignment process and the mitigation proposed, it would appear that impacts have been reduced as far as reasonably practicable and can be appropriately managed through conditions.

5.13 **Historic Environment Team (Archaeology)** do not object to the application. EIAR Chapter 11 (Cultural Heritage) provides an appropriate level of information and assessment and concludes that with mitigation it will be possible to limit impacts to within an acceptable range. The historic environment baseline was established through a desk-based and walkover survey and includes designated assets within 2km of the proposed OHL alignment, beyond 2km of the alignment, and non-designated assets within the LoD. Indirect and direct impacts have been identified and assessed as part of the EIA. Of note, the Mains of Daviot ring cairn site has been assessed with a predicted impact of Moderate Adverse (Significant), such that the integrity of the setting may be significantly impacted upon. As a result, additional mitigation is proposed for this site, that will include undergrounding a section as Appendix 11.4: Potential Mitigation: Undergrounding of Existing 275kV OHL at Daviot. This proposal is welcomed and would allow accordance with Highland Council Planning Policy 57 (Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage) and the Highland Historic Environment Strategy, Strategic Aim 13. Recommendations have been made in the EIA for mitigation measures where direct physical impacts are predicted, including include pre-construction procedures such as marking out and avoiding affected areas where possible, and archaeological investigation if avoidance is not feasible, in line with Policy 7 of NPF4. The general mitigation as set out in Table 11.6: Construction Phase Mitigation Measures is accepted as appropriate. Site- or phase-specific project designs will be required to be submitted for agreement in advance of any works. Mitigation for potential unrecorded buried features or deposits can be covered through monitoring and watching briefs which should be included as part of project designs, as this would allow any unrecorded features to be identified and recorded. A condition for a written scheme of investigation (WSI) has been recommended should consent be granted.

5.14 **Historic Environment Team (Conservation) objects** to the application. Their response focuses on the Culloden Muir Conservation Area, specifically the setting of the designation, as the proposed development would be sited through the landscape to the south of this designation. They concur with the landscape and visual assessment presented by the Council's Landscape Officer regarding Viewpoint 16 and consider the photomontage does not present a fair representation as to the perceived impact the OHL could have on Culloden Muir Conservation Area and the heritage assets included within its boundary. The visibility of the OHL on the skyline at Meall Mor due to the size of towers would impact multiple views from multiple heritage assets, including listed buildings, Schedule Monuments and the Battlefield. Further mitigation is required and would need to be reviewed to reduce the impact on Culloden Muir Conservation Area. The designation covers a highly sensitive area and views in all directions are important. Undergrounding this section of line or reducing the height of towers would be plausible mitigation measures for Culloden Muir Conservation Area. More information and a better understanding of the impact of towers on the heritage assets within and including the Culloden Muir Conservation Area is required for this application.

5.15 **Landscape Officer objects** to the proposal, unless their recommendations and suggestions made in relation to three sections of concern, with regard to reducing/minimising the effect of the proposed development at these locations. Following receipt of the applicant's TN submitted on 22nd May 2026 setting out further justification and potential additional mitigation measures, the landscape officer maintains their objection in relation to all sections except for Area B - The Caledonian Canal crossing, should the applicant proceed with the suggested mitigation option of tower relocation by 50m. Their detailed appraisal is set out at Section 7 and Appendix 4 of this report.

5.16 **Transport Planning Team object** to the application. The assessment of likely impacts to the local road network and the existing users of it, and neighbours to it, is inadequate and the applicant has significantly underrepresented those likely impacts. The EIA underestimates the physical road mitigation measures required to accommodate the proposed construction traffic, whilst ensuring that the network remains safe and available for other road users. It is recommended further work is undertaken and clarifications provided before consent could be granted. This should include:

- assessment of the works associated with the removal of the 132kV Beauly to Knocknagael OHL and diversion of existing distribution infrastructure;
- adequate assessment of public road improvements and realistic timeframes for implementation;
- clarification on the requirement for satellite yards;
- clarification on the number of accesses;
- clarification on whether works associated with track reinstatement has been assessed;
- the inclusion of forestry works within the assessment;
- clarification on various aspects of the traffic assessment methodology;
- adequate cumulative assessment;
- adequate assessment of Non-Motorised Users Delay and Amenity;
- consideration of effects on bus services; and
- adequate assessment of Fear and Intimidation, amongst other matters.

Consultations Undertaken by The Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (includes consultations across the whole development site – Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire)

5.17 **Aberdeenshire Council** does not object to the application subject to matters and conditions set out in their response to the ECU.

5.18 **British Horse Society** do not object to the proposal and have provided comments on their remit for horse-riders and horse-drawn vehicles and the interests of education, safety, welfare and access.

5.19 **British Telecom** do not object to the application. It advises the proposed development should not cause interference to BT's current and presently planned radio network.

5.20 **Deer Community Council (Aberdeenshire)** objects to the application.

5.21 **Defence Infrastructure Organisation / Ministry of Defence** do not object to the proposal. If there are any variations to the proposal that may significantly alter how the development relates to MOD safeguarding requirements and cause adverse impacts to safeguarded defence assets or capabilities, the MOD should be consulted and provided with adequate time to carry out assessments and provide a formal response.

5.22 **Fisheries Management Scotland** do not object to the application. It confirms they can provide a general response with regard to general risk of such developments to fish, their habitats and any dependent fisheries. Local District Fisheries Boards have also provided their own responses.

5.23 **Fyvie, Rothienornan and Monquhitter Community Council (Aberdeenshire) object** to the application due to inadequate consultation with communities being impacted, noise pollution-post construction, light pollution, traffic, lack of economic benefit/change in nature of the area and lack of benefit to the community.

5.24 **Highlands and Islands Airports** do not object to the proposed development. Given the position and height, the development would not infringe the safeguarding criteria and operation of Inverness Airport. Any variation to the parameters (location, dimensions, form and finishing materials of pylons) would require consulting HIAL before consent could be granted.

5.25 **Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** does not object to the proposal following submission of additional information by the applicant which demonstrates that the area of Beaufort Castle GDL to be oversailed by the proposed development is of lesser significance and the provision of updated mitigation to mitigate effects on the GDL. The updated mitigation suggested by the applicant includes the consideration of micro-siting the OHL alignment to avoid significant trees or features that contribute to the cultural significance of the designed landscape, to mitigate effects on Beaufort Castle GDL (GDL00052). HES also states that a condition should be imposed requiring agreement and implementation of a mitigation scheme to protect the integrity of the setting of the Mains of Daviot Farm ring cairn and stone circle, 600m NNE of the proposed development (SM3085). Their response to the ECU sets out their detailed assessment of the EIA and associated documents.

5.26 **Joint Radio Company object** to the application due to one tower significantly affecting a radio link and five further towers having the potential to affect radio links within their applied for micro-siting allowance.

5.27 **Moray Council objects** due to significant adverse landscape and visual impacts, conflict with NPF4 and Moray LDP 2020 policies, unacceptable woodland loss, insufficient consideration of undergrounding, unresolved cumulative impacts, and failure to demonstrate biodiversity net gain.

5.28 **National Air Traffic Services** do not object to the application. It does not conflict with the safeguarding criteria.

5.29 **National Trust for Scotland (NTS)** did not respond to the consultation request, having a request for an extension to the consultation deadline declined by the Energy Consents Unit.

5.30 **NatureScot object** to the application due to impacts on protected sites across the whole application (Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire). In terms of the proposal where it is located in the Highland Council area, Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA is partially located within Highland and is designated for breeding Capercaillie. The proposed development could have significant impacts on this population due to mortality from collision with OHL infrastructure. NatureScot do not consider the mitigations set out in the applicant's Capercaillie Heathland Habitat Management Plan (HMP) would fully mitigate collision risk, and that the SPA conservation objectives could not be met. As such, NatureScot recommend where further discussions do not identify further mitigations, then the applicant may wish to prepare a case for derogation under the Habitats Regulations. Compensatory measures have been suggested by NatureScot. Advice is also provided on other protected sites and species.

5.31 **Network Rail** do not object to the proposal, however request that any works that take place over the railway are subject to further discussion and agreement with Network Rail.

5.32 **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) object** to the application, as they do not consider a conclusion of no adverse effects on site integrity for the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA can be made in relation to Capercaillie due to collision risk with towers, habitat loss and potential disturbance during construction and operation. The proposed development could lead to the loss of a Capercaillie lek linked to the SPA. RSPB have also made comments on biodiversity enhancement in relation to the proposed development.

5.33 **Scottish Canals** do not object to the proposal, however, have requested consideration of matters noted in their response and where appropriate, advisory notes and/or conditions are incorporated to address such. The Caledonian Canal is a designated Scheduled Monument and therefore works that interface with the canal will require consent from Historic Environment Scotland. Scottish Canals requests to be notified of any potential impacts on canal infrastructure arising from the future removal of existing overhead lines and towers. Access to the canal must be maintained at all times by Scottish Canals to enable necessary canal and asset maintenance, including work on weirs, whether planned or reactive. All construction activities must be coordinated with any schedule of works on the canal and its associated assets. Other requests made by Scottish Canals are as follows: appropriate mitigation measures will be required to address significant adverse impacts on the canal in relation to VP13. Confirmation is sought that the current tower locations shown on either side of the canal will not deviate, ensuring the agreed clearance above the canal is maintained. The applicant shall submit risk assessments and method statements to Scottish Canals for tree felling required on the south side of the towpath. Protective measures will be required to prevent debris, rubbish or contamination entering the Canal during construction. Third Party Works approval will be required from Scottish Canals for any interfaces including construction methodologies adjacent with the canal.

5.34 **Scottish Environment Protection Agency** do not object providing that their recommended planning conditions are attached should consent be granted. Their response notes impact on Private Water Supplies (PWS) and are generally satisfied with the approach taken towards PWS and groundwater abstractions, though have recommended condition wording. Regarding flood risk, reference to the most up to date SEPA Future Flood Maps are required in any further submissions and drawings to support the proposal/discharge of conditions. There are 18 locations where towers are located in flood risk areas, however SEPA consider the volume of displacement for each tower is relatively small and there would unlikely be a significant impact on floodplain capacity and conveyance. Access tracks have generally been designed to be close to existing ground levels to minimise ground raising. It is noted the main construction compounds and laydown areas required for the development are not included within the S37 application. SEPA request the finalised CEMP should state no long-term (more than 24hours) land raising, material storage or bunding will occur within SEPA Future Flood extents. Detailed design of watercourse crossings has not been confirmed at this stage. There are 281 watercourse crossings across the whole development site (Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire); it is recommended all new and upgraded watercourse crossings should be designed to comprise clear span, single deck, bank-to-bank bridges, so not to reduce channel capacity or conveyance, in line with SEPA guidance. Conditions have been requested to address concerns regarding groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTE), peat and carbon rich soils, and the water environment.

5.35 **Strathisla Community Council (Moray) object** to the application on grounds including the principle of development, policy and legal non-compliance, landscape and visual impacts, ecology and biodiversity impacts, peatland and climate impacts, water environment and flood risk impacts, impacts on agriculture, woodland impacts, cultural heritage and amenity impacts, traffic and access impacts, public health and wellbeing impacts and cumulative impacts with other energy developments.

5.36 **Scottish Forestry** have not responded to the consultation.

5.37 **Scottish Water** do not object to the application. The development falls within several drinking water catchments where Scottish Water abstractions are located. The development is likely to present a risk to water quality. More detail on the planned route and water quality mitigation measures are required. Scottish Water request further involvement at more detailed design stages to determine the most appropriate proposals and mitigation within the catchment to protect water quality and quantity. They also request that 3 months in advance of any works commencing on site that Scottish Water are notified.

5.38 **Spey Fishery Board** do not object however raise concerns regarding freshwater pearl mussel and salmon spawning burns that are tributaries to the River Spey SAC that have not been assessed as part of the cumulative assessment in the EIA.

5.39 **Strathnairn Community Council (Moray) object** to the application due to a lack of demonstrable alternatives, including offshore cabling, having been explored, cumulative effects and negative impacts on local communities and landscape being

disregarded. Other concerns include: electromagnetic radiation and proximity to EMF scoped out too easily and too early; lack of protection against Landscape Visual Impact in and around Culloden Moor / Culloden Battlefield; lack of recognition of significance of Great Glen Way and surrounds; non-existent and unenforceable plan in place for Nature Restoration Works across the extent of the 'site' prior to consent being sought; and documentation submitted by the applicant being fraught with get-out clauses on these points.

5.40 **Transport Scotland** do not object to the application. Their response covers issues regarding environmental impacts, access points, abnormal loads, and request that conditions be attached to any consent relating to Abnormal Indivisible Loads, requiring approval of any additional signage or temporary traffic control measures, approval of a Construction Traffic Management Plan and approval of access junction design where they are onto the trunk road network.

5.41 **Ugie District Salmon Fishery Board (Aberdeenshire)** do not object to the application however request further information.

6.0 DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY AND OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Appendix 2 of this report provides details of the documents that 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.

7.0 PLANNING APPRAISAL

7.1 The application has been submitted to the Scottish Government under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended). Should Ministers approve the development, it will receive deemed planning permission under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended). While not a planning application, the Council processes S37 applications in the same way as a planning application as consent under the Electricity Act will carry with it deemed planning permission.

Planning Considerations

7.2 The key considerations in this case are:

a) Development Plan and other planning policy;
b) Energy and economic benefit;
c) Routing, design evolution and alternatives;
d) Landscape and visual impact;
e) Built and cultural heritage;
f) Natural Heritage, including ornithology;
g) Forestry, woodland and trees;
h) Water, drainage and peat; and
i) Construction impact;
j) Roads, transport and access;
k) Other material considerations.

Development Plan / Other Planning Policy

7.3 The Development Plan comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (2024) (IMFLDP2) and various Supplementary Guidance documents associated with these Local Development Plans.

7.4 Appendix 3 of this report provides an assessment of compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy.

7.5 In summary, the principle of development is established in national policy, with the proposed development being of national importance for the delivery of the National Spatial Strategy. NPF4 considers that Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure will assist in the delivery of the Spatial Strategy and Spatial Priorities for the north of Scotland, and that Highland can continue to make a strong contribution toward meeting Scotland's ambition for net zero. Alongside these ambitions, the strategy for Highland aims to protect environmental assets as well as to stimulate investment in natural and engineered solutions to address climate change. This aim is not new and will clearly require a balancing exercise to be undertaken, which is reflected throughout NPF4.

7.6 At a regional level, the principal Highland-wide Local Development Plan policy is 69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure. This policy offers support for electricity transmission infrastructure, having regard to their level of strategic significance in transmitting electricity from areas of generation to areas of consumption. Such support is subject to the proposals not having an unacceptable significant impact on the environment. As the development would help to reinforce the onshore transmission infrastructure and facilitate an increasing proportion of electricity generation from renewable sources, the principle of the development receives support under HwLDP Policy 69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure, subject to site selection, design and overcoming any unacceptable significant environmental effects.

Energy and Economic Benefit

7.7 In July 2022, the Electricity System Operator published the Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design ('HND') which sets out the strategic network requirements to facilitate the connection of 23GW of offshore wind projects. When combined with existing offshore wind projects and those already advanced in their development, the HND aims to enable the connection of 50GW of offshore wind in Great Britain by 2030. The HND identifies a need to reinforce the onshore transmission corridor between Beauly and Peterhead.

7.8 In 2024, the National Energy System Operator (NESO) reviewed the requirement for onshore and offshore network reinforcements through their HND Follow Up Exercise, part of Beyond 2030. Beyond 2030 builds on the HND and designs for a further 21GW of offshore wind, following the ScotWind leasing round, to connect to the onshore electricity network. This confirmed that the requirement for new onshore network infrastructure between Beauly and Peterhead remains.

7.9 Ofgem's Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment (ASTI) framework provides a streamlined regulatory approval and funding route for the timely delivery of strategically important onshore electricity transmission infrastructure. The ASTI framework supports the Government's 2030 net-zero objectives by facilitating the connection of up to 71 GW of offshore wind capacity to the onshore transmission network. The proposed development is an ASTI project. There is a clear expectation from Government that such projects will be delivered by 2030, and this includes an indicative timeline for ASTI projects to be determined within 52 weeks.

7.10 The application is supported by a Socio-Economic Assessment (September 2025) which predicts an economic contribution of £413.2 million Gross Value Added (GVA) and 4,010 years of employment across Scotland. The applicant is engaged in the delivery of SSE's Just Transition Strategy which outlines initiatives such as prioritising local procurement, investing in skills development and increasing contracts awarded to businesses within regional and Scottish economies. At the low end, £41.8 million GVA and 385 years of employment is predicted across the Regional Area (Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire Council areas). This increases to £91.2 million GVA and 846 years of employment across the Regional Area if the applicant's stated ambition of maximising local supply chain content is achieved. It is recommended that a condition requiring a Local Employment Scheme be added to any grant of permission to ensure these benefits are secured and maximised.

7.11 Given the requirement of NPF4 Policy 11c) for development proposals to only be supported where they maximise socio-economic impacts, in July 2023 the applicant launched a consultation on plans for their first ever community benefit fund. This is a £10 million fund which will see SSEN working with communities across the north of Scotland to channel funds into local projects. Following the Autumn Statement on 22 November 2023, the UK's Department for Energy Security and Net Zero also published its "Response to the consultation on Community Benefits for Electricity Transmission Network Infrastructure". In light of this, the applicant is expecting further community benefit funding opportunities, in the region of £100 million to be available for local projects. Community benefit however remains a non-material planning consideration and therefore the existence or absence of this fund can be given no weight in the decision-making process.

7.12 A further recent announcement was made by the UK Government on 10 March 2025 that the Planning and Infrastructure Bill will deliver an energy discount scheme for homes close to overhead transmission pylons required to deliver Clean Power 2030, with this scheme to be rolled out across England, Wales and Scotland. The statement explains that communities could get £200,000 worth of funding per km of new high voltage overhead line and £530,000 per substation. As the bill is at an early stage and is making its way through Parliament, it remains unclear if this detail will remain unaltered or what the scheme eligibility / commencement cut-off date will be. The applicant has however confirmed that this project will be eligible. Again, although this emerging scheme may deliver socio-economic benefits, it is also to be regarded as another form of community benefit which at the present time should be given no weight in the decision-making process. The Council's Community Wealth Building Team have confirmed that it will be liaising with the applicant regarding the Highland Social Value Charter (HSVC), with SSEN being the first company to sign up to the charter in November 2025. Again however, whilst helping to deliver

broader Council objectives for the benefit of communities in Highland, the HSVC is again completely separate to any planning process, and no weight can be attributed to this in considering this current application.

Construction Impact

7.13 The construction phase comprises vegetation clearance and felling, creation of access and enabling works, construction of foundations, erection of towers and stringing overhead cables. These works will be followed by the dismantling of existing OHLs and reinstatement works. Construction activities are anticipated to take place over a four-year period with dismantling and reinstatement works then taking place over a further 15 months. The application is supported by an EIAR chapter on Noise and Vibration which includes consideration of construction impacts. The chapter includes a desk-based assessment of construction noise which notes that potential construction noise levels from work sites cannot be calculated until detailed information about the proposed construction activities is available. The desk-based assessment is therefore based on a predicted worst-case scenario based on construction activities and expected noise levels detailed in EIA Appendix 15.3: Construction Activities.

7.14 The desk-based assessment includes consideration of 2,312 Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSRs) across the entire route, including sections within Moray Council and Aberdeenshire Council areas. There is no breakdown for the number of NSRs within Highland in the EIA chapter. Figure 15.1: Noise Sensitive Receptors suggests that, within Highland, there are 243 NSRs within 500m of the proposed OHL alignment LoD and a further 872 NSRs that are greater than 500m from the proposed OHL alignment LoD but within 500m of other planned construction works. Their locations are shown within Figure 15.1 of the EIAR.

7.15 The desk-based assessment states that most construction activity would take place during weekday daytime hours, although some works may also occur during evening periods and at weekends. Noise limits of 65 dB(A) during daytime and 55 dB(A) during evenings and weekends are proposed. For the purposes of the assessment, daytime hours are defined as 07:00–19:00 on weekdays and 07:00–13:00 on Saturdays, while evening and weekend periods are defined as 19:00–23:00 on weekdays, 13:00–23:00 on Saturdays, and 07:00–23:00 on Sundays. Construction activities are proposed to take place seven days a week.

7.16 The assessment predicts that construction noise levels will exceed both the proposed daytime and evening limits at a significant number of NSRs. In some cases, the limits will be exceeded by a significant margin with predicted levels at the closest receptor exceeding 90dB(A). These predicted significant impacts are acknowledged within the assessment as requiring mitigation. Proposed mitigation measures include the creation of a Construction Noise Management Plan (CNMP), a LoD restriction at sensitive locations, community engagement, equipment curtailment and ensuring a short-term duration of works. Subject to mitigation, the assessment finds that, during felling, foundations, tower erection and stringing phases of work, 94% of receptors will not experience significant impacts. Impact during the access and enabling phase are predicted to be higher but are expected

to be short-term. The assessment concludes that construction noise would result in a Minor impact at worst and is therefore reported as not Significant.

7.17 It is important to note that compliance with relevant noise limits does not, in itself, justify construction activity taking place seven days a week. Wider considerations, including the acceptability of noise to local residents and communities, must also be taken into account. In particular, where receptors are already subject to high levels of construction noise during weekday daytime periods, additional evening or weekend working is unlikely to be acceptable. Consequently, it is recommended that the proposed seven-day working is not accepted however this could be resolved by way of a condition restricting activities that are audible at the curtilage of an NSR to the following:

- Monday to Friday: 08:00 – 19:00 hrs
- Saturday: 08:00 – 13:00 hrs
- At no time on Sunday or recognised bank holidays in Scotland.

7.18 It is also recommended that a detailed construction noise assessment be required to be carried out by the Principal Contractor, at which point detailed information on construction activities, utilisation levels of plant, and noise levels will be available. The assessment will be required to include a CNMP which contains measures to effectively manage construction noise. This should include restricting the noisiest activities to Daytime and Saturday working hours and careful consideration of activities permitted outwith those times. Updates to the CNMP should also be required where potential cumulative effects with other projects arise during construction works. Construction noise effects are expected to be kept within acceptable limits subject to these measures.

7.19 A Construction Dust Mitigation Scheme would be required to demonstrates how best practice measures will be implemented and this could be secured by condition. Subject to this condition, the effects of dust on sensitive receptors are not expected to be Significant.

7.20 The EIAR chapter also includes a desk-based assessment covering construction vibration. It notes that construction activities that induce vibration are likely to be limited to potential piling activities where required at tower foundations. The assessment is based on a worst-case scenario. All activities other than the potential vibratory compaction start up and run down (Medium) are assessed as being Low or Negligible. The potential Medium impact would reduce to Low where the distance between the activity and the NSR is at least 60m. Where this cannot be achieved, alterations to the equipment to reduce the level of vibration can also reduce the level to Low. The inclusion of vibration within any CNMP would ensure that vibration impacts are properly controlled and mitigated. This could be secured by condition. Subject to a Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan (CNVMP), effects from construction vibration are not considered to be Significant.

7.21 In addition to the requirement for a CNVMP, the Council and Transport Scotland also require the applicant to provide a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) for the use of the road network. In addition, a series of Community Liaison Groups should be set up for each section of the line to ensure that the affected

community council's and other stakeholders are kept informed and are consulted before and during the construction period.

Routing, Design Evolution and Alternatives

7.22 Chapter 4 of the EIAR describes the routeing process and the alternatives considered. Firstly, a "do-nothing" scenario is considered and is discounted on the basis that the proposed development is of national importance, contributing significantly towards the delivery of the UK's and Scottish Government's net zero targets. This is because the current electricity transmission network would not have capacity to support the transfer of power from both onshore and offshore renewable generation in the north of Scotland to centres of demand further south.

7.23 The EIAR includes consideration of subsea HVDC cables as an alternative technology. It notes that they can transmit electricity over long distances and avoid certain onshore constraints, however they were discounted for several other reasons. Their capacity is significantly lower, with typical HVDC technology providing around 2 GW compared to approximately 6 GW for a 400 kV overhead line, meaning multiple systems would be required to achieve equivalent capacity. In addition, subsea cables are substantially more expensive (around five times the cost of overhead lines) and require significant associated onshore infrastructure, including converter stations of approximately 9.3 hectares at each landfall.

7.24 Underground cable (UGC) was also considered as an alternative technology; however, it was not progressed due to a combination of technical, environmental and economic constraints. UGC is substantially more expensive than overhead line infrastructure, with significantly higher construction and lifetime costs, and would introduce inefficiencies into the transmission network, requiring additional infrastructure such as reactive compensation equipment and expanded substations. It also entails a wide and continuous construction corridor, extensive excavation and permanent access requirements, resulting in greater disturbance to soils, peatland, groundwater and habitats. Furthermore, underground cables are more challenging to install and maintain, particularly in upland terrain, and faults can take significantly longer to repair, posing risks to network reliability. On this basis, UGC was not considered a reasonable or viable alternative.

7.25 The EIAR therefore concludes that OHL technology is the most appropriate solution in this case. Chapter 4 thereafter moves through four principal stages of design evolution, as follows, with the location of the proposed OHL being further refined and stakeholder consultation carried out at each stage:

- Stage 0: Routeing Strategy Development;
- Stage 1: Corridor Selection (Sections 1 and 2 within Highland);
- Stage 2: Route Selection (Sections 1-4 within Highland); and
- Stage 3: Alignment Selection (Sections 1-11 within Highland).

7.26 The applicant is required to follow a series of guidelines for the routeing of new high voltage OHLs which have been established within the electricity supply industry – known as the Holford Rules. This sets a hierarchical approach to routeing which advocates avoiding areas of high amenity value, minimises changes in direction, takes advantage of topography and which minimise visual interaction with other

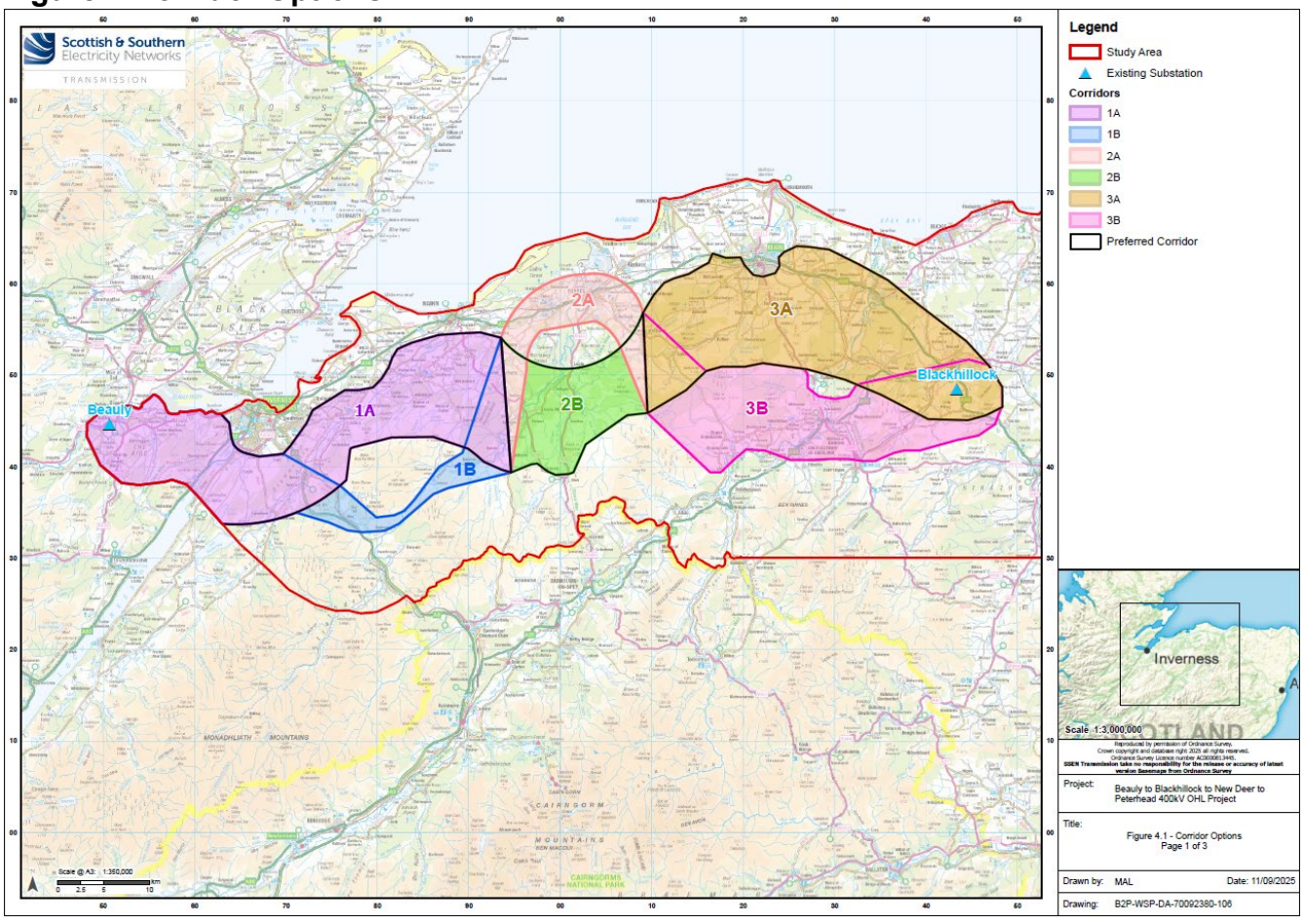
transmission infrastructure. The applicant has developed its own guidance to reflect modern practice, incorporating environmental, technical and economic considerations within an iterative process.

7.27 In relation to landscape and visual matters, the following design principles were taken into account during the various stages of the routeing process, in accordance with the steps outlined in the Holford Rules:

- “avoid if possible major areas of highest landscape value (including those covered by national and international designations and other sensitive landscapes);
- avoid by deviation, smaller areas of high amenity value;
- try to avoid sharp changes of direction and reduce the number of larger angle towers required;
- avoid skylining the route in key views and where necessary, cross ridges obliquely where a dip in the ridge provides an opportunity;
- target the route towards open valleys and woods where the scale of poles or towers will be reduced and views broken by trees (avoid slicing through landscape types and try to keep to edges and landscape transitions);
- consider the appearance of other lines in the landscape to avoid a dominating or confusing wirescape effect;
- arrange wherever practicable that parallel or closely related routes are planned with tower types, spans and conductors forming a coherent appearance; and
- approach urban areas through industrial zones and consider the use of undergrounding in residential and valued recreational areas.”

7.28 The corridor selection stage represents the first refinement of the route, whereby a broad study area, shaped by topographical constraints and the need to avoid major environmental sensitivities, was analysed using combined environmental and technical data to produce a constraints heat map identifying areas of relative sensitivity. The Corridor options are shown in Figure 1 below. Within Highland, Corridor 1A was preferred over 1B to avoid impacts on the Drynachan, Lochindorb and Dava Moors Special Landscape Area as well as the possibility to avoid peatland habitats. It is also noted that 1A already contains steel lattice tower OHLs.

Figure 1 Corridor Options



7.29 The route selection stage, illustrated in Figures 2 and 3 below, further refined the preferred corridors by identifying and assessing narrower route options within each corridor section. Multiple route alternatives were developed and comparatively appraised against environmental, technical and cost criteria, with particular focus on avoiding designated sites, settlements, landscape sensitivities and peatland, while accommodating engineering constraints. A preferred route was identified for each section and taken forward to consultation, with subsequent feedback informing targeted refinements and the development of a more defined route corridor prior to alignment selection.

Figure 2 Route Options - Part 1

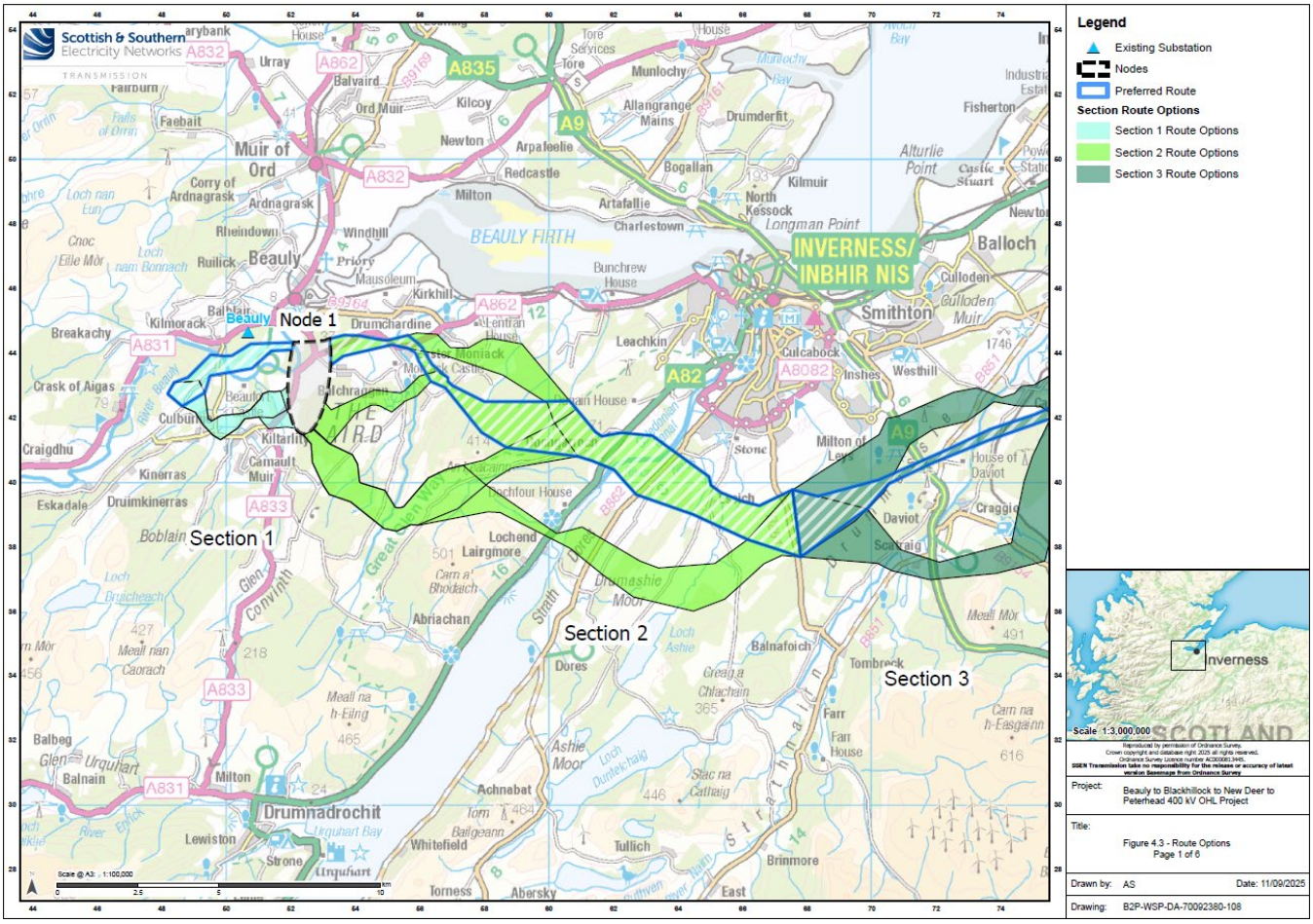
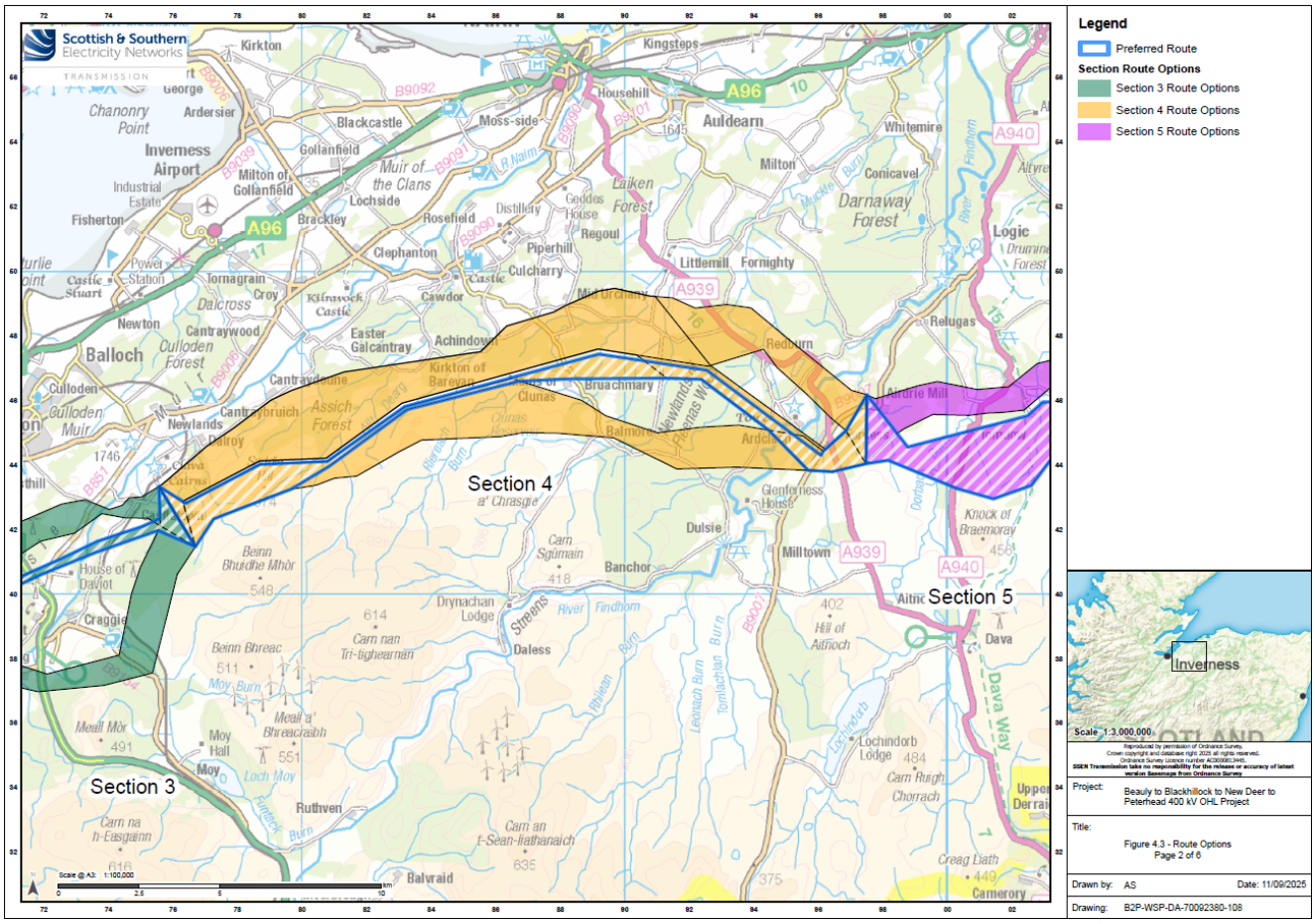


Figure 3 Route options- Part 2



7.30 In Section 1, the northern route was preferred to avoid residential receptors in Kiltarlity and Culburnie and to avoid the Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival site, although this would require routeing through part of the Beaufort Castle GDL with associated loss of ancient woodland.

7.31 In Section 2, a central option was preferred due to it having the least constraints through a relatively sensitive area, including landscape and visual effects crossing the Great Glen, Caledonian Canal and the Aird and the designated Torvean Landforms SSSI and Dochfour GDL, amongst others.

7.32 At Section 3, the central routeing option was selected to reduce impacts to Culloden Battlefield and Culloden Muir Conservation Area to the north and to avoid landscape and visual effects around Daviot to the south.

7.33 At Section 4, a central route option was selected to locate the proposed OHL adjacent to an existing OHL whilst maintain distance to various designated sites and avoiding peatlands further south.

7.34 The final design evolution stage is the alignment selection phase which has produced the alignment that is the subject of the current application. The alignment options are illustrated in Figures 4 and 5, below.

Figure 4 Alignment Options Part 1

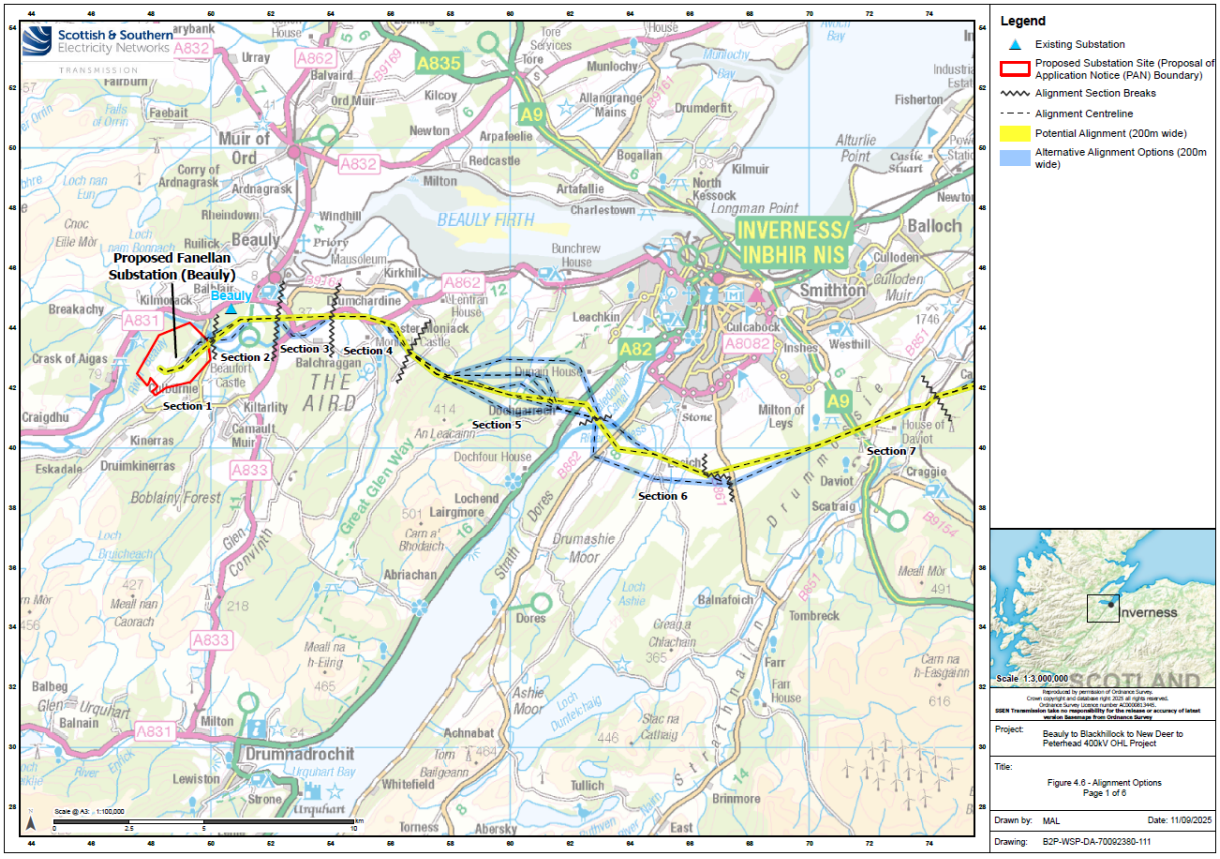
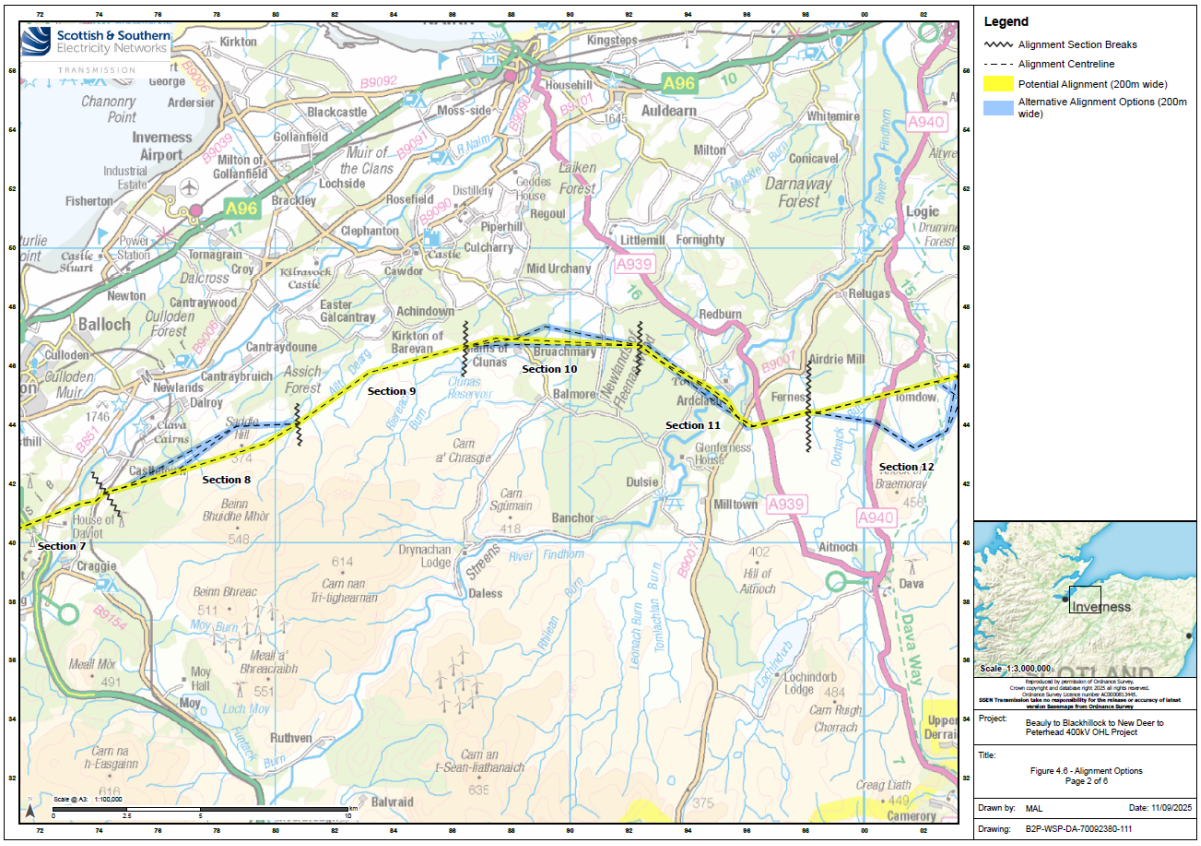


Figure 5 Alignment Options Part 2



7.35 The alignment selection process comprises 11 sections within the Highland area. It is set out in Table 4.3 of Chapter 4 of the EIAR and summarised here by section number:

1. The preferred alignment represents the shortest crossing of the Beaufort Castle Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) and provides the opportunity to avoid locating a tower within it;
2. The alignment reflects a balanced approach to minimising effects on woodland, as well as residential and heritage receptors;
3. The alignment selected was preferred from virtually all environmental and engineering perspectives;
4. Covering the A862 crossing at Easter Moniack, the alignment was chosen to avoid impacts on cultural heritage designations, including listed buildings to the west, and to maintain greater separation from properties at East Moniack and Reelig.
5. At the Aird crossing, the alignment reduces impacts on trees and woodland and avoids the need for a visually prominent angle tower at the approach to the Great Glen, while also facilitating a straight crossing of the Caledonian Canal and River Ness in the subsequent section.
6. A northern woodland route near Scaniport was discounted due to potential impacts on numerous veteran broadleaved trees, while a southern option was rejected due to greater visibility and proximity to Scheduled Monuments; the central option was therefore identified as least constrained.
7. Alignment alongside an existing OHL was preferred to consolidate infrastructure.
8. The southern option was selected to maintain separation from Culloden Battlefield and benefit from screening provided by Saddle Hill.
9. Constraints including peatland, elevated terrain and the preference to route south of the existing OHL and away from residential receptors resulted in a single option being identified.
10. A central alignment was selected to maintain proximity to the existing OHL and maximise distance from nearby properties.
11. The primary consideration was the crossing of the River Findhorn, with the alignment selected to keep the proposed and existing OHLs closely aligned in order to reduce landscape, visual and cultural heritage effects.

Overhead Line's Design

7.36 The proposed development includes a new double circuit steel structure 400kV OHL. Within Highland, the tower ranges from BC1-1 to CB7-3 for approximately 56km between the proposed Fanellan 400kV substation to the southwest of Beauly in the west, to the River Findhorn south of Ferness in the east, and the majority range between 48 to 72m in height. The exception to this is one special tower of up to 97m at the Caledonian Canal which is required to maintain sufficient electrical clearance for vessels with masts up to 35m in height. The proposed development also includes the removal of the existing 132kV OHL between Beauly and Knocknagael for 16.9km, and the realignment of the existing 2.6km Beauly to Blackhillock 275kV OHL. No underground cabling has been included as part of the proposed development, with the undergrounding of a short section of an existing 275kV OHL having been proposed by the applicant as mitigation relating to the proposed 400kV line's impact on the Mains of Daviot ring cairn and stone circle.

7.37 The design process has also taken landscape and visual effects into account with regards to the siting of diamond or duck under crossings, due to their increased likelihood of significant effects as a result of a 'cluster' of towers and wires, and micro-siting of towers.

7.38 Opportunities for mitigation planting proposals through forestry areas have also been taken into consideration by the applicant. Within Highland, deciduous forest edge planting has been proposed within the operational corridor at The Aird, Meall Mor and the A9 at Drumossie. Deciduous planting is intended to soften the appearance and artificial linear edge of particularly visually prominent sections of felling. These areas are within areas of commercial coniferous forestry where there is a 90m operational corridor. The planting would contribute to mitigation of adverse effects by:

- "having a naturalistic edge and avoiding artificial straight edges through the landscape that draw the eye; and
- soften the appearance through staggering the height of planting to the forest edge i.e. smaller shrubs, medium sized shrubs, medium sized trees then larger trees up to the edge of the first row of conifers."

7.39 The principles of this mitigation planting and an example layout has been provided in Appendix 7.6: Forestry Landscape Mitigation Principles of the EIAR.

7.40 Where permanent access tracks are required for maintenance purposes within designated landscapes such as SLAs, a number of reinstatement measures have been set out in paragraph 7.4.12 of Chapter 7 of the EIAR. These measures would ensure that any permanent access tracks within the SLAs would not appear substantially more robust in character than existing similar tracks within these, or other nearby, parts of the landscape. Consideration of NatureScot's good practice guidance for track construction will also be given.

Potential Design Amendments

7.41 As noted previously, no design amendments have been made to the application during the consultation process however the applicant submitted a TN on 22 May 2026 which provided further justification and set out potential additional mitigation measures to address the Landscape Officer's concerns in their consultation response. The TN is clear that the applicant has not committed to these mitigation measures which form part of ongoing discussions with the Council and therefore do not form part of the application at this point. These suggested measures include:

7.42
- **Area A - A862 to Easter Moniack:**
  - Option 1: Alternative Route Option – Any alternative alignment for this section would encroach or oversail several residential properties and is therefore not a feasible solution.
  - Option 2: Underground this section of the line – Implications to the network are considered by the applicant to outweigh any potential benefit, and therefore undergrounding is not possible.

7.43 The applicant considers "*the current proposed OHL alignment as set out in the application remains the only feasible option and the least visually intrusive tower arrangement in this location*." Officers do not accept this, given the large

number of visual receptors (residents, transport and recreational users) that would be significantly adversely affected by this section including a large proportion of the Farmed River Plains LCT. Undergrounding would be the Council's preferred position in relation to this section which would minimise these large numbers of significant adverse landscape and visual effects.

7.44

- **Area B - Caledonian Canal:**
  - Option 1: Reduction in tower height – Following a review of the current ground clearance, there is no scope to reduce the tower heights of CB1-1 or CB1-2 further whilst maintaining the required ground clearance for canal users, including sail boats.
  - Option 2: Underground the route under the canal – Implications to the network are considered to outweigh any potential benefit, and therefore undergrounding is not possible. Further, the Torvean Landforms SSSI is designated for its below ground geomorphological features, which would make undergrounding not possible without further impacting the SSSI.
  - Option 3: Relocate towers CB1-1 and CB1-2 - Alternative tower siting for CB1-1 suggested which removes towers from the "vista" view available at Dochgarroch Locks.

7.45

Officers welcome Option 3, the micro-siting of tower CB1-1 by approximately 50m which would remove the tower appearing prominent in the 'vista' view as seen in the new visualisation provided in Annex B of the TN. If the applicant proceeds with the micro-siting to the proposed location, this move will address the Landscape Officer's concerns and the visual effect from this location would reduce from Significant to not Significant during the operational phase. This is capable of being secured by condition.

7.46

- **Area C – Scaniport**:

  Alternative tower siting for towers CB1-4 and CB1-5 suggested to move towers further away from the residential property known as Grove Park, to the west of Cullaird Farm, however, this would result in two angle towers and result in some increased visibility for users of the B862, National Cycle Network and adjacent Core Path due to slight increase in tree loss.

7.47

Whilst Officers welcome the potential tower move, their concern still remains in relation to the residential visual amenity on Grove Park. The applicant is currently undertaking a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) which is anticipated to be submitted to the DPEA on 25 June 2026 and is unclear if there will be supporting visualisations from this property to support the assessment. The view from this residential property is static with the only open view available from the principal elevation and garden of this property, whilst users of the B862, cycle route and Core Path would experience transient views over a relatively short duration.

7.48

- **Area D - South of Culloden**:
  - Option 1: Micro-site towers within the LoD – Not possible to microsite the towers that would be both technically feasible and environmentally acceptable, whilst meeting the objectives of reducing skylining at Meall Mor.

- Option 2: Reduce tower heights – Some reduction in tower heights suggested including reducing the heights of six towers between CB3-1 and CB3-15. Towers CB3-3, CB3-4 and CB3-13 could be reduced in height by 3m, towers CB3-5 and CB3-9 could be reduced in height by 6m and tower CB3-6 could be reduced in height by 9m. An updated visualisation has been provided in Annex C of the TN.
- Option 3: Tower painting – The applicant confirm that they would be happy to agree in principle that tower painting could be considered in respect of the proposed development and existing 275kV OHL where they are visible from the Culloden Battlefield, with a view to implementing a tower painting scheme of mitigation, subject to further review and agreement of an appropriately worded condition.
- Option 4: Underground or realign the existing 275kV OHL – Not a feasible option within the scope of the application.
- Option 5: Additional forestry landscape mitigation – The applicant would be willing to explore potential options of extending the forest edge fringe planting mitigation into this location, however, confirm that it would not significantly change the appearance of the proposed development when viewed from the Battlefield.

7.49 Officers welcome a number of suggested mitigation options, however, the overarching concern of the two towers drawing attention on the skyline to the east of Meall Mor, as seen more clearly on the updated visualisation, remain, and Significant visual effects from Culloden Battlefield would continue. In relation to Option 2, whilst the reduction in height in towers would make limited difference to the overall effect experienced from the Battlefield, the composition of the proposed development as a whole when viewed in the round would appear more balanced, as seen in the visualisation.

7.50 In relation to Option 3 - tower painting, a detailed tower painting study would be welcome to identify the most appropriate coating colour for this particular location. The example tower painting scheme provided in Figure 6 of the TN is not convincing when applied to the proposed development given the towers seen from Queens View are well below the skyline, of a smaller scale and contained within a different landscape character setting. Tower painting for the skylined towers of the proposed development would make no difference. However, Officers consider that tower painting could be considered for the other towers in front of the hillside of Meall Mor, and those back clothed extending east, as illustrated in the updated visualisation. It is to be noted though that the visual effect of the painted towers during the winter months with snow cover would be far greater than when seen in the summer. To prove the effectiveness of the tower painting in this location, Officers suggest that one of the towers of the existing 275kV OHL which is also visible in the same view at a lower height be painted an appropriate colour to test this mitigation option which could potentially be undertaken ahead of any PLI related site visit.

7.51 In relation to Option 4, the potential of undergrounding the 275kV OHL is stated by the applicant not to be a feasible option within the scope of the application. Critically, the applicant has not stated that this is technically not feasible, and the parameters of the current application should not dictate the ability for this

potentially highly effective solution from being fully assessed and implemented. This may require an amendment to the current application, as well as additional environmental information to be provided, however, the lack of detailed consideration of this option is found to be unacceptable given the sensitivity of this receptor. Should overall project determination and delivery timescales require to be adjusted to accommodate exploration of this matter further, this is fully justifiable and appropriate, particularly should this result in a solution which avoids significant visual effects experienced at Culloden Battlefield.

7.52 Officers welcome Option 5, that the applicant is willing to explore potential options of extending the forest edge fringe planting mitigation into this location at Meall Mor. This could be covered by suitable worded condition. Similarly, the examples provided in Figures 7-9 of the TN in relation to reinstatement of tower pads and access tracks on side slopes is welcome, and this potential mitigation could also be addressed through a condition.

7.53 Overall, whilst the reduction in tower height, tower painting, forest edge mitigation and appropriate reinstatement of crane pads and access tracks is welcome for this section, the skylined towers adjacent to Meall Mor still remain of concern. Officers preference to minimise the landscape and visual effects at this location would be to either underground a short section of the route where it is skylined or given that this is unlikely to be technically feasible, the existing 275kV OHL should be realigned or undergrounded to allow the proposed development to avoid being skylined, with its towers being relocated to be back clothed by the hillside.

Landscape and Visual Impact

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Methodology

7.54 The applicant has undertaken a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) as reported within Chapter 7 of the EIAR. In doing so the effects of the proposed development on landscape character and receptors within a 10km study area have been considered. Beyond this distance there are not anticipated to be any significant landscape and visual effects resulting from the OHL. The chapter is supported by visualisations provided from a range of viewpoints and produced in accordance with the Council's Visualisation Standards. Whilst photomontages provide a useful aid in showing the appearance of the proposed development, they are just one tool used by Officers in the assessment of visual effects. A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) drawing is included in the assessment which shows theoretical bare ground visibility along with a ZTV that also shows screening effects from vegetation and buildings. Any potential screening effects indicated by the screening ZTV have been verified through a combination of assessing LVIA baseline photography and undertaking site visits by Officers.

7.55 The methodology for the LVIA broadly follows that set out in Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition (GLVIA3). As set out in paragraph 3.32 of GLVIA 3 the "*LVIA should always clearly distinguish between what are considered to be significant and non-significant effects*." The applicant judges significant effects

following the combination of judgements based on the Sensitivity of the Receptor against the Magnitude of Change.

7.56 The sensitivity of the receptor (landscape or visual) is defined by the receptor's susceptibility to the change brought about by the proposed development against the importance (value) of the landscape resource / view. For landscape, 'susceptibility' is the "*ability of the landscape receptor…to accommodate the development without undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation and/or the achievement of landscape planning policies and strategies*" (GLVIA3, Page 88). For visual receptors, higher susceptibility to the proposed change are those whose attention or interest is focussed on their surroundings as well as recreational users moving through the landscape at slower speeds such as cyclists and walkers as well as passengers in vehicles. Receptor susceptibility is judged to be high, medium, or low. The value of a landscape receptor, given as high, medium, low is based on a review of landscape designations and application of judgement based on criteria relating to scenic value, rarity, recreational value, representativeness, conservation interest, and association. Similar criteria are applied for views such as designations for specific views and views with recognised scenic value, whether they are specifically mentioned in special qualities of a designated landscape, their importance to heritage assets, and value attached to views by visitors as may be indicated by inclusion in tourism literature or references in literature and art. The sensitivity of the receptor is defined by the applicant as High, Medium to High, Medium, Low to Medium and Low.

7.57 Judgement of magnitude of change is based on an assessment of factors including: size, scale and nature of effect; geographical extent of the effect, and duration and reversibility of the effect. The applicant's definitions of magnitude of change ranges from High, Medium to High, Medium, Low to Medium, Low, Negligible to Low, Negligible and No Change.

7.58 In the submitted EIAR, effects of Major or Moderate to Major correspond to Significant effects. Where 'Moderate' effects are predicted, the EIAR advises that professional judgement has been applied to ensure that the potential for Significant effects arising has been clearly explained. Those effects classified as Minor to Moderate, Minor, Negligible or Negligible to Minor are considered to be Not Significant.

7.59 A series of 22 visualisation viewpoints (VPs) within THC have been provided within the EIAR (VPs 1-19, 54, 55 and 58). These have been individually assessed in Appendix 7.5: Representative Viewpoint Sensitivity and Effects, Volume 5 of the EIAR. Paragraph 1.12 of Appendix 7.5 notes that "*Where the viewpoint is representative of more than one type of receptor, consideration of the different sensitivity levels of each receptor type is provided, and subsequent assessment carried out accordingly*." However, the applicant's viewpoint assessment in this document does not assess all relevant visual receptors at each viewpoint. For example, the assessment of VP12 only identifies residents as the visual receptor whereas this view would also be representative of road users although the applicant has acknowledged other visual receptors on the corresponding THC visualisation but not assessed them within the viewpoint appendix. This applies to VPs 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 18 and is noted in the officer's Viewpoint Appraisal in Appendix 4 of this report.

7.60 A Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) has not been undertaken by the applicant. It is noted in the Scoping Report that "*effects on residential receptors are anticipated to be captured sufficiently and holistically within the LVIA to identify significant adverse effects (taking in to account perceptual qualities as well as visual changes on receptors)*." Whilst the applicant's LVIA assesses Significant adverse effects at a number of properties, it does not go a step further to determine whether the predicted effects on visual amenity and views at the property are such that it has reached the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold, therefore potentially becoming a matter of Residential Amenity. Officers, however, understand that the applicant is currently undertaking an RVAA following the PLI Pre Examination Meeting (PEM) and this is anticipated to be submitted to the DPEA on 25 June 2026.

Landscape Character Effects

7.61 Given the location and scale of the proposed development it sits across several Landscape Character Types (LCTs) as illustrated on Figure 7.4. There are 15 LCTs within Highland in the LVIA Study Area. Each of these LCTs cover much wider areas than would be subject to the effects of this application. The EIAR's landscape assessment in Appendix 7.3, Volume 5 and summary in Chapter 7 has identified that there would be Significant effects to landscape character on 10 LCTs. These are tabled below with all Significant effects reported by the applicant in bold text with Major and Moderate to Major effects during the line's operation shaded red.

Table 1: Applicant's summary of significant effects on the 10 LCTs within Highland

LCT / Location	Construction Effects	Operational Effects (Year of Opening)	Operational Effects (Year 15)
Significant effects - Overall and localised parts of the LCT			
229 Enclosed Farmland - (River Beauly valley between Fanellan and Easter Moniack)	**Major Adverse**	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	Not assessed by applicant
Significant effects - Localised parts of the LCT only			
342 Farmed River Plains - (around Easter Moniack)	**Major Adverse**	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	**Moderate to Major Adverse**
228 Rolling Farmland and Woodland - (Eastern and western slopes of The Aird)	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	Moderate Adverse (Not Significant)
225 Broad Steep-Sided Glen - (River Ness valley between The Aird and the River Ness)	**Major Adverse**	**Major Adverse**	**Moderate to Major Adverse**
222 Rocky Moorland Plateau - (The Aird)	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	**Moderate Adverse**
223 Flat Moorland Plateau with Woodland - (Drummossie Muir)	**Moderate Adverse**	**Moderate Adverse**	Moderate Adverse (Not Significant)
227 Farmed Strath- (Strathnairn)	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	**Moderate Adverse**	Moderate Adverse (Not Significant)
221 Rolling Uplands - (Open moorland southeast of Saddle Hill)	**Moderate Adverse**	**Moderate Adverse**	**Moderate Adverse**
291 Open Rolling Upland - (Open moorland southeast of Saddle Hill)	**Moderate Adverse**	**Moderate Adverse**	N/A
286 Narrow Wooded Valley - (Findhorn valley and Ardclach landscape	**Moderate to Major Adverse**	**Moderate Adverse**	Moderate Adverse (Not Significant)

7.62 As noted in the table above, LCT 229: Enclosed Farmland would be significantly affected as a whole, and within a local section of the LCT during construction (Major adverse) reducing to Moderate to Major adverse during operation at the year of opening. At construction, effects are generally greater, primarily due to the height, movement and activity of the construction works, particularly in relation to tower construction through use of cranes and potentially helicopters. The completion of the construction works would remove this uncharacteristic height and movement in the skyline, resulting in slightly lower effects during operation for the wider LCT characteristics of LCT 229, reported in the EIAR to be reducing to non-significant effects during operation at year of opening (winter and summer) but remaining significant at all phases locally. The Officer considers this statement to be confusing. The effects during construction is not disputed, however, the Officer considers that the effect during operation at the year of opening has been under-assessed and would be Major adverse and locally significant, similar to the construction phase, given the large scale and spread of the proposed development across a large part of this LCT, thereby altering several of the key characteristics of this LCT including "*restricted views and increased sense of enclosure*", "*creating intrigue*" and the general enclosed and wooded landscape characteristic. This is particularly evident in VPs 1 and 54. It is also unclear why the effects during operation at Year 15 on this LCT has not been assessed by the applicant.

7.63 Similarly, contrary to the EIAR's findings, Officers consider that the effect locally on LCT 342: Farmed River Plains has been under-assessed and would also be Major adverse and Significant during operation at the year of opening and at Year 15, similar to the construction phase, given the introduction of the prominent (in some instances, dominant) vertical features within this landscape affecting the "*contrast of the flat, open plain and the adjacent concave slopes rising to steep hill and mountain edges*" and the more intimate, rural part of this landscape around Easter Moniack. Whilst this part of the landscape is undesignated, it would still have an adverse effect due to the introduction of a new and detracting human development through open fields in a landscape of a reasonably higher scenic value which would alter the perceptual and rural qualities of this landscape. This is particularly evident in VPs 7, 8, 9, 11 and 54.

7.64 The management felling of surrounding felled coniferous woodland and establishing forest edge fringe planting within the operational corridor would help to mitigate adverse effects on local landscape character and Significant localised effects are anticipated to decrease to non-Significant at Year 15 for LCT 221, LCT 223, LCT 227, LCT 228, and LCT 286. This assessment is not disputed.

7.65 Significant localised adverse effects would therefore remain at all phases of operation for LCT 342, LCT 225, and LCT 222. This assessment is not disputed.

Designated and Protected Landscapes

7.66 The proposal does not cover any designated landscapes in Highland, other than Beaufort Castle GDL which is considered in the built and cultural heritage section of this report. Only one SLA within THC has been assessed in the LVIA. The assessment concludes that the effects on the special landscape qualities of the Drynachan, Lochindorb and Dava Moors SLA would be Minor to Moderate adverse and Not Significant during all phases of the proposed development. The proposed

development would be visible from local summits and higher ground within the north-western portion of the SLA as it passes between Saddle Hill and Beinn Bhudhe Bheag and on the lower slopes of Carn a Choire Odhair, although it would be largely backclothed by Saddle Hill, forestry and landscape to the north of the SLA. Effects on the SLA would be associated with its perception and the value of broad, expansive views from local hill summits. However, the existing 275kV OHL is likely to already be perceived and the change in perception would be negligible and experienced through a small portion of the expansive SLA. The majority of key characteristic features of the SLA would remain intact. This assessment is not disputed with the line avoiding significant adverse effects on surrounding designated landscapes.

Visual Effects

7.67 Appendix 7.5, Volume 5 of the EIAR includes a visual assessment from each of the 22 THC viewpoints, including an assessment of what the applicant considers the significance of the visual effect would be for receptors at each viewpoint. No cumulative assessment has, however, been undertaken at each of the viewpoints by the applicant. As stated previously, the applicant's viewpoint assessment does not assess all relevant visual receptors at each viewpoint as is noted in the Officer's Viewpoint Appraisal in Appendix 4 of this Report.

7.68 Unsurprisingly, there is some difference between the applicant's assessment and the appraisal undertaken by Officers, which is to be expected when such assessments are dependent on the application of professional judgement. Differences in judgement on the specific viewpoints are set out in Appendix 4 of this report.

7.69 The applicant has under-assessed the level of effect at several viewpoints assessed as Significant including VPs 1: River Beauly, 7: Balchraggan, 8: Easter Moniack, 11: Drumchardine, 12: Pine Chalets, Newtonhill, and 54: A862, Kirkhill. This is due to disagreement with either the sensitivity or magnitude assessed by the applicant at these viewpoints.

7.70 In addition, critically, Officers also considers that VP16: Culloden Battlefield is Significant rather than Not Significant as assessed by the applicant. Similarly, VP14: Caledonian Canal is also considered to be significant during all phases rather than just during construction as assessed by the applicant. The location of this viewpoint is not representative of the receptors, and a greater view would be gained further along the path. This has been explained in the Landscape Officer's consultation response. The assessment of Viewpoint 9: Knockbain has also been under-assessed by the applicant which Officers consider as Significant for residents.

7.71 There are also a number of non-significant viewpoints which have been under-assessed in terms of either sensitivity or magnitude including VPs 2: Creraig, 3: Ruisaurie, 4: Beauly, 5: Ardnagrask, 6: Kiltarlity, 10: A832, Newton and 18: Urchany. None of these effects are however considered Significant by Officers.

7.72 The visual assessment in Appendix 7.4.1, Volume 5 and summarised in Chapter 7 of the EIAR has identified that there would be Significant adverse visual effects during construction and operation within all four geographical sections within Highland, affecting several residents, tourists and visitors, travellers and recreational users. No beneficial visual effects have been reported.

7.73 Of the 63 residential receptor groups assessed within Highland, 22 have been reported as Significant during construction, 21 during operation (winter), 20 during operation (summer), and 19 during operation (Year 15). The Significant visual effects range from Major, Moderate to Major or Moderate adverse.

7.74 Of the 26 recreational receptors assessed within Highland, 14 have been reported as Significant during construction and operation (winter), and 12 during operation (summer) and operation (Year 15).

7.75 Of the 10 transport receptors assessed within Highland, 5 have been reported as Significant during construction, and 4 during operation (summer, winter and year 15).

7.76 Significant visual effects reported within the four geographical sections within Highland are as follows:

- **Fanellan to The Aird**:
  - Residents to the south and at Fanellan, around Beaufort Castle, east of Hughton, residents between the A831 and River Beauly, properties at Groam of Annat, Groam Farmhouse and River Beauly Lodge, residents around Easter Moniack and along the A862, around Balchraggan and Cabrich, West Croft, south of Altnacardich, from Ardmachdonie to southwesdt of Newtonhill, Drumchardine, Inchmore, Holmer and Craggach, Netonhill and Altnacardich;
  - Recreational users of Core Paths IN03.03-04, IN20.11, IN20.05, IN21.07 and IN23.02, and of the Great Glen Way; and
  - Road users of the A862, local roads between Culburnie and Easter Moniack, minor roads over The Aird.
- **The Aird to Knocknagel**:
  - Residents between Dochgarroch Locks and Inverness, detached properties at Lagnalean and Dalreoch (Lower Dunain), around Dochgarroch and Scaniport, isolated properties in Essich, and residents between the B862 east of the River Ness (Cullaird) and west of the A9 at Milton of Leys;
  - Recreational users of the Great Glen Canoe Trail, Caledonian Canal Towpaths, Caledonia Way, and Core Paths IN11.02, 1N19.39-40;
  - Users of Daviot Steading wedding venue; and
  - Road users of the A82 and A9.
- **Knocknagel to Castleton**:
  - Residents south of Castleton including Daviot Lodge, Daviot Steading, Craigard and North Birches; and
  - Users of the Highland Tourist Route on the A939, NCN Route 7.
- **Castleton to Ferness**:
  - Residents to the south and southwest of Cawdor, within Urchany and between Mains of Clunas and Newlands of Fleenas Wood, to the west of Redburn, residents at Bruachmary, Balmore, Newlands of Knockaneorn, residents in Ferness in particular Tomnarroch Farm, Drumore and Achanbechan, Factors Cottage to the southwest of Ferness, residents north of Achagour Fishery, north of River Findhorn around Ardclach; and
  - Users of Achagour Fishery, visitors to Ardclach Church and Bell Tower.

7.77 Having undertaken an appraisal of the LVIA's findings, many of these effects are not being contested by Officers and therefore the content of the applicant's LVIA can be generally relied upon as fair and reasonable assessment of the likely visual effects arising from the proposed development. There are, however, exceptions where there is disagreement including where Officers assess additional significant effects to those reported by the applicant. In appraising the EIAR findings, pertinent matters including areas of disagreement identified by Officers which are worthy of Committee's and Scottish Ministers further consideration are set out below.

Fanellan to The Aird – Visual Appraisal

7.78 The applicant states in paragraph 7.4.68 of the LVIA that this section is "*The more dramatic landscape within the Highlands area creates more quickly altering views and vistas, from elevated, open panoramas to more intimate, enclosed, secluded pockets.*"

7.79 The main area of disagreement is in relation to the routeing of the scheme and the visual effects on the section traversing the Farmed River Plains LCT 342 as the proposed development crosses the A862 south towards Easter Moniack and before it starts to climb steeply up The Aird. This section largely constitutes around 8 towers for approximately 2km in length. To the south of the A862, the proposed development deviates from the existing retained OHL in the north, through an attractive and rural landscape centred around Easter Moniack and beyond, where it would be seen as a new human development through open fields with limited tree cover and would appear dominant in some views from the A862, with angle towers particularly prominent, resulting in significant adverse effects on a number of visual receptors. The LVIA under-states the magnitude at VP54: A862, Kirkhill which Officers assesses as High (during operation) resulting in a Major adverse visual effect at the viewpoint. The key visual receptors affected would be users of the A862 (some of whom would be tourists driving along the North Coast 500 for which the applicant has understated the sensitivity), local roads and Core Paths around Easter Moniack and some scattered residential properties within this landscape resulting in significant adverse visual effects. The residential properties, Core Paths and local roads are located in groups (THC-R-13, THC-R-16, THC-R-18, THC-R-19, THC-T-2, THC-REC-2 and THC-REC-7) around VP8: Easter Moniack, VP7: Balchraggan, VP9: Knockbain and VP54: A862, Kirkhill where there is an under-estimation of effects. The proposed development would have a dominant adverse visual effect due to the introduction of a new and detracting human development through open fields in a landscape of higher scenic value which would alter the perceptual and rural qualities of this landscape.

7.80 The applicant was asked by Council Officers to explore an alternative route option between towers BC3-5B and BC4-7A or underground this section of approximately 2km (given the relatively unconstraint topography) between the crossing of the A862 and Easter Moniack to reduce the large number of significant adverse visual effects, however, the applicant confirmed in its TN of 22 May 2026 that largely due to residential property constraints in the area, there were no feasible options to address this section.

7.81 The applicant has also under-assessed the visual effect for receptors (road users, residents and Core Paths, particularly the northern end of the Beaufort Castle GDL) along the Black Bridge over River Beauly (VP1: River Beauly) where the proposed

development would introduce a highly prominent new feature in the view and would appear as a detracting / discordant element in these views.

7.82 In relation to The Aird itself, as the proposed route starts climbing The Aird where there would be a substantial portion of felling undertaken making the towers more prominent in views from the A862 and Easter Moniack. Officers agree with the LVIA that these effects would be significant during construction and operation at Year 1 but would reduce overtime as the proposed mitigation forestry replanting matures by Year 15. It is also generally agreed that the proposed mitigation comprising the organic restructuring of the wooded areas on the slopes of the Aird would reduce effects over time as illustrated and noted in Appendix 7.6, Volume 5 of the EIAR.

The Aird to Knocknagel – Visual Appraisal

7.83 With the exception of the route crossing the Caledonian Canal and the visual effect on the property near Scaniport (Grove Park), the landscape and visual effects on the remainder of this section are reasonably mitigated by design.

7.84 In relation to the Caledonian Canal, the crossing over the Canal between towers CB1-1 (69.57m in height) to CB1-2 (96.57m in height) is of concern to officers, particularly CB1-1 which would be clearly visible in a 'Vista' view from the Dochgarroch Locks. The positioning of VP14: Caledonian Canal is unfortunate and is not the best representative view of this location. A better position would have been from the lock itself as it crosses the Canal or from the picnic tables on the opposite side where there is a clear 'Vista' view along both sides of the Canal. The Landscape Officer provided some visualisations from the lock and the picnic tables as part of their consultation response which illustrates the view of the proposed CB1-1 tower. There is no other overhead line or tower visible from these locations, and tower of CB1-1 would be clearly visible above the vegetated slopes to the east. The LVIA under-estimates the effect on recreational users of Dochgarroch Locks, Caledonian Canal (THC-REC-1 and VP14) which Officers assess a Medium to High magnitude of change resulting in a Moderate to Major adverse Significant effect at VP14 (when relocated). This is primarily due to tower CB1-1 which changes the character of this view as this popular recreational destination. There is also concern with the height of tower CB1-2 which would be clearly visible from the towpath on both sides of the canal further east resulting in Major adverse effects. There is however a reasonable amount of tree cover and other overhead lines visible which would partially mitigate the effect; nevertheless, it would be Significant and adverse.

7.85 The applicant was asked to explore an alternative route option to significantly reduce the visual effects at Dochgarroch Locks and along The Canal, however, the applicant confirmed to the Council on 24 April 2026 that they have identified potential tower micro-siting options, and are reviewing and assessing the options to confirm if they are constructable, if they address the landscape and visual concerns, and raise any additional significant effects. They also confirmed that updated visualisations would be provided to illustrate these options, provided their assessments confirm they are feasible.

7.86 The applicant then submitted a TN on 22 May 2026 confirming a possible mitigation option to relocate tower CB1-1 by 50m. Officers welcome the micro-siting of tower CB1-1 which would remove the tower appearing prominent in the 'vista' view as seen

in the new visualisation provided in Annex B of the TN. If the applicant proceeds with the micro-siting to the proposed location, this could be secured by a suitably worded condition as the move will address Officers concerns and the visual effect from this location would reduce from Significant to Not Significant during the operational phase.

7.87 In relation to Scaniport, the towers of concern are CB1-4 and CB1-5 where they will appear dominant in front of Grove Park which has an elevated aspect with its principal elevation and garden looking southwest, in the direction of the proposed development. The Landscape Officer provided some visualisations from near this property as part of their consultation response which illustrates the view of the proposed towers. Appendix 7.4.1, Volume 5 of the EIAR, in relation to this residential receptor - THC-R-28, helpfully states that:

7.88 "*For residents of properties within open fields adjacent to the Proposed Development, including Grove Park, the Proposed Development would appear in the near-distance with towers visible in their entirety and in the skyline, introducing new infrastructure within otherwise attractive uninterrupted rural views. The Proposed Development would continue to be seen further east as it passes over rising landform and the northern extent of Drumashie Plantation, where a small amount of clearance to accommodate a new OC would result in slightly increased visibility. One angle tower adjacent to Cullaird would be particularly prominent in the foreground of views, although it would be slightly off-site from the direct line of sight from the main property. Given the general lack of detracting features and the foreground of views being substantially disturbed by the introduction of the Proposed Development, the magnitude of change is assessed as High. The geographical extent would be medium to high, and the duration would be long-term*."

7.89 The applicant's assessment is agreed that the effect would be Major adverse and Significant during construction and operation, however, Officers considers the view from this property with the proposed development has the potential to breach the residential visual amenity threshold due to the close distance (towers CB1-4/5 being between 215-280m from the property) and dominant effect of the two towers visible from the principal elevation and garden of the property visible from its main outlook to the southwest. There would also be Significant visual effects from the nearby Laggan Cottage, located 184m to tower CB1-4 to the southwest of the proposed development, however, due to the intervening bunding and vegetation to the rear of the property, there is less potential that the residential visual amenity threshold would be breached for that property.

7.90 In its submitted TN on 22 May 2026, the applicant proposed a mitigation option of micro-siting towers CB1-4 and CB1-5 moving them further away from the residential property of Grove Park, however, they confirmed that this would result in two angle towers and result in some increased visibility for users of the B862, National Cycle Network and adjacent Core Path due to slight increase in tree loss. Whilst Officers welcome the potential tower move, their concern still remains in relation to the residential visual amenity on Grove Park. The applicant is currently undertaking a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) which is anticipated to be submitted to the DPEA on 25 June 2026 and is unclear if there will be supporting visualisations from this property to support the assessment. The view from this residential property is static and the only open view available from the principal elevation and garden of

this property whilst users of the B862, cycle route and Core Path would experience transient views over a relatively short duration.

7.91 **Knocknagel to Castleton – Visual Appraisal**

7.92 With the exception of the route crossing to the east of Meall Mor resulting in Significant adverse visual effects from Culloden Battlefield, the landscape and visual effects on the remainder of this section are reasonably mitigated by design. Many of the visual effects along the remainder of the route are generally agreed.

7.93 The section of concern is between towers CB2-24 and CB3-4/CB3-5 as the proposed development cuts across the east of Meall Mor when viewed from VP16: Culloden Battlefield. Firstly, it is unfortunate that the weather conditions for VP16 are poor and the proposed development is likely to be more visible than what has been illustrated and used by the applicant when undertaking their assessment. However, the applicant has retaken the photography and submitted an updated visualisation as an annex to its TN on 22 May 2026. Officers disagree with the LVIA that the effects would be Not Significant from this location. As set out in Appendix 4 of this report, Officers assess the effect as Moderate and Significant for visitors to the Battlefield, the main reason being the prominence of the towers highly visible on the skyline to the east of Meall Mor and the contrasting scale of towers with those supporting the existing 275kV OHL. The view and effect would also be similar from other receptors including Core Paths users within and adjacent to the Battlefield (THC-REC-25) and nearby residents (THC-R-40).

7.94 Whilst there are other existing and smaller OHLs visible in the same view, they are at a lower elevation, and the eye would be drawn particularly to the part of the route which rises up and crosses to the east of Meall Mor. Culloden Battlefield is a highly sensitive location and the views in all directions are important. Whilst there would be no significant effects on the landscape character of the Battlefield, it is the visual effect that would be Significant and adverse and particularly the section of the route noted above.

7.95 The applicant was asked to explore alternative route options including reduction in tower height in order to avoid breaking the skyline and crossing to the east of Meall Mor thereby substantially reducing the visual effects from Culloden Battlefield, however, the applicant confirmed to the Council on 24 April 2026 that the micro-siting options at Meall Mor are being investigated, but engineering constraints have been identified in this location which the applicant needs to work through in more detail. They also confirmed that updated visualisations would be provided to illustrate these options, provided their assessments confirm they are feasible. Of the other options suggested at the meeting with the Council on 12 March 2026, tower painting for the Culloden section was suggested by the applicant and were going to be provide examples of how this has worked in other locations. The applicant then submitted a TN on 22 May 2026 confirming a range of possible mitigation options to address Officers concerns. Some of the suggested mitigation options are welcomed, however, the overarching concern of the two towers drawing attention to on the skyline in front of Meall Mor and the contrasting scale of towers with those supporting the existing 275kV OHL, as seen more clearly on the updated visualisation, remain, and Significant visual effects from Culloden Battlefield would continue. Further detail of the Officers

appraisal in relation to the suggested mitigation options has been sent out within the earlier Routing and Design Evolution subsection of this report.

Castleton to Ferness – Visual Appraisal

7.96 The landscape and visual effects on the section between Castleton to Ferness are largely agreed to those assessed in the LVIA with Significant effects limited to several residents, and users of Achagour Fishery, and visitors to Ardclach Church and Bell Tower.

Cumulative Effects

7.97 The cumulative assessment is described in EIAR Appendix 7.7, Volume 5, however, no detailed cumulative viewpoint assessment has been undertaken. The methodology broadly follows best practice guidance.

7.98 The cumulative assessment has been set out in two stages, as follows:

- Stage 1 - The proposed development is considered with three other projects associated with the SSEN Transmission Network upgrades – Fanellan Substation, Greens Substation, and Netherton Hub; and
- Stage 2 - The proposed development is considered with other unrelated developments, as outlined in Chapter 5 of the EIAR.

7.99 In relation to Stage 1, the LVIA assesses the cumulative effects of the proposed development with Fanellan Substation proposed to be located within Highland:

- Significant cumulative landscape effects (ranging from Major to Moderate adverse) have been assessed on LCT 229: Enclosed Farmland and LCT 227: Farmed Strath during construction and operation;
- Significant cumulative visual effects (ranging from Major to Moderate adverse) have been assessed on three residential groups around Fanellan, Beaufort Castle, west of Beaufort Castle, east of Hughton, Culburnie, Creraig and west of Hughton (THC-R-1a, 1b and 2) and a number of recreational receptors including users of Core Paths IN20.11 'Home Farm to Hughton by Lonbuie' and IN20.05 'East Lodge to West Lodge, Beaufort Castle', within Beaufort Castle GDL (THC-REC-6), represented by VPs1: River Beauly and 2:Creraig. These effects are largely not disputed.

7.100 There would be no cumulative effects for receptors in Highland associated with the line's other planned substations (Greens substation and Netherton Hub), both of which are located in Aberdeenshire.

7.101 In relation to Stage 2, the LVIA assesses additional Significant cumulative effects in relation to the following developments. None of these effects are disputed:

- Knocknagel BESS – significant visual effects on THC-R-30 represented by residents of scattered properties between the B862 and B861, south of Inverness (VP6) during construction only. No change to visual effects during operation, and no change to landscape effects;

- Beauly BESS - significant visual effects on THC-R-11 represented by residents of Beauly and Beauly south (VP4) during construction. No change to visual effects during operation, and no change to landscape effects;
- Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400kV Project – No change to landscape effects (remains significant for LCT 229 and LCT 227 during construction), Significant visual effects on THC-R-10 during construction and operation represented by residents of Tomnacross, Ardendrain and Foxhole;
- Western Isles HVDC UGC – no change to landscape effects. Significant visual effects during construction for THC-R-4b and THC-R-11 represented by residents at Kilmorack to Ruilick, Beauly and Beauly South;
- Beauly Substation – no change to landscape effects. Significant visual effects during construction on THC-R-4b represented by residents at Kilmorack to Ruilick;
- Cairn Duhie Wind Farm Redesign – Significant landscape effects on the Drynachan, Lochindorb and Dava Moors SLA, and significant visual effects on THC-R-57 represented by residents off the B9007, The Mount, Ferness (north) during construction and operation;
- Balmore Wind Farm – Significant landscape effects on LCT 290 during construction and operation and Significant visual effects on THC-R-51, THC-R-49, THC-R-50, THC-R-53, THC-R-55, THC-R-56a, and THC-R-56b during construction and on THC-R-51 during operation;
- Ballach Wind Farm – Significant visual effects during construction for THC-R-11 and THC-R-19 represented by residents at Beauly, Beauly south, Knockbain, Rebeg. No change to landscape effects;
- Ourack Wind Farm – Significant landscape effects on the Drynachan, Lochindorb and Dava Moors SLA. No change to visual effects within Highland;
- Lynemore Wind Farm – Significant landscape effects on LCT 221, and Significant visual effects during construction and operation on THC-R-40 and THC-REC-25 represented by residents at Leanach, Newlands of Culloden, Properties on the B851 and visitors to Culloden battlefield open space and visitor centre, within the Battle of Culloden Battlefield; and
- Fairburn Wind Farm Extension – Significant visual effects on THC-R-19 during construction represented by residents at Knockbain, Rebeg. No change to landscape effects.

7.102 Officers understand that the applicant will be providing additional information for the purposes of the PLI on an updated cumulative assessment with any relevant development proposals that were not included in the EIAR. This has not been provided to the Council at the time of writing this Report. However, Officers remain concerned on the significant adverse cumulative effects on Culloden Battlefield and around Easter Moniack due to the addition of the proposed development in combination with existing OHL infrastructure which has already been accommodate in these areas.

Conclusions

7.103 To conclude, it is clear from the EIAR that the applicant has tried, where possible, to reduce several potential landscape and visual effects through the proposed design and routing of the scheme. Nevertheless, there are still Significant adverse effects on 10 LCTs, 22 residential receptor groups, 14 recreational receptor groups and 5 transport receptor groups along the 56km route through Highland. This includes 11 of

the 22 assessed viewpoints. Officers also consider additional Significant effects which would add to the number of receptors assessed as Significant by the applicant.

7.104 Based on the design of the line and the routing options selected, the applicant has however failed to design out, or suitably mitigate the proposed developments Significant adverse effects on sections relating to: Area A) the crossing of the A862 to Easter Moniack; Area B) the Caledonian Canal; Area C) the residential property Grove Park; and Area D) views from Culloden Battlefield. These effects are detrimental to receptors in these locations which demands further scrutiny, thought, avoidance or additional mitigation with the proposed development as currently presented causing unacceptable landscape and visual effects.

7.105 The applicant suggested a number of potential additional mitigation options in its TN of 22 May 2026. Officers consider that the option of micro-siting a tower along the section of The Caledonian Canal is suitable and addresses their concern for Area B, however, no firm commitment has been made by the applicant to undertake this mitigation. In the absence of this, the objection in relation to landscape and visual effects remains for this section of the line. in relation to the other sections, the identified significant adverse effects have not been suitably mitigated.

Cumulative Effects - Effect Interactions

7.106 In-combination cumulative effects, being cumulative effects from the Proposed Development and other developments in the vicinity, are considered within each topic of the EIAR. Effect interactions are considered within Chapter 16. Effect interactions occur when a single receptor receives a combination of different types of impacts from the same development, for example a walker using a Core Path might experience reduced enjoyment due to a combination of visual intrusion, construction noise and increased traffic.

7.107 Cumulative effects from residual visual effects, private water supply effects, traffic effects, noise and vibration effects, and residual flood risk effects are considered within the EIAR. There are a number of receptor groups where particularly increases in traffic and changes to visual amenity are likely to result in slight localised magnification of effects. Nevertheless, in all cases the EIAR assesses effect interactions within Highland as being Minor Adverse and not Significant which is not disputed. A potential exception to this is for Grove Park as Officers await the submission of an RVAA for the scheme.

Built and Cultural Heritage

7.108 The assessment of cultural heritage impacts is set out in EIAR Chapter 11, using a study area comprising the LoD and a 2km buffer to assess effects on the setting of heritage assets, with some additional assets included where long-distance views contribute to significance. Within Highland, the study area contains a substantial number of heritage assets comprising:

- 36 Scheduled Monuments (SM);
- 13 Category A Listed Buildings;
- 56 Category B Listed Buildings;
- 37 Category C Listed Buildings (LB);

- 5 Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDL);
- 2 Conservation Areas (CA);
- 1 Inventory Battlefield (IB); and
- 124 non-designated heritage assets.

7.109 In addition, the area is assessed as having Medium to Low potential for the presence of unknown archaeological remains. Prehistoric archaeology is assessed as having Medium likelihood, particularly in low-lying areas, whilst Pictish, medieval and post-medieval remains are assessed as having a Low likelihood.

7.110 Embedded mitigation through route alignment has sought to avoid or reduce impacts on key assets, including avoiding tower placement within sensitive areas such as Beaufort Castle GDL and increasing separation from Culloden Battlefield, albeit that this has resulted in positioning the OHL across higher ground.

7.111 At the construction phase, there is potential for direct impacts on heritage assets during all ground-breaking activities associated with the proposed development. This includes works associated with the erection of towers and the formation or improvement of access tracks. In addition, the removal of woodland also has the potential to directly affect the Beaufort Castle GDL.

7.112 Construction activities have the potential to result in direct impacts on 21 non-designated assets, including loss or damage to archaeological features, and possible disturbance of unknown remains. These effects range from Slight to Large Adverse, with a Moderate Adverse effect predicted for unknown archaeology. Mitigation for these potential effects is proposed, including marking-out and avoidance, and archaeological investigation if avoidance is not feasible. Following application of mitigation measures, a Significant effect is only predicted to Cairnfield and hut circle, Cottartown (HER MHG2995). It is accepted that avoidance of this asset is not possible and the proposed mitigation is considered appropriate.

Garden and Designed Landscapes

7.113 In terms of GDLs, most are predicted to experience neutral or slight adverse effects, and this is not disputed by Historic Environment Scotland. Beaufort Castle GDL would experience some physical impact through woodland removal beneath the OHL as the line oversails the northern extents of the GDL. Following proposed tower micro-siting to reduce impacts on notable trees within the Beaufort Castle GDL, and additional information relating to the relative significance of the part of the GDL to be impacted, Historic Environment Scotland (HES) has withdrawn its objection subject to mitigation secured through a Construction Environmental Management Plan.

7.114 At the operational phase, impacts on heritage assets would consist of permanent changes to their settings due to the addition of modern infrastructure within the existing landscape.

Scheduled Monuments and Listings

7.115 The majority of Scheduled Monuments are assessed as experiencing no or slight adverse effects, reflecting factors such as screening, limited intervisibility, or the reduced importance of wider views to their significance. Four Scheduled Monuments

were identified as having greater sensitivity, with one (Mains of Daviot ring cairn and stone circle: SM3085) initially assessed as having a Significant adverse effect. However, proposed mitigation, specifically the undergrounding of an existing OHL, would reduce this effect, resulting in a neutral and not significant residual effect, subject to implementation secured by condition. It should be noted that the proposed undergrounding of the existing OHL would require separate consent under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, with this expected to be subject of a multi-stage consent condition, necessitating this to be secured ahead of development commencement on the proposed OHL. A similar approach could also be taken for the undergrounding of the 275kV OHL at Culloden Battlefield should this potential design solution be taken forward as suggested by Officers. Further protection of scheduled monuments, were consent to be granted, should be secured by way of a condition requiring a site protection plan to be agreed with Historic Environment Scotland.

7.116 Similarly, the majority of listed buildings within Highland, 96 of the 106, are assessed as experiencing no effect due to a lack of visibility, intervening screening, or because wider landscape views do not contribute to their significance. A further eight listed buildings are assessed as experiencing either neutral or slight adverse effects, none of which are considered significant. These comprise: Lovat Bridge (LB8083), Leys Castle and Garden Terraces (LB8053), Culloden Moor Viaduct (LB1709), Achnagairn House (LB7807), Reelig House and Walled Garden, Reelig House (LB7821) [included in the EIAR as two listed buildings], and Ardclach Bell Tower (LB551).

7.117 Two listed buildings, the Category A listed Beaufort Castle (LB8068) and the Category B listed Moniack Castle (LB7818), were identified as having the greatest potential for effects on their setting. At Beaufort Castle, the proposed overhead line (OHL), located approximately 830m to the northwest, would be visible in some northern views and introduce additional infrastructure into a landscape already containing existing electrical infrastructure, including the Beauly Substation and other OHLs. The effect would be adverse, however, is assessed as Slight in magnitude and not Significant. Similarly, at Moniack Castle, the introduction of the OHL into views to the northwest would result in a Slight adverse effect to its setting, an important element of its significance, however this is not considered Significant.

Culloden Battlefield

7.118 The Battle of Culloden Inventory Battlefield (BTL6) is of national importance as the site of the Battle of Culloden on 16 April 1746. It was the final land battle fought on British soil and was a pivotal event in the history of Scotland. The battlefield's significance is closely linked to its landscape setting, particularly views across Drummossie Moor that reflect the historic context of the battle.

7.119 The proposed OHL would be located approximately 1.7km to the south of the battlefield boundary and would be visible in southern views, broadly paralleling an existing 275kV OHL but sitting higher on the hillside where some towers would break the skyline. The EIAR assesses a very minor change to the setting of the battlefield resulting in a Slight adverse effect which is Not Significant. This finding is not accepted and disputed by Officers.

7.120 Historic Environment Scotland (HES) agree that the Proposed Development would result in an adverse impact on the setting of the battlefield. Due to the separation

distances of 1.7km to the inventory boundary and 3km to the visitor centre, HES consider that the proposed OHL would not be visually dominant in views from Culloden Battlefield and note that it would not affect views in other directions. HES therefore advise that the effect would be adverse but would not be Significant.

7.121 Culloden Battlefield is a highly sensitive cultural location due to the consequences that the battle had for Scotland's political, economic and cultural future. The outcome of the battle accelerated the decline of the clan system and weakened traditional Gaelic culture, whilst subsequent policies of the British Government contributed to the Highland clearances and widespread displacement of communities. Consequently, the site holds significant cultural importance and continues to hold high significance and emotional connection to many within Scotland, and to the descendants of the Scottish diaspora. This is reflected by the significant number of visitors each year, with 374,000 visiting the visitor centre alone in 2024.

7.122 Key views from Culloden Battlefield, including those toward the south and the proposed overhead line (OHL), remain broadly comparable to their 18th-century character, with the open, undulating moorland landscape largely intact and contributing strongly to the Battlefield's setting and significance. In particular, views southwards are important in understanding the events following the battle, when a substantial body of Jacobite troops retreated in relatively good order toward Beinn a Bhuchanaich and Badenoch. Several thousand soldiers followed this route, ultimately regrouping at Ruthven Barracks before Charles Edward Stuart ordered their dispersal due to the army's shattered condition. This retreat, and the subsequent burning of the barracks, marked the end of organised Jacobite resistance and forms a key element of the battlefield's intangible heritage, with the southern view playing an important role in conveying this aspect of Culloden's historic significance.

7.123 While modern development is present in the wider area, it tends to be low-lying and relatively recessive within the landscape. For instance, the existing 275kV OHL is, to some extent, back clothed by rising moorland and, where towers are skylined, does not appear prominent or materially detract from the setting of the Battlefield due to their lower height and scale. By contrast, the proposed development would introduce taller and bulkier structures. Although these would be skylined in similar locations to the existing 275kV OHL in views from the Battlefield and would be further away, their increased scale would result in greater visual prominence. Given the exceptional sensitivity of Culloden, considered to be Very High, and the importance of its largely unaltered landscape context, the introduction of such prominent electrical infrastructure within its setting is likely to result in a Moderate magnitude of impact. Using the EIAR's Cultural Heritage Assessment Methodology, the resulting effect would be Large and would be considered a Significant adverse effect.

7.124 It is considered that options to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development on Culloden Battlefield exist. These include undergrounding a section of the proposed OHL, noting that lower lying land around the River Nairn may be capable of accommodating cable sealing ends and an operational corridor associated with an Underground Cable (UGC). This option has not been fully explored, nor has it been demonstrated that it cannot be achieved. Alternatively, undergrounding the existing 275kV OHL may allow more sensitive siting of the proposed development. Should these measures not be achievable, a more sensitive routing which minimises the skylining of pylons should be implemented, alongside measures to reduce the visual

prominence of the pylons which could include painting of towers and reinstatement of access tracks and pylon bases. It is considered that the predicted Significant adverse effect to the setting of Culloden Battlefield has not been sufficiently mitigated.

7.125 The conclusion of a Significant Adverse effect is reached notwithstanding the consultation response from HES, which advises an adverse but not significant effect. HES, in its role as a statutory consultee, provides advice on the likely impacts of development on nationally important heritage assets. This advice is not determinative however and must be considered alongside other material considerations. In its response, HES acknowledges that local authority cultural heritage advisors are also competent to provide advice on the historic environment, including on topics within the remit of HES.

7.126 HES's position on Culloden Battlefield is based on the separation distance to the proposed OHL, the presence of existing OHL infrastructure and the retention of views in other directions. HES do not make clear in their consultation response whether a site visit was undertaken and whether printed visualisations were available during any site visit. Council officers did undertake a site visit supported by printed visualisations and reached their conclusions based on the professional judgement of a chartered landscape architect, a chartered architect and a chartered planner. It is also noted that the visualisations submitted with the application from Culloden Battlefield were taken in poor weather conditions which reduced the visibility of the proposed development. The Council has subsequently been provided with visualisations based on photography captured in fair and winter conditions, which present a clearer representation of likely visibility.

7.127 The assessment of sensitivity, magnitude of change, and the resulting level and significance of effect requires the application of professional judgement. In this case, having considered the EIAR, undertaken a site visit, reviewed updated visual material and applied the professional judgement of its officers, the planning authority has undertaken its own assessment. This has led to a reasoned conclusion on the level and significance of effect which differs from that of HES and this is considered to be a reasonable and justified position.

Conservation Areas

7.128 Culloden Muir Conservation Area (CON32) includes Culloden Battlefield as well as further land to the west, north and south. Its boundary was extended in 2015 to include a wide range of additional heritage assets. These include prehistoric monuments, including the Clava Cairns, the site of a medieval chapel and the Category A listed Nairn Viaduct. It is a cultural landscape which reflects the socio-economic evolution of the Highlands over thousands of years. Significantly, the Conservation Area extends further to the south than the Inventory Battlefield with its closest point being 800m from the proposed OHL alignment. The EIAR considers that the impacts on the Conservation Area will match those assessed for the Battle of Culloden Inventory Battlefield, which it assesses as being Slight adverse and Not Significant. Again, for the same reasons as set out for the Battlefield, this assessment is also contested by Officers.

7.129 Highland Council's Conservation Officer objects to the application on the basis of its potential effect on the Culloden Muir Conservation Area and the heritage assets within

it. Culloden Muir Conservation Area is a highly sensitive location and views in all directions are important. The proposed OHL would be clearly visible as it breaks the skyline around Meall Mor in several places, due to the size of the towers and their locations within the viewshed above the outer boundary of the Conservation Area. The prominence of the proposed OHL is understated within VP16 due to the weather conditions in the baseline photography. Whilst it is noted that there are other existing OHLs within the same view, they are smaller in scale and at a lower elevation. It is considered that the EIAR underassess the significance of effect on Culloden Muir Conservation Area. The Proposed Development is likely to result in a Significant adverse effect to the Conservation Area.

7.130 The applicant submitted a Technical Note (TN) at a late stage of the application's consideration which considers additional mitigation options for several parts of the proposed OHL, including the section to the south of Culloden Battlefield. The TN explores further mitigation measures but does not demonstrate that these would materially alter the significance of effect. The key issue remains the siting of the proposed 400kV OHL across the slopes of Meall Mòr, where towers would be visible on, and breaking, the skyline in views from the battlefield (V16). While modest tower height reductions are identified as technically feasible, and would be welcomed, they are nevertheless limited in scale and would not remove the fundamental visibility of the most prominent towers or their skyline intrusion. Similarly, tower painting and additional planting are acknowledged as potential mitigation, whilst these measures would marginally reduce contrast, they would not address the principal impact arising from the scale, elevation and skyline positioning of the infrastructure; indeed, the applicant accepts that additional planting "would not significantly change the appearance of the Proposed Development when viewed from Culloden Battlefield".

7.131 In addition to Culloden Muir Conservation Area, Beauly Village Square Conservation Area (CON18) also falls within Highland. The EIAR assesses no change to the Beauly Village Square Conservation Area as wide landscape views outside of the Conservation Area are not a key aspect of its setting.

Summary

7.132 Overall, the proposed development has been designed to avoid or reduce impacts on most cultural heritage assets, with the majority accepted as to experiencing non-significant effects with appropriate mitigation proposed for construction-related impacts, including on non-designated assets and potential unknown archaeology. However, significant concerns remain regarding the setting of Culloden Inventory Battlefield and Culloden Muir Conservation Area, both of which are of exceptional sensitivity and whose significance is closely tied to their landscape context and key views. The introduction of prominent, large-scale OHL infrastructure, which is taller, more visually intrusive, and more frequently skylined than existing development, would represent a marked departure from the current landscape character and result in Significant adverse effects that have not been sufficiently mitigated, particularly given that options such as undergrounding or alternative routing have not been fully explored.

Forestry, Woodland and Trees

7.133 Chapter 12 of the EIAR relates to forestry and aims to identify potential significant effects associated with forestry, woodland and trees.

7.134 The proposed OHL requires an Operational Corridor (OC) to be cleared for safe functioning. Its width is determined by two factors: the potential falling distance of surrounding trees (dependent on woodland type and tree height), and the maximum conductor swing plus required electrical clearance (dependent on span length). As a result, corridor width varies with woodland type and span length. The EIAR indicates typical widths of 90m in commercial conifer forestry and 70m in broadleaved woodland. In sensitive areas, including Ancient Woodland Inventory sites, crown reduction and selective felling will minimise the corridor width. It is recognised that crown reduction can have unintended negative consequences for trees and so, were consent to be granted, it would be recommended that a Crown Reduction Plan and monitoring scheme be required by condition.

7.135 In terms of embedded design, the EIAR describes an iterative design process that sought to avoid impacts on a range of constraints, including forestry and woodland. It also requires contractors to adhere to the applicant's good practice measures, as set out in a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP). It is considered that the routeing process demonstrates that avoidance has been prioritised and that impacts have been minimised as far as reasonably practicable, although loss of irreplaceable habitat has not been avoided.

7.136 The forestry and woodland baseline was determined through a combination of desk study and field survey. Forest walkover and mapping surveys confirmed the extent of forestry and woodland, as well as their current woodland characteristics. Ancient woodlands were assessed to identify their remnant characteristics and condition status. The Council's Forestry Officer sought and received confirmation from the applicant that Long-Established Woodlands of Plantation Origin (LEPO) with ancient woodland indicators had been surveyed and correctly classified. Following this confirmation, the submitted classifications are accepted and provide a reasonable description of baseline conditions.

7.137 Within Highland, the EIAR anticipates the loss of a total of 217.76ha of forestry and woodland comprising the following amounts:

- Commercial: 154.45ha;
- Native: 60.28ha;
- Broadleaved: 0.87ha;
- Ancient: 2.16ha.

7.138 The sensitivity of commercial forestry within the study area is low and equates to the loss of 0.06% of Highland's commercial forestry resource. Consequently, the effect is assessed as Minor Adverse and not significant.

7.139 The sensitivity of native woodland is assessed as medium, reflecting its increased biodiversity and amenity value over typical commercial plantation. The proposed felling equates to the loss of 0.05% of Highlands native woodland resource. Reflecting the higher sensitivity of native woodland however, the effect is assessed as Moderate adverse and Significant.

7.140 Ancient woodland is assessed as having high sensitivity as it is an important biodiversity resource and is an irreplaceable habitat. The proposed felling of ancient woodland within Highland is represented within the EIAR as being a loss of no more than 0.001% of the combined ancient and native woodland resource in Highland. It is noted that the inclusion of native, non-ancient, woodland in this figure has the effect of diluting the extent of ancient woodland loss as a proportion of the Highland resource. Given the high sensitivity of ancient woodland, the effect is assessed as Major adverse and Significant.

7.141 Broadleaved woodland is considered to be of medium sensitivity. Its loss is assessed as Moderate adverse and Significant.

7.142 The EIAR includes consideration of the effects of windblow whereby retained trees immediately adjacent to the operational corridor are at greater risk of being damaged and blown over due to the lack of shelter. Management felling is required to fell woodland back to a windfirm edge. Management felling of commercial forestry is assessed as being a Minor adverse effect and not significant whilst management felling of native woodland would be Moderate adverse and Significant. It is recommended that indirect effects on adjacent Ancient Woodland be mitigated by way of a condition requiring a Management Plan for areas of Ancient Woodland adjacent to the line.

7.143 In terms of effects during the operational phase of the proposal, the EIAR predicts negligible effects from ongoing vegetation management and from restrictions on forestry operations within the vicinity of the OHL. It also recognises the felling associated with the proposed development is likely to require individual landowners to revisit their Long-Term Forest Plans (LTFP) which could be an onerous process. This effect is considered to be a Moderate adverse and Significant effect.

7.144 The EIAR does not fully assess potential impacts on trees and woodlands associated with Abnormal Indivisible Load (AIL) movements on routes to the site. Given the extensive route network required to access tower locations, there is potential for significant cumulative impacts on roadside trees and adjacent woodland. This potential effect is expected to be mitigated by way of a condition requiring an Arboricultural Impact Assessment in support of the AIL Assessment.

7.145 Similarly, effects on notable and potential veteran trees are not fully assessed, with the submitted information identifying some notable features and providing outline general mitigation principles. Conditions requiring a Specimen Tree Planting Plan and a Veteran Tree Management Plan would mitigate this potential effect.

7.146 In response to the identified potential significant effects, the EIAR includes additional measures to mitigate impacts during the construction and operational phases. These are:

- Measures to reduce the loss of woodland through micro-siting and implementing the Native Woodland Management Strategy;
- The production of Woodland Reports with mitigation measures to address the likely significant effect for forest management and to reduce the risk of future windblow by outlining felling strategies to create stable forest edges; and

- Provision of off-site compensatory planting.

7.147 It is also recommended that, should consent be granted, conditions are imposed to establish a framework for the protection of retained trees throughout the construction process.

7.148 The EIAR contains only a high-level commitment to providing compensatory planning which introduced uncertainty as to whether a policy-compliant scheme could be delivered. Further information was sought from the applicant who subsequently provided indicative location information which allows an initial view to be taken that the proposed area is broadly capable of delivering compensatory planting at an appropriate scale and of a suitable quality. It is recognised that compensation is currently proposed at a 1:1 basis however newly established woodland cannot replicate the ecological value of ancient woodland within any meaningful timeframe. Consequently, the proposed compensatory planting should be regarded as mitigation rather than true compensation. An uplift in compensatory planting would address this issue, which may be addressed by planting within the operational corridor to address landscape and visual concerns. Further details to ensure delivery of a policy compliant compensatory planting scheme can be secured by way of condition.

7.149 Subject to the implementation of the additional mitigation, the effect of the loss of broadleaved and native woodland would reduce to Minor Adverse and not significant. The loss of ancient woodland cannot be fully mitigated so its loss would remain Major Adverse and Significant. The production of Woodland Reports reduces the effect on forest managers to Minor adverse and Not Significant. The Woodland Reports would also reduce the effect of windblow to Minor adverse and not significant, although it is recognised that this falls outwith the scope of the application and requires the agreement of landowners.

7.150 The Forestry Chapter includes an assessment of potential cumulative effects from other developments in the vicinity of the project. In Highland, these comprise:

- Fanellan Substation;
- Beauly BESS;
- Kilmorack Substation;
- Culternich Farm Energy Storage Project;
- Beauly Substation;
- Carn Duhie Wind Farm Redesign;
- Aigas Substation;
- Ourack Wind Farm; and
- Tom Nan Clach Wind Farm Extension.

7.151 The EIAR considers that there is potential for cumulative effects through potential loss of native woodland from Beauly BESS, Beauly Substation and Aigas Substation. It notes that, given these projects will be required to undertake compensatory planting for any woodland loss, the cumulative effect would be Negligible and not significant.

7.152 In summary, loss of ancient woodland during construction will lead to a Major adverse and Significant effect. Subject to the delivery of compensatory planting, predicted significant effects associated with the loss of broadleaf and native woodlands during construction will be effectively mitigated so as to not result in significant effects.

Similarly, as a result of the production of Woodland Reports in conjunction with forest managers, effects to forest management and from windblow are also predicted to be mitigated to a level where they will not be significant. There are no other significant effects predicted relating to forestry, woodland and trees. The Council's Forestry Officer raises no objection to the application subject to conditions and recognises that the impacts of the proposed development have been reduced as far as reasonably practicable and can be appropriately managed by condition.

Water, Drainage and Peat

7.153 EIAR Chapter 10: Water and Geological Environment assesses the potential for significant effects on both the water environment and geological receptors. The assessment incorporates embedded mitigation measures, including the application of an iterative design process, which has sought to avoid or minimise impacts on these environments from the outset. In addition, a range of good practice construction measures is proposed. These include specific controls for works undertaken in or near watercourses, within sensitive habitats, and in relation to watercourse crossings, amongst others. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is also proposed, which will set out detailed mitigation measures to reduce risks to groundwater, surface water, Private Water Supplies (PWS), Drinking Water Protected Areas (DWPAs), and other licensed water uses during the construction phase.

Geological Designations

7.154 Torvean Landforms SSSI sits to the southwest of Inverness and is an important site for Quaternary geomorphology (less than 10 million years old) containing a large range of fluvioglacial landforms comprising kame terraces, eskers and kettleholes. The SSSI is crossed by four proposed towers, four temporary floated access tracks and one existing access track upgrade. The existing Beauly to Knocknagael 132kV OHL, which is to be dismantled, also runs through the site with five towers within its boundary. Tower positions within the SSSI have been refined following consultation with NatureScot and it is proposed that further micro-siting will take place based on detailed site studies. NatureScot advise that they object to the application unless permission is granted subject to a condition requiring a Site Specific Environmental Management Plan (SSEMP). This would need to include, among other things, ongoing liaison with NatureScot, the creation of "no-touch" buffer zones to protect adjacent landforms and the use of floating tracks. Subject to this condition, damage to nationally important landforms within the SSSI would be avoided and the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the site would be maintained.

7.155 Dalroy and Clava Landforms SSSI is located on the southeastern side of the Nairn Valley. It is designated for its Quaternary geology and geomorphology. The SSSI is crossed by two proposed access track upgrades and is 850m downslope from the nearest proposed tower. The applicant proposes a site-specific method statement to be agreed with NatureScot prior to construction within the SSSI. This will include working methods to ensure the landforms are protected and access track reinstatement measures following commissioning of the proposed development. Subject to this being secured by condition, NatureScot advise that damage to

nationally important Quaternary landforms would be avoided and the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the site would be maintained.

Watercourses

7.156 SEPA's consultation response notes that there are a significant number of breaches to the 10m watercourse buffers along the proposed development. SEPA advises that a 50m buffer from water features should be retained where subsurface activities are more than 1m in depth. It is recommended that a 10m buffer be adhered to unless otherwise agreed in writing by SEPA and that a 50m buffer be adhered to where subsurface activities are more than 1m in depth. This could be secured by way of condition.

7.157 In terms of impacts on watercourses, the proposed development could modify existing surface water drainage patterns through inappropriate water crossings or blockages. Access tracks and impermeable surfaces at tower bases could alter the flow of surface water, as could forestry felling. Watercourse crossings are to be designed in accordance with SEPA's good practice guide which could be secured by condition. Changes to surface water flow will be mitigated through the implementation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). It is considered that the risk of pollution impacts to watercourses can be sufficiently mitigated through a CEMP condition. Taking into account the design and embedded mitigation, the overall effect on watercourses is assessed as being Minor adverse and not significant.

Water Supplies

7.158 The EIAR Chapter is supported by a Private Water Supply Risk Assessment (PWSRA) at Appendix 10.6. The PWSRA identifies all PWS within 250m of the proposed development, including its associated accesses and its LoD. The scope of the PWSRA also extends to supplies outwith the 250m buffer but with hydrological connectivity to the proposed development. A conceptual site model (CSM) was prepared to assess whether the PWS identified could be affected. An initial risk rating was determined by combining the likelihood of impact with the magnitude of potential change, taking into account proposed embedded mitigation. Embedded mitigation includes micro-siting, creation of a CEMP and employment of an Environmental Advisor. Where a PWS was identified as being at a potentially significant level of risk, further mitigation measures were applied to assess the residual risk. These comprise further investigation, monitoring and the provision of a suitable engineering solution or alternative water supply should it be found necessary. The Private Water Supply Risk Assessment (PWSRA) concludes that, subject to the successful implementation of all additional mitigation measures, the residual impact would be Minor and not significant during the construction phase. Ongoing monitoring and sampling will take place during the construction phase and the following 12-month period. The potential effect would reduce to Negligible and not significant at the operational phase.

7.159 In terms of impacts on PWS, SEPA note that the screening statement at Table 5.1 of Appendix 10.6, which is used to determine whether further assessment is required, does not appear to present a worst-case scenario due to it not taking account of the LoD applied for. SEPA therefore recommends a condition requiring that, one month prior to commencement, evidence is submitted to demonstrate that the screening process has taken account of the LoD and an updated Schedule of Mitigation be

submitted should any further impacts be identified. It is therefore considered that potential Significant effects on PWS could be avoided through the imposition of conditions.

7.160 The EIAR chapter includes assessment of potential effects on abstractions that are the subject of SEPA CAR licences. All SEPA abstractions within Highland have been screened out of assessment on the basis that there is no potential hydrological connection. No significant effects on SEPA abstractions within Highland are therefore anticipated.

Groundwater Habitats

7.161 Potential effects on Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTE) are assessed within the EIAR. The EIAR identifies habitat parcels with either moderate or higher potential groundwater dependency and considers whether a potential hydrological connection to the proposed development exists. Potential effects from construction activities are identified however only small changes to local subsurface and groundwater flows are expected, taking into account the embedded mitigation including micro-siting to avoid GWDTEs, ensuring drainage design mimics natural flow patterns, and the development of a monitoring and remediation scheme by an Environmental Advisor. Pollution effects are considered unlikely due to most GWDTEs being upslope of the proposal, as well as the implementation of appropriate pollution controls. SEPA advise they have no concerns with the assessment at this stage but require pre-construction site-specific GWDTE risk assessments which could be conditioned. The overall effect on GWDTEs is assessed as being Minor adverse and not significant.

Flooding

7.162 The development is expected to have a minimal effect on floodplain capacity with each tower resulting in a maximum displacement of 4.5m³. SEPA accept that this is unlikely to result in significant impact on floodplain capacity and conveyance. Also, where the development is located within floodplains, it is in remote and isolated areas where there are no external flood risk receptors. If landraising is required for access tracks, SEPA advises that compensatory storage should be provided which can be secured by condition. Suitable watercourse crossings, capable of taking 1 in 200 year plus climate change flood flows, can also be secured by condition. The implementation of embedded mitigation, including the Watercourse Crossings GEMP, will ensure the effect on flood risk is Minor adverse and not significant.

Peatland

7.163 In terms of impacts on peat, the applicant has used a bespoke model to predict the likely presence of peat within the study area. Depending on the likely presence indicated by the model, proportionate peat probing was then carried out. Peat probing was also carried out at locations with no predicted peat presence, but where priority peatland habitats had been mapped. This approach was agreed with SEPA and NatureScot. Peat is almost entirely absent for the section of the proposed development between Beauly and Creagan Glas, south of Clava Cairns, however the section further east runs through areas of more extensive peat. The proposed development, by virtue of being essential infrastructure with a specific locational need, is of a type that NPF4 can support on peatland.

7.164 In terms of effects from compaction and loss, the EIAR details how peat excavation has been minimised through avoidance of peat wherever possible and a combination of piling and floating infrastructure where peat is present. A breakdown of peat excavation by Council area has not been provided however, for the entire alignment (including areas within Moray and Aberdeenshire Councils), excavation of 24,531m³ of peat is predicted. It is anticipated that 21,384m³ of peat will be reused leaving an excess of 3,147m³. It is understood that the applicant is in discussions with NatureScot in relation to using the remaining excess peat for reinstatement. SEPA raise concerns with some aspects of the outline Peat Management Plan (PMP), including the level of detail provided in relation to the reinstatement of excavated peat. SEPA nevertheless consider that the outline PMP can be rectified by way of a pre-commencement condition requiring a detailed PMP. The effect of the Proposed Development in terms of peat compaction and loss is assessed as being Minor adverse and not significant.

7.165 The EIAR also includes an assessment of peat landslide hazard risk. This identifies that where sources of risk have a runout towards watercourses, the runout would be constrained by factors including forestry, curvature and debris thinning. It assesses the overall risk from peat instability as being Minor adverse and not significant. SEPA raise no objection to the application subject to a Peat Management Plan being conditioned.

Cumulative Assessment and Summary

7.166 The cumulative effects of the proposal, when considered alongside existing and reasonably foreseeable developments, are not considered to give rise to significant adverse impacts. While there is potential for incremental pressure on environmental receptors, mitigation measures embedded within this and other schemes, alongside differing construction programmes and timeframes of activities, are expected to limit these effects to an acceptable level. Overall, cumulative impacts are assessed as being Minor adverse during construction and Negligible during operation. In both cases, the effect is assessed as being not Significant. In summary, the proposed development is not predicted to have any significant effects on the water and geological environments.

Natural Heritage, including Ornithology

Designated Sites

7.167 The EIAR summarises sites designated for ecological and ornithological interests within 10km of the proposed development in Chapters 8 Ecology and 9 Ornithology, respectively. The sites within Highland are as follows:

- Strathglass Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC);
- Conon Islands SAC;
- Moniack Gorge SAC;
- Moniack Gorge SSSI;
- Moray Firth SAC;
- Carn nan Tri-tighearnan SAC and SSSI;
- Cawdor Wood SAC and SSSI;
- Glen Affric to Strathconon Special Protection Area (SPA);
- North Inverness Lochs SPA;
- Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar;
- Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar;
- Moray Firth SPA;
- Monadh Mor SAC;
- Loch Ashie SPA;
- Loch Flemington SPA;
- Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA (shared with Moray);
- Beauly Firth SSSI; and
- Beauly protected seal haul out site.

7.168 In addition, NatureScot advise that there is evidence that the capercaillie population in the north mixes with that in the Strathspey SPAs for which breeding capercaillie is a qualifying feature. Consequently, dispersal flights must occur between the two areas and so the following SPAs, collectively referred to in this report as the “Strathspey SPAs”, within Highland are also considered:

- Anagach Woods SPA;
- Craigmore Wood SPA;
- Kinveachy Forest SPA;
- Abernethy Forest SPA; and

- Cairngorms SPA (shared with Aberdeenshire and Moray).

7.169 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 Energy Consents Unit 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).

7.170 The EIAR assesses that the following sites have no functional link to the proposed development and so scopes them out of further assessment. The proposed development will have no likely significant effect on:

- Conon Islands SAC;
- Carn nan Tri-tighearnan SAC and SSSI;
- Moray Firth SAC;
- Moray Firth SPA;
- Monadh Mor SAC;
- Loch Ashie SPA;
- Glen Affric to Strathconon SPA;
- Loch Flemington SPA; and
- North Inverness Lochs SPA.

7.171 The EIAR considers that, in terms of the Habitat Regulations, there would be a "likely significant effect" on the following designated sites but that the proposal would not adversely affect the sites' integrity:

- Strathglass Complex SAC; and
- Strathspey SPAs.

7.172 The EIAR also assesses that effects to the Beauly Firth SSSI and Beauly protected seal haul-out site are not significant and this is not contested.

7.173 NatureScot object to the application unless consent is granted subject to conditions requiring compliance with detailed mitigation measures to protect the following sites:

A. Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar site;
B. Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar site;
C. Moniack Gorge SAC;
D. Moniack Gorge SSSI; and
E. Cawdor Wood SAC and SSSI.

7.174 **A) Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar site** are designated for their breeding seabird, osprey and overwintering pink-footed goose populations, as well as its broader non-breeding waterfowl assemblage. The EIAR assesses negligible or no risk of adverse effects on bird populations associated with these designated sites. Nevertheless, NatureScot advise that the proposed development could pose a collision risk to breeding osprey and impact areas known to be favoured by foraging wintering geese. The proposed development therefore would have a likely significant effect on the designated sites. NatureScot raise objection unless a Bird Flight Diverter Plan is agreed and implemented prior to construction commencing. It is noted that substantial alternative foraging remains available to the non-breeding goose qualifying feature.

Subject to implementation of the identified mitigation, the proposal would not adversely affect the Cromarty Firth SPA and Ramsar site.

7.175 **B) Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar site** are designated for their non-breeding populations of divers, grebes, sea ducks and shags, as well as breeding populations of common tern and osprey. The EIAR assesses potential effects on the osprey feature from collision and displacement. NatureScot also advise of potential effects on non-breeding geese from the loss of foraging habitat. The proposed development would be likely to have a significant effect on the designated sites. NatureScot object to the application unless a Bird Flight Diverter Plan is agreed and implemented prior to construction commencing. It is also recognised that sufficient foraging habitat remains available to the non-breeding goose qualifying feature. Subject to implementation of the identified mitigation, the proposal would not adversely affect the Inner Moray Firth SPA and Ramsar site.

7.176 **C) Moniack Gorge SAC** is designated for the presence of green shield-moss *(Buxbaumia viridis)* an Annex II species. The EIAR notes that the SAC is located 0.3km upstream of the proposed development so is not hydrologically connected. Nevertheless, there is potential for degradation of the SAC via the spread of Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS). The proposed development is considered to have a likely significant effect on the SAC for this reason. NatureScot object to the application unless a Site-Specific Method Statement (SSMS) is provided for any works, such as public road improvement works, within the SAC boundary. The SSMS would be required to detail the measures needed to avoid impacting the qualifying interest of the SAC. Subject to this condition, the proposed development would not adversely affect the integrity of the Moniack Gorge SAC.

7.177 **D) Moniack Gorge SSSI** is designated for its lichen assemblage and upland mixed ash woodland. NatureScot object to the application unless permission is granted subject to a Site-Specific Method Statement for works within the SSSI boundary. Subject to this condition, effects on the Moniack Gorge SSSI would not be significant.

7.178 **E) Cawdor Wood SAC and SSSI** are designated for the site's western acidic oak woodland, an Annex I habitat. The SSSI is also designated for its lichen assemblage. The site is 0.3km downstream of the proposed development and linked by several watercourses. The proposed development could result in likely significant effects on the site because of recreational pressures associated with increased access. NatureScot objects to the application unless an SSMS is provided for any works within the site boundary. The SSMS would be required to detail the measures needed to avoid impacting the qualifying interest of the SAC. Subject to this condition, the proposed development would not adversely affect the integrity of Cawdor Wood SAC and SSSI.

7.179 In addition, NatureScot objects to the application because of the impact it is predicted to have on the capercaillie population of Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA. NatureScot advises that they have been unable to identify any mitigation measures that would satisfactorily mitigate collision risk and therefore this is an outright objection.

7.180 **Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA** is designated for its breeding capercaillie population. Capercaillie is a Red List species which is in critical decline and of unfavourable conservation status. The EIAR considers that the population of the site

is likely to be no more than 10-15 individuals, although recognises that the SPA population is likely to exist as part of a metapopulation distributed throughout the wider Nairn and Moray area.

7.181 Capercaillie associated with the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA may be subject to effects arising from collision risk, habitat loss and degradation, and well as disturbance and displacement.

7.182 Capercaillie usually fly at low height, flying at or below the tree canopy level. They are generally considered to be susceptible to collision with OHLs. The OHL is aligned in a position where short local flights and longer flights between this SPA, the Strathspey SPAs to the south, and the woodlands through which the OHL runs, take place. As mitigation, the applicant proposes to establish a ground layer of vegetation suited to capercaillie to encourage them to keep on the ground and to discourage flights across the operational corridor. NatureScot advise that operational collision risk with OHL infrastructure cannot be fully mitigated and could result in collision mortality which, for such a small population of birds, could have a significant effect. NatureScot therefore advise that the conservation objectives of the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA would not be met.

7.183 The proposed development does not overlap with the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA and will therefore will not result in any loss or degradation of habitat within the SPA boundary, nor the loss of any lek sites.

7.184 The EIAR identifies that woodland linking Dulsie Wood and Darnaway Forest, located outwith the SPA boundary, supports part of the local capercaillie population associated with the SPA and therefore constitutes functionally linked habitat. The proposed development runs between these woodland areas so woodland felling required to establish the OHL wayleave would result in the loss of functionally linked capercaillie habitat. This would further reduce connectivity between Dulsie Wood and Darnaway Forest, when considered cumulatively with the existing A939 and the existing 275kV OHL. Habitat loss could limit ground movement between woodland areas, potentially increasing flight activity and collision risk associated with the OHL. Dispersal movements may also experience a barrier effect if birds either avoid crossing the OHL or cross it with an increased risk of collision.

7.185 NatureScot advises that this barrier effect could be mitigated through additional habitat creation within the operational corridor across the Dorback valley (within Moray Council area) as part of the Capercaillie Heathland Habitat Management Plan, together with the creation of additional suitable woodland habitat in the wider area. Subject to this additional mitigation being secured by condition, the effect on the SPA capercaillie population due to loss of supporting habitat would not be significant.

7.186 In terms of disturbance and displacement impacts, the risk to the capercaillie population is generally considered low, subject to the Capercaillie Species Protection Plan (SPP) being extended to cover the operational and maintenance phases of the development. The SPP should include an appropriate speed limit for use on all access tracks within capercaillie woodlands. One new permanent access track in the north of Dulsie Wood does create a new risk to capercaillie from recreational and predator activity. NatureScot advise that the currently proposed mitigation is not appropriate and so an alternative will need to be identified. NatureScot advises that the track

should be made temporary or, if not possible, measures to reduce the size of the bellmouth and discourage any parking should be implemented. Subject to appropriate alternatives to the current mitigation being implemented, the effect of the proposal from disturbance and displacement would not be significant.

7.187 In summary, in relation to designated sites, the proposed development will have either no likely significant effect, or a likely significant effect with no adverse effect on site integrity, on all designated sites within its Ecological Zone of Influence other than Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA. In terms of the SPA, impacts from habitat loss and degradation, and disturbance and displacement, can be mitigated by condition. Collision risk associated with the proposal cannot however be fully mitigated. Recognising the small capercaillie population associated with the SPA and the risk of mortality associated with collision risk, this is predicted to give rise to a Significant adverse effect which has led to a NatureScot outright objection.

7.188 Moray Council have also objected on this basis, and Officers advise that despite NatureScot already being expected to give evidence on this matter at PLI, the recommended reasons to object to the application includes the proposed development's significant adverse impact on the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA owing to the collision risk for Capercaillie.

Other Ornithological Impacts

7.189 EIAR Chapter 9 Ornithology aims to enable the identification and assessment of any likely significant effects on ornithology. Baseline condition surveys were carried out through a combination of desk-based study and field surveys. The applicant used the results of a habitat suitability assessment, records obtained from relevant organisations, and information provided during public consultation events to create a survey programme. This focused on key areas of potentially suitable habitat for Target Species within 2km of the Proposed Development. Target Species are:

- Annex I species;
- Birds that are qualifying species of designated sites;
- Species listed on Schedules 1, 1A and/or A1 of the of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended);
- Species registered on the Red List of Bird of Conservation Concern 2021; and
- Other species considered vulnerable to the effects of OHL developments (including other waterfowl species and regionally and nationally important passerine species).

7.190 Bird species that exist within the Ecological Zone of Influence (EZoI) only as qualifying species of designated sites have been assessed in the preceding section so are not considered again in this chapter. This includes capercaillie which has only been assessed in the EIAR as a qualifying feature of Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA, noting its apparent absence from the remainder of the proposed OHL alignment based on desk study records and field surveys.

7.191 As noted above, field surveys have not been carried out across the whole of the development footprint. Whilst this was agreed with NatureScot, the Council's Ecologist raises concerns with the approach and notes that desk studies are limited by the availability of suitable recent data so cannot be relied upon to replace up-to-date field

surveys. It is considered that, were consent to be granted, it should be subject to a condition requiring pre-construction surveys of the entire route with Species Protection Plans then prepared for any additional species identified.

7.192 The habitat suitability appraisal identified that the western half of the proposal, which covers the section of the route within Highland, would pass through upland and lowland agricultural terrain, commercial and semi-natural forestry and upland moorland habitats. These habitats have potential to support overwintering waterfowl associated with coastal and estuarine wetland habitats, various raptor species, capercaillie and black grouse. The EIAR chapter is therefore informed by surveys targeting these species focused on areas of suitable habitat or within known distribution range.

7.193 In terms of embedded mitigation, the route selection process sought to identify the most environmentally sensitive alignment possible, taking into account impacts on various bird species, amongst other things. In addition, the applicant's Environmental Working Protocols, including General Environmental Management Plans and Species Protection Plans for Birds, will be implemented.

7.194 Potential construction effects derive from habitat loss and degradation, and disturbance and displacement. In addition, there are potential operational impacts including collision risk and displacement.

7.195 The non-SPA osprey population within the study area is identified in the EIAR as being of regional conservation importance. Ospreys may use large rivers and waterbodies within or adjacent to the application site; however, the proposed development will not result in the loss of habitat associated with these features. No osprey nest sites will be directly lost, although two nests within the Highland area fall within the species' 750m disturbance buffer. The Bird SPP will be implemented to avoid disturbance during the breeding season, including from helicopter activity, and construction is therefore not expected to adversely affect the species.

7.196 Ospreys are not considered to be unduly deterred by overhead lines near nesting sites, and existing nests are already located close to current OHL infrastructure. No significant effects on osprey from displacement are anticipated during the operational phase. Generally, osprey are identified as being at high risk of collision with OHLs within the EIAR, with this risk focussed on Drummossie Muir and along river valleys crossed by the development. Nevertheless, the EIAR concludes that ospreys in the area are likely habituated to existing overhead lines and that collision events would be very rare. That said, the loss of individuals from collision at a local scale would be Significant.

7.197 Red kite are identified within the EIAR as being of regional conservation importance. Red kite is primarily a scavenging species associated with lowland mixed agricultural and woodland habitats, as well as lower upland habitats. The construction phase of development will result in some loss of these habitats however this would be at a localised and negligible scale relative to the wider availability of these habitats. This effect would not be significant. The EIAR identifies two nests within the Highland area that are within disturbance area, one is close to an existing OHL and A-road whilst the other is close to an existing OHL but in a quieter location. Nevertheless, noting the wide range of red kites whilst scouring for food, the effect of construction activities is

not considered to be Significant, including from helicopter activities, provided the Bird SPP is applied.

7.198 The EIAR details that red kite nests within Highland are close to existing infrastructure and that red kites were regularly recorded flying over the existing OHL, indicating that locally occurring birds are undeterred by the existing OHL. The proposed development is not expected to displace red kite during its operational phase so this effect would not be significant. The EIAR identifies red kite as generally being at moderate risk of collision. In the locations where red kite were observed, the proposal follows existing OHL and so red kites in the area are likely to be habituated to OHLs. The occurrence of collisions is likely to be low, however the loss of individuals from the local population would again represent a Significant effect.

7.199 The EIAR finds that goshawk, black grouse, pink-footed goose, and breeding waders/common gull, while of regional or local conservation importance, will not be significantly affected by the proposed development. Habitat loss across all species is limited due to the availability of extensive alternative habitat, and construction-related disturbance is not expected to be significant, with mitigation such as a Bird Species Protection Plan further reducing effects.

7.200 The EIAR specifies additional mitigation measures and enhancement measures to reduce the predicted effects. These include the appointment of an Environmental Advisor and the installation of bird diverters.

7.201 The EIAR includes an assessment of cumulative effects which takes into account associated SSEN transmission network upgrades, including Fanellan substation, and other developments. Other developments within Highland comprise 5 wind farms (2 operational, 1 consented, 2 submitted) and 11 HV OHLs (10 operational, 1 at scoping).

7.202 Habitat loss and degradation associated with the Proposed Development are predicted to be minor or negligible in terms of their impact on ornithological features and therefore would not materially contribute to cumulative effects with other developments. Potential cumulative disturbance has been assessed for overlapping construction periods (2026–2032) within a precautionary 2km study area, with a maximum disturbance influence of 1km. Only a small number of nearby consented developments were identified as potentially overlapping, and their respective assessments conclude that residual disturbance effects on relevant ornithological receptors are minor or negligible and not significant. Given that disturbance from the proposed development will be further minimised through embedded mitigation, including species protection plans and specific measures for sensitive species, any residual effects are expected to be negligible. Accordingly, the proposed development is not anticipated to contribute to cumulative construction phase impacts to an extent that would result in Significant effects.

7.203 Operational cumulative effects are also not considered Significant. Although other developments within 10km may give rise to minor collision and displacement effects, these are generally assessed as negligible or not significant, and mitigation for the Proposed Development, particularly bird diverters and habitat management, will further reduce collision risk to very low levels. Displacement effects are expected to be localised and limited, with species likely to be habituated to existing infrastructure. While small-scale effects could combine locally, they are not anticipated to affect

ornithological features at a regional or national scale, and overall cumulative operational impacts are therefore considered not Significant.

7.204 To summarise, collision risk between the proposed development and osprey and red kite are likely to result in a Significant effect, with predicted impacts for these species not being cited as grounds for objection by NatureScot, RSPB or the Council's Ecology team, principally owing to these effects occurring at the local population level and these species being habituated to existing overhead lines with collision events being very rare. In all other regards, potential effects from the proposed development on ornithological interests, including cumulative effects, are not considered to be Significant.

Protected Species

7.205 The EIAR does not include protected species surveys across the entirety of the application site. Instead, surveys were undertaken across up to 20% of the site, targeted at areas identified as having higher suitability for protected species. This approach was informed by desk-based evidence, survey data from earlier project stages and consultation with consultees including NatureScot and The Highland Council. NatureScot has raised no objection to this approach to protected species surveys. The Council's Ecologist does raise concerns with the approach however, noting that the desk-based studies are limited by the availability of up-to-date information. Consequently, it is recommended that pre-construction surveys of the entire route be required by condition with Species Protection Plans then prepared for any additional protected species identified.

7.206 Embedded mitigation forming part of the proposal includes:

- An OHL alignment process which aimed to avoid ecological interests;
- Habitat Management Plan;
- Treatment of INNS;
- Construction lighting kept to the minimum required;
- CEMP implementation;
- General Environmental Management Plans (covering oil storage and refuelling, soil management and dust management, amongst other topics); and
- Species Protection Plans.

7.207 The EIAR includes assessment of potential construction and operational effects on the following protected species and determines that effects would not be significant. The species would nevertheless be covered by pre-construction surveys and any subsequently required Species Protection Plans. These species are:

- Badger;
- Pine Marten;
- Red squirrel;
- Otter;
- Water vole;
- Wildcat;
- Fish;
- Great Crested Newt;
- Reptiles; and

- Beaver.

7.208 Whilst NatureScot agrees that effects on wildcat are unlikely to be significant, they note that detection of the species can be difficult and welcome the applicant's commitment to confirmatory and pre-construction surveys for wildcat. Additional mitigation in the wildcat SPP would then be required including timing works to be outwith the breeding season, speed limits for construction traffic and the creation of alternative resting sites if any are destroyed, among other measures.

7.209 Bats are identified as being of National importance, reflecting their status as a European Protected Species. There are trees and a structure with Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) which could be impacted by the proposals. 91 trees with PRFs are within the area to be felled. In addition, bat activity was surveyed within six woodlands within Highland. There is potential for effects on bats arising from artificial light at night, works affecting roosts/roosting bats, mortality and injury, noise, and habitat fragmentation. The key issue is identified as being the combined effects of disturbance and potential loss of roost resources for bats. The effect on bats is assessed as being of Moderate magnitude and Significant at a regional scale.

7.210 Freshwater Pearl Mussels (FWPM) are also identified as being of International importance. Suitable habitat to support FWPM was identified within the study area. Adverse effects could arise from habitat degradation and fragmentation, and mortality and injury. Subject to implementation of good construction practices, as set out in the Embedded Mitigation, the probability of pollution and sedimentation effects to habitats would be low. Direct mortality associated with sedimentation during construction would therefore also be of low probability. Whilst the probability of impacts is low, FWPM's endangered status means that complete avoidance of any impact to the species is the target. The potential impact on FWPM is therefore assessed as being Significant.

7.211 The applicant proposes additional mitigation measure for the protected species identified as receiving Significant effects, as well as those subject to legal protections. These include species-specific sensitive timing of works, use of sensitive lighting, compensatory measures, including bat boxes, and monitoring and licensing, where required.

7.212 Subject to implementation of the additional mitigation, the residual effect to FWPM would reduce to not significant. The additional mitigation would reduce the effect to bats however the residual effect would remain Significant.

7.213 The EIAR includes an assessment of cumulative effects which considers potential in-combination effects from associated SSEN Transmission Network Upgrades, comprising the Fanellan substation development within Highland, and other developments, including Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) developments, other OHL works, and wind farms. The potential for cumulative effects on all protected species other than bats is assessed as being not significant.

7.214 The EZoI for bats has been assessed as 4km therefore it is possible that other developments affecting roosts and supporting habitat within this buffer could combine with the Proposed Development to increase the significance of effect. The potential cumulative loss of potential roosting features is assessed as being Significant whilst

cumulative effects arising from lighting, fragmentation of habitat and accidental injury or killing of bats would not be significant.

7.215 To summarise, taking into account potential effects from the Proposed Development, embedded and additional mitigation, including the installation of artificial bat boxes, and potential cumulative effects, the Proposed Development is predicted to result in a Significant effect on bats, primarily arising from the loss of roost resources and disturbance effects. A condition requiring implementation of the EIAR's Schedule of Mitigation will ensure that the identified mitigation is implemented. Effects on all other protected species are assessed as being not significant.

Habitats and Biodiversity Enhancement

7.216 EIAR Chapter 8 (Ecology) is informed by a UKHab survey covering habitats within 250m of the potential ecological footprint and within 100m of proposed access tracks. Within the Highland area, a diverse range of habitats was recorded, including extensive areas of coniferous woodland (1,144ha), modified grassland (650ha), heathland (618ha), broadleaved and mixed woodland (564ha), arable and horticultural land (333ha), blanket bog (357ha), other grasslands (182ha), scrub (116ha), and smaller areas of wetlands (34ha), alongside urban habitats, rivers, and hedgerows. The presence of rhododendron, an invasive non-native species (INNS), is also noted at several locations. Embedded mitigation measures, including habitat protection and biosecurity protocols, are proposed and considered acceptable. Effects on woodland habitats are addressed separately within the Forestry, Woodland and Trees section of this report.

7.217 The EIAR assesses effects on all locally and regionally important habitats, including wetlands, grasslands, heathland, hedgerows, scrub, and waterbodies/watercourses, as being of Minor magnitude and not significant. However, blanket bog in good or moderate condition is identified as an irreplaceable habitat of national importance. The proposed development would result in the loss of approximately 8.43ha of blanket bog within the Highland area, comprising 1.66ha of permanent loss and 6.77ha of temporary disturbance. While the EIAR concludes that this level of impact would not threaten the long-term integrity of the wider blanket bog resource, the magnitude of impact is assessed as Moderate and Significant due to the habitat's irreplaceable nature.

7.218 The application is also supported by a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment (Appendix 8.3), which quantifies baseline and post-development biodiversity value. This indicates a substantial net loss of biodiversity in the absence of compensation, with biodiversity units decreasing from 1,566.82 BU to 623.87 BU (a 60% reduction) and linear units from 4.72 LU to 0.00 LU (-100%). The assessment assumes that blanket bog, woodland, and linear features such as hedgerows and tree lines, will not regenerate naturally whereas the remaining habitats within the temporary footprint will. Blanket bog and ancient woodland are treated separately due to their irreplaceable status, with ancient woodland effects considered under the Forestry section of this report.

7.219 To address the identified biodiversity deficit, the applicant proposes to achieve a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain through off-site compensation, focusing on the creation and enhancement of woodland, grassland, and heathland habitats. Achieving

this target within Highland would require the creation of approximately 1,099.63 biodiversity units and 5.19 linear units. However, no specific details of the location or design of these off-site measures have been provided at this stage. Given the national importance of the Proposed Development, it is considered proportionate to secure a comprehensive scheme of biodiversity enhancement by way of planning condition.

7.220 In terms of the effect on blanket bog, the applicant has committed to restoring a greater extent of blanket bog in good or moderate condition than is permanently lost, with temporarily affected areas to be reinstated within four years of completion. NatureScot and the Council's Ecologist raise no objection to the proposed extent of loss or the principle of restoration. Notwithstanding this, the absence of detailed proposals for the location and delivery of off-site blanket bog restoration is noted, and, were consent to be granted, it would be considered appropriate to secure a detailed blanket bog restoration plan by condition. Given the irreplaceable nature of this habitat, it is expected that restoration will exceed the area lost.

7.221 It is noted that the Proposed Development is likely to cross an existing Habitat Management Plan (HMP) Area for Cairn Duhie Wind Farm. This area should be avoided however if this is not possible, a proportionate level of additional biodiversity enhancement should be provided to compensate for this loss, which may be required in the locality of this impact to address the conservation and environmental objectives of the HMP. This could be secured through a bespoke biodiversity enhancement condition.

7.222 In summary, the Proposed Development is expected to have a Significant Adverse effect on blanket bog habitat. It is considered that significant biodiversity enhancement can be achieved through the imposition of planning conditions requiring off-site biodiversity enhancement and a blanket bog specific restoration plan, however this will not avoid the identified Significant Adverse effect on blanket bog.

Roads, Transport and Access

7.223 The Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) Chapter 13 considers the transport and access implications of the Proposed Development. This is supported by a Transport Assessment (TA) for the Highland Council area (Appendix 13.1), an Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) (Appendix 3.4), and associated technical documentation.

7.224 The EIAR identifies the extent of the road network to be used during construction, with access taken from the trunk road network and extending across a wide range of local roads, from A-class roads to unclassified rural routes of limited construction (Figure 13.1). Within Highland, the network has been subdivided into 11 sections, with predicted daily traffic flows (two-way movements, i.e. an arrival and a departure) as follows:

Section	Daily Cars/Vans	Daily HGVs
1: Fanellan to River Beauly	76	150
2: River Beauly to Cnoc na Moine	76	150

3: Cnoc na Moine	76	150
4: Cnoc na Moine to River Ness	76	150
5: River Ness to Knocknagael	76	150
6: Knocknagael to Daviot Wood	76	150
7: Daviot Wood to Highland Main Line	76	150
8: Highland Main Line to Dalcharn	76	150
9: Dalcharn to Acheneim Wood	106	158
10: Acheneim Wood to Muckle Burn	106	158
11: Muckle Burn to Cairn Duhie	106	158

7.225 The EIAR identifies a range of embedded mitigation measures, including:

- Implementation of a detailed CTMP to manage construction traffic and ensure good construction practice;
- Delivery of an Outdoor Access Management Plan (OAMP) to mitigate impacts on Public Rights of Way (PROW), Core Paths, and access points; and
- Physical measures such as site access formation, Public Road Improvements (PRI), route signage, wheel washing, and potential closure of lay-bys in consultation with the Roads Authority and Transport Scotland.

7.226 The EIAR assesses effects against six transport criteria: community severance, driver delay, non-motorised user delay, non-motorised user amenity, fear and intimidation, and road safety. It concludes that there would be no Significant effects against all criteria and across all assessed roads.

7.227 In terms of impacts on the trunk road network, Transport Scotland raises no objection subject to standard conditions relating to the management of Abnormal Indivisible Loads (AILs), approval of trunk road junctions, and a finalised CTMP.

7.228 However, in respect of the local road network, the EIAR is considered insufficient to allow an adequate assessment of potential impacts on the local road asset, its users, and adjacent communities. The Council's Transport Planning team therefore raises objection to the application.

7.229 The Planning Authority has sought clarification on a number of key issues, including:

- Consistency in the definition of "trips" (two-way vs one-way movements);
- Whether traffic estimates include movements associated with existing powerline diversion works;
- The practicality of relying on a single service yard north of Croy and whether additional yards within Highland may be required;
- Discrepancies in the number of proposed site accesses between the TA and the Outline CTMP;
- Whether traffic associated with narrowing access tracks has been included;

- The derivation of traffic generation figures within the CTMP; and
- The duration of impacts on individual road links.

7.230 At the time of writing, no response to the Transport Planning's objection has been received. The applicant has advised that they intend to respond by 28 May 2026, thereby providing limited opportunity to review any additional information prior to the finalisation of this Committee report; with the reporting timescales having been well communicated with the applicant. It is therefore likely that, should this additional information be received, it along with any available updated consultation response from Transport Planning will be reported verbally to SPAC during the Officer's presentation. At this point therefore, there remains significant uncertainty regarding the robustness of the Traffic Assessment undertaken, including whether it reflects realistic traffic levels and whether all relevant routes have been assessed.

7.231 No assessment has been provided of the structural capacity or condition of the affected public roads. Many of the impacted routes are not designed roads, instead being fragile, rural roads that are not typically used by significant numbers of HGVs. There is therefore a clear risk of deterioration, damage, or failure of parts of the road network. While a Section 96 Road Repair Agreement could ensure any damage is repaired, it would not necessarily prevent initial damage or disruption, including potential road closures affecting local communities.

7.232 In addition, in considering the requirement for Public Road Improvements (PRI), the EIAR appears to base its consideration of the capacity of the road links solely based on whether the roads are physically wide enough to accommodate construction vehicles. No consideration is given to whether the impacted roads can safely accommodate construction vehicles whilst remaining safe and available for other road users. The EIAR suggests that construction traffic will be managed to avoid conflicts on narrow singletrack roads however, in many instances, this is not practical as it takes no account of how conflicts with non-construction traffic will be dealt with.

7.233 In relation to the removal of the existing 132kV Beauly to Knocknagael overhead line, the EIAR concludes no Significant effects on the road network. However, this conclusion is not supported by sufficient evidence. No traffic generation figures or baseline data are provided for roads affected solely by removal works, and a generalised assumption of a 100% increase in traffic is applied. This is likely to underestimate impacts, particularly where baseline traffic levels are very low. Without adequate data, the magnitude of impact cannot be determined, and the conclusion of no Significant effects is not substantiated.

7.234 Inconsistency regarding the number of new site accesses has been noted above and remains unaddressed at this stage. In terms of junction design, an indicative bellmouth layout is provided at Figure 3.7 of the EIAR however no site-specific assessment as to the suitability of each proposed access point has been provided. It is particularly important to demonstrate that each site access will achieve suitable visibility splays. The EIAR includes reference to the installation of temporary speed limits where substandard visibility exists however this is not supported by national guidance and is unlikely to be acceptable to the Roads Authority. The applicant should therefore ensure that suitable visibility splays are achieved at site accesses without reliance on the installation of temporary speed limits.

7.235 The Transport Assessment does not take timber extraction into account. It states that a significantly reduced number of trips will be associated with timber extraction which will be undertaken using existing forestry tracks in advance of the formation of access tracks. This does not take account of the fact that vehicle movements associated with timber extraction will make use of the local public road network and that the adequacy of that network to take such loads has not been determined. The statement that timber extraction will take place ahead of access track construction also appears to contradict the construction programme provided at Table 3.5 of EIAR Chapter 3: Project Description. This indicates forestry removal taking place between Q1 2027 – Q2 2028 with access track formation taking place between Q1 2027 – Q2 2029. There therefore appears to be potential for forestry and construction works to overlap. Taking into account the rural nature of much of the public road network within the study area, with existing low levels of HGV movements and roads often being of limited construction, uncertainty around the effects of vehicle movements associated with timber extraction means that it cannot be determined that there would be no significant effect on the public road network.

7.236 The submission assumes a two-phased approach to accessing the proposed OHL on the southern side of the River Beauly. This is because of the substandard nature of the existing Black Bridge which carries the C1016 over the River Beauly. Phase 1 uses the A833, C1108, U1604 and C1106 to access Fanellan from the A862 through Kiltarlity. Phase 2 uses the A831 and C1106 to access Fanellan via the Black Bridge. The C1108 and U1604 local public roads are not suitable in their current form for the nature and scale of traffic impacts likely to be generated. Were it recommended that consent be granted, it would need to be subject to a condition which restricts the use of the C1108 and U1604 roads and therefore requires the replacement of the Black Bridge, critically, before construction traffic makes use of access points to the west of the River Beauly.

7.237 The cumulative assessment presented within the EIAR is limited and does not consider a number of relevant developments in proximity to the scheme, including but not limited to:

- Construction of the Spittal-Beauly OHL (THC Ref: 25/03311/S37);
- Beauly-Denny OHL Diversion (THC Ref: 25/02993/S37);
- Kilmorack Replacement Substation (THC Ref: 24/02831/FUL); and
- Aigas Replacement Substation (THC Ref: 24/02830/FUL).

7.238 The lack of a comprehensive cumulative assessment means that it is not possible to have a clear understanding of the likely cumulative traffic impacts on the public road network likely to be impacted by the Proposed Development.

7.239 In addition, several further shortcomings are identified:

- No evidence of engagement with the Council's Structures Team regarding AIL route capacity;
- Underestimation of road sensitivity, particularly for fragile and single-track roads;
- Reliance on potentially outdated or inappropriate design standards for capacity assessment;

- Inadequate assessment of community severance, particularly in relation to large increases in HGV traffic;
- Inadequate assessment of impacts on Core Paths, National Cycle Network routes, and non-motorised users;
- Insufficient assessment of impacts on local bus services; and
- Inadequate consideration of fear and intimidation effects, particularly given the scale of increase in large vehicle movements on lightly trafficked rural roads.

7.240 Overall, the EIAR is considered to significantly under-assess the likely impacts of the Proposed Development on the local road network. As a result, the scale and nature of mitigation required to ensure the safe and effective operation of the public road network have also been underestimated. The conclusion of no Significant effect in terms of transport therefore cannot be relied upon, and this matter is recommended to form a reason for objection.

Other Material Considerations

Recreation and Tourism

7.241 This chapter summarises the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) findings for recreation and tourism receptors, including recreational and tourist facilities, public access, tourist events and accommodation. It draws on the detailed assessment reported in Chapter 14 of the EIA Report and considers effects arising during both construction and operation of the Proposed Development.

7.242 The proposed development includes several embedded mitigation measures. These measures form part of the proposal and have been taken into account in the assessment of effects. They include:

- An Outdoor Access Management Plan (OAMP) to maintain safe access to Core Paths and recreational routes during construction;
- A Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) to manage traffic effects and maintain access to recreational and tourism receptors;
- Application of mitigation from other topics (notably landscape and visual, noise, and transport) to reduce amenity effects; and
- A Construction Workforce Accommodation Strategy, including provision of new and temporary accommodation, to minimise pressure on existing tourist accommodation.

7.243 During the construction phase, the majority of recreational and tourism receptors would experience either Minor adverse or Neutral effects, which are not significant. However, some localised receptors would be subject to greater impacts where there is direct interaction with construction activities. In particular, Farm Ness and the Reelig Horse Riding Centre would experience temporary restrictions and disturbance, resulting in Moderate adverse effects which are considered Significant. Similarly, certain woodland areas used for recreation, including Daviot Wood, The Aird and Clunas Wood would experience disturbance and tree removal, leading to Moderate adverse (Significant) effects.

7.244 Public access routes would be maintained throughout construction, although there may be temporary reductions in amenity and, in cases, diversions. These effects are assessed as Minor adverse to Neutral and therefore not significant. Tourist events would not be significantly affected, as access would be maintained and events are generally transient in nature. Conditions should be imposed, for example to restrict or limit development and construction traffic to prioritise safe access to the Belladrum - Tartan Heart Festival which takes place annually in Kiltarlity in late July / early August. Effects on tourist accommodation would also be limited, with the available supply substantially exceeding demand from the construction workforce, resulting in Neutral or Minor adverse effects which are not significant.

7.245 During operation, effects are primarily related to changes in visual and environmental amenity arising from the presence of the infrastructure. Across all receptor groups, including recreational users, tourists and users of public access routes, these effects are assessed as Minor adverse to Neutral and are not significant. In some locations, such as watercourses crossed by the overhead line, there would be minor, localised restrictions (for example on fishing directly beneath the line), but these would not materially affect overall use and are also considered not significant.

7.246 Additional mitigation is proposed in relation to specific receptors that would otherwise experience significant effects during construction. In particular, consultation with landowners and operators of Farm Ness and Reelig Horse Riding Centre would be undertaken to programme works to avoid peak visitor periods, thereby reducing disruption. Further mitigation is also provided through forestry management measures set out in the Forestry chapter, which seek to minimise the extent and impact of tree removal in recreational woodland areas.

7.247 Following the implementation of additional mitigation, the residual effects for Farm Ness and Reelig Horse Riding Centre would reduce from Moderate adverse (Significant) to Minor adverse (Not Significant). However, for the identified woodland recreational receptors, Moderate adverse effects would remain following mitigation, due to the unavoidable nature of tree removal and associated disturbance. These effects are therefore considered to be Significant adverse residual effects during construction.

7.248 The assessment of cumulative effects has considered other SSEN Transmission projects, including substations, as well as relevant third-party developments. In general, these developments are expected to implement similar mitigation measures, including maintaining access and managing traffic, and therefore would not give rise to significant in-combination effects on recreation and tourism receptors. Potential cumulative effects relating to tourist accommodation have been identified, particularly in the event of overlapping construction programmes increasing demand for accommodation. However, the implementation of the Applicant's Housing Strategy, including the provision of new and temporary accommodation, is expected to mitigate these pressures, such that cumulative effects would remain not significant. Although there may be minor cumulative changes to amenity experienced by users of some recreational resources, these are assessed as Minor adverse and not significant.

7.249 The assessment demonstrates that the proposed development would not result in widespread or long-term significant effects on recreation and tourism. The majority of

effects, both during construction and operation, are assessed as Minor adverse or Neutral and therefore not significant. Following mitigation, the only Significant residual effects identified relate to construction-phase impacts on woodland recreational areas, where Moderate adverse effects remain due to unavoidable tree removal and associated disturbance. All other effects are reduced to, or remain at, levels that are not significant.

7.250 In general, the reported recreation and tourism impacts are not contested, however, this assessment is presumably in part based on the findings of the applicant's LVIA with Officers contesting many of its reported level of effects for many receptors, several of which are frequented by tourists / visitors to the area. The most pertinent receptor is Culloden Battlefield with Officers findings being that Significant adverse visual effects and setting impacts will occur for visitors across that site. Whilst the visual impacts of the line, both during construction and once operational may not deter visitors, the presence of the development across and above the southern hillside will affect the experiential qualities of this highly sensitive world-renowned attraction. Similarly, in the absence of effective tower micro-siting being undertaken at the Caledonian Canal, this may also be detrimental to visitor's experience of this scenic part of the region, with tourists boarding and alighting Loch Ness boat cruses and undertaking other recreational activities. Officers in turn therefore find that the proposal would undoubtedly have a Significant adverse impact for tourism, albeit that Officers recommended reasons for objection to the application are in relation to the cultural heritage setting / visual impacts for these receptors, with these locations not being exclusively used by visitors but experienced and enjoyed by everyone with these areas being promoted recreational public spaces.

Operational Noise

7.251 Chapter 15 of the EIAR includes an assessment of operational noise effects associated with the proposed development. These effects primarily arise from two sources which are corona discharge and aeolian noise. Corona discharge is the characteristic crackling or humming sound often associated with OHLs, which can become more pronounced during wet weather conditions such as rainfall, fog or mist due to increased surface irregularities on the conductors. It can have a tonal component. Aeolian noise is generated by wind passing over conductors and associated structures, causing vibration. This form of noise is typically infrequent and variable, depending on specific wind conditions. The EIAR notes that aeolian noise is difficult to assess and that there is currently no standardised method available for its prediction.

7.252 Embedded mitigation for operational noise has been incorporated into the design of the proposed development through the selection of a type of conductor that is considered to be low-noise, the routing of the overhead line to maintain a minimum separation distance of 45 m from noise sensitive receptors, and the implementation of best practice design measures to minimise aeolian noise. These include the use of vibration dampers on conductors and the avoidance of components known to generate excessive wind-induced noise, thereby reducing both the likelihood and audibility of operational noise effects.

7.253 The EIAR uses National Grid guidance (TGN(E)322 – Operational Audible Noise Assessment Process for Overhead Lines) to assess noise from corona discharge. The

guidance applies a three-tier assessment methodology, where if predicted noise levels meet the criteria at Tier 1 or Tier 2, impacts are considered acceptable with no adverse effects on nearby receptors. In this case, the assessment confirms that the use of low-noise conductors, combined with a minimum 45 m separation between infrastructure and noise sensitive receptors, effectively limits noise emissions. A TGN(E)322 assessment of all receptors within 500 m demonstrates that predicted operational noise levels fall below the Tier 1 threshold of 34 dB(A), indicating that effects are Negligible and not significant.

7.254 In addition, the EIA identifies the potential for aeolian noise to arise from the OHL infrastructure. This form of noise is generated where wind interacts with conductors or structural components under specific conditions. While there is no standardised quantitative method available to predict aeolian noise, the assessment notes that, although it may be audible at distances of several hundred metres, the specific wind conditions required are relatively uncommon and unlikely to occur frequently enough to give rise to significant effects. The assessment therefore emphasises the importance of design mitigation, including the application of best practicable means in conductor design, the installation of vibration dampers to minimise wind-induced noise, and the use of components with no known history of generating excessive aeolian noise. Subject to this being secured by condition, the effect would not be Significant.

Agriculture

7.255 The application is not supported by a specific assessment of the potential effects of the proposed development on agricultural land use. The proposed overhead line (OHL) crosses an area of Class 3.1 land at Scaniport, which is classified as prime agricultural land. While this section of the route is relatively limited in extent, and the permanent land-take associated with the development is modest, there remains potential for impacts on agricultural operations. In particular, consideration should be given to the interaction between the OHL and modern agricultural practices, including the use of vehicles and spray systems. The presence of overhead infrastructure has the potential to introduce operational constraints and safety risks, including an increased risk of electrocution where large-scale agricultural machinery is used in proximity to the line. The Council does not possess specific expertise in this area, and as such, it is not considered appropriate to rely on this as a reason for objection. However, third-party respondents have already raised concerns regarding agricultural impacts with the DPEA, ensuring that this matter will be considered by the Reporters.

Aviation

7.256 In the interest of aviation safety, a condition is required to receive finalised details of the precise locations and heights of all substantive above ground construction and permanent plant equipment / infrastructure, construction timescales, and any aviation warning lighting details. Note that no OHL operational visible aviation lighting will be required with this to be secured by condition.

Decommissioning

7.257 The applicant is seeking consent in perpetuity for the development. The EIAR states that the effects associated with the construction phase can be considered to be

representative of worst-case decommissioning effects, and so a separate assessment of decommissioning has not been carried out. Compliance with best practice processes and methods at that time could be required through a Decommissioning Environmental Management Plan which can be secured by condition.

Monitoring

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

Non-Material Considerations

7.259 Non-material considerations raised within the representations include concerns regarding alleged profiteering, the perceived lack of need for the development, and assertions relating to an oversupply of renewable energy generation in the north of Scotland, as well as energy pricing and constraint payments. These matters fall outwith the scope of material planning considerations and therefore are not relevant to the determination of this application.

7.260 In this regard, it is noted that the Scottish Government has declared a climate and nature emergency, and there is a recognised urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Transmission infrastructure required to support the transition to a low-carbon energy system is identified as a national development and is therefore supported in principle.

7.261 Similarly, while community benefit is acknowledged as having the potential to assist in delivering a just transition to net zero, such arrangements are voluntary and do not constitute a material planning consideration, as previously outlined in the socio-economic section of this report.

7.262 Impacts on property values are also not material planning considerations, as these relate to private interests rather than the public interest. Furthermore, planning decisions should not be influenced by emotive arguments relating to cultural identity where these are not grounded in material planning impacts. Any generalised distrust of government or developers within the energy sector is likewise not material, and neither the identity of the applicant nor their track record constitutes a relevant planning consideration in the assessment of this proposal.

8.0 MATTERS TO BE SECURED BY LEGAL AGREEMENT

8.1 On other applications, legal agreements have previously 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 Memorandum of Understanding with the Council, Officers are content that additional off-site compensatory planting / biodiversity enhance can be delivered through a planning condition, rather than through 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. The agreement would take account of any neighbouring developments that might progress concurrently with the works proposed and would make provision for a mechanism for apportionment of costs between respective developers. This can be secured concurrently with the finalisation of the CTMP.

8.3 Given the concerns expressed with the applicant's Transport Assessment and inability to assess the totality of the whole project's impact on the Council's road and path network, the Council may through the course of PLI proceedings suggest the applicant enter into a legal agreement as a mechanism to deliver transport infrastructure to enable the project's delivery, should this not be achieved through the implementation of a package of Public Road Improvement works, the scope of which has not been agreed and should also cover active travel and wider access works.

8.4 Owing to the extent of Significant landscape and visual impacts associated with this project, with several towers being dominant in views, a condition or legal agreement should also be imposed to secure a substantial element of public art; the scope of which has not been agreed to date but could portray the history and character of energy's influence on this part of Highland.

9.0 CONCLUSION

9.1 The proposed Beauly to Peterhead 400kV Overhead Line represents infrastructure of national significance and is identified as a National Development within National Planning Framework 4, carrying substantial weight in view of its role supporting the reinforcement of the electricity transmission network and supporting Scotland's transition to a net zero economy. The EIAR demonstrates clear and substantive benefits in terms of enabling renewable energy generation, strengthening grid capacity and delivering socio-economic benefit at regional and national levels. In principle, the development aligns with the strategic objectives of NPF4 and is supported by Development Plan policy provided its environmental effects are satisfactorily mitigated.

9.2 Although the overriding need for the development is understood and received strong policy support, when considered in the round, the proposed development would give rise to a number of significant adverse effects that have not been satisfactorily addressed or mitigated with insufficient regard having been had to certain key cultural heritage and attractions in Highland.

9.3 The construction traffic impacts of the development also remain unclear with the design not having been sufficiently advanced to assess and mitigate the impacts of the whole project. Transport impacts are insufficiently assessed with fundamental uncertainties regarding traffic generation, route capacity, road condition, and cumulative impacts. The absence of robust evidence prevents confidence that the public road network can safely accommodate construction traffic without unacceptable disruption to other users. Leaving such matters to conditions to be resolved at a later point without a supportable strategy or attempt to resolve the Council's concerns is of fundamental concern. It is however appreciated that further information on these aspects is anticipated to be provided as part of the PLI for the Scottish Government's

appointed Reporters to consider further, with Officers continuing to work collaboratively with the applicant to help progress this project whist securing appropriate mitigation for all users of the transport network.

9.4 Significant adverse effects to the setting of Culloden Battlefield are predicted. The exceptional significance of the heritage asset and the introduction of prominent electrical infrastructure within its setting is of major concern. Despite the line being located in the same direction of view as the existing 275kV OHL, the coupling of existing and proposed towers on the hillside, the larger scale of the proposed towers to be introduced, and their routing across higher ground, will obviously draw the eye with towers breaking the skyline, adversely affecting visitors experience and appreciation of the events which unfolded in this culturally rich landscape which is largely void of this scale of built infrastructure. Addition mitigation has recently been suggested to reduce these impacts; however, the introduction of suggested measures such as tower height reduction, tower painting, additional planting and tower base and track ground restoration has not been formally committed to. Irrespective of this, the suggested potential measures tabled to date do not go far enough to avoid Significant adverse impacts. Avoidance of this impact is critical to the acceptability of the line being routed in this location and demands a more onerous design solution. Officers therefore do not support the current configuration and advocate for relocation or undergrounding, potentially within the existing 275kV OHL corridor to avoid prominent skylining tower effects. Time is however needed for the applicant to fully assess what is technically feasible, which should be facilitated and take priority over targeted determination periods, or intended construction timescales, with this line being interdepended with a series of other substations which collectively will dictate energisation timeframes.

9.5 Elsewhere, the applicant has taken steps to reduce landscape and visual effects through the scheme's design and routing, however significant adverse impacts remain. Owing to the scale of the project such significant effects would occur across 10 Landscape Character Types, numerous residential, recreational, and transport receptor groups, as evidenced at 11 of the assessed representative viewpoints (half of all viewpoints provided and assessed within the Highland LVIA study area). In the majority of cases, it is accepted that the predicted effects have been mitigated so far as possible, and certain significant adverse effects can be accommodated and are expected owing to the magnitude of the infrastructure proposed. The severity of some of the impacts however remains of significant concern.

9.6 In addition to the highly sensitive Culloden Battlefield, the routing and form of the line as currently proposed causes particular dominating effects as the line crosses the A862 to Easter Moniack, with this currently being an attractive and rural landscape. Given the relatively flat topography of this area, it has not been sufficiently demonstrated that a section of the line could not be undergrounded. This is particularly relevant in light of the concentration of existing and proposed substations and associated overhead lines within the wider Beauly area. This infrastructure is already acting as a catalyst for further development pressure, including battery energy storage systems and onshore wind projects that are either consented or currently under consideration. If progressed, these developments would add to the cumulative effects of renewable energy infrastructure in this part of Highland, resulting in a notable change to the area's character and its overall sense of place.

9.7 The line's potential to impact on the users' experience of the Caledonian Canal is also of concern, however, such Significant impacts could be addressed through micro-siting of towers, albeit that this has again not been formally committed to thus far. Such mitigation is integral to limiting the proposed developments' impacts in this location, with the overall impact of the line likely to have adverse effects for tourism, albeit that is a matter of Officer judgement, and differs from the applicant's findings with certain sections and pinch points of the project expected to result in significant landscape and visual harm.

9.8 The OHL's impact on the residential property at Cullaird, known as Grove Park, also warrants further detailed assessment given that the proposed development may render this an unattractive place to live owing to the proximity of OHL towers in principal residential views. This matter is anticipated to be considered further by the appointed Scottish Government Reporters who have requested a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment.

9.9 In addition, a Significant adverse effect on the integrity of the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA is predicted due to unmitigable collision risk to capercaillie. On this matter, the Council relies on the evidence provided by NatureScot who have already objected to the application. Consequently, NatureScot will be providing evidence to the PLI on this matter, and it is recommended that the Council does not provide additional evidence but supports NatureScot's position of objection owing to the project's impacts on capercaillie. These impacts may necessitate further amendments to be made to the design or routing of the line, or further mitigation to be introduced, with NatureScot advising that this may be a case for derogation under the Habitats Regulations.

9.10 In terms of the impacts of the development on the natural environment more generally, there are significant impacts on certain protected species, and extensive losses of woodland and habitats which is to be expected for a linear project of this nature, where there are several technical design and environmental constraints to be considered. Such impacts are all capable of being mitigated and compensated for to varying degrees through conditions, and it positive that the applicant has committed to delivering 10% biodiversity enhancement, with this to be delivered across various large sites in Highland at strategic scale. Unfortunately, however, specifics on where these measures will be introduced and details of habitat creation and management are not at a suitably advanced stage to be presented within the application. Owing to the number of infrastructure projects of this nature planned within the region, the lack of further evidence on the delivery of this aspect is of growing Officer concern, and it is hoped that SSEN will be able to demonstrate further progress ahead of the Scottish Government's determination of this application. With PLI proceedings underway, Officers will continue to engage on this matter, and several other conditions matters, as set out within this report, should consent ultimately be forthcoming.

9.11 Accordingly, and notwithstanding the acknowledged national need of the proposed OHL, it is concluded that the proposed development, as currently presented, gives rise to unacceptable environmental and amenity impacts. The application therefore fails to achieve an appropriate balance between the need for national infrastructure and the need to protect the environment through which it traverses. Overall, the proposed development is considered to be contrary to the Development Plan and there are no material considerations to suggest that approval should be granted in

any case. It is therefore recommended that the Council maintains its objection to the application.

10. IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Resource: There are significant staffing and financial resource implications should the Council take part in the Public Local Inquiry.

10.2 Legal: The application is subject to a Public Local Inquiry.

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

10.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: The application allows for the connection of renewable energy to the grid therefore helping to deliver a contribution toward climate change targets.

10.5 Risk: Not applicable

10.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

11.0 RECOMMENDATION

11.1 **Action required before consultation response is issued to Scottish Ministers:** None

11.2 It is recommended that the Council continues to Raise Objection to the application subject to (A) and for the reasons set out below.

A. Members granting delegated authority to the Area Planning Manager – South to respond to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit and Planning and Environmental Appeals Division regarding any future Further or Supplementary Environmental Information, or application amendments, which may arise during the PLI process.

In the event that Officers are minded to withdraw one or more reasons for objection, the matter would first be reported back to Committee for further consideration.

Reasons for Objection

Assessment of the 'Whole Project'

1. Any required 'ancillary works' including but not limited temporary construction compounds and other modifications to the existing distribution network are an essential and functionally interdependent element of the proposed development, but this land-take and infrastructure has not been included within the application and has not been assessed in the EIAR. It is therefore considered, having regard to Raeshaw Farms Ltd v Scottish Ministers [2026] CSIH 10, that there is insufficient environmental information before the decision-maker to conclude that the true nature and scope of the project, and its likely significant environmental effects, have been lawfully and adequately assessed for EIA purposes.

Roads, Transport and Access

2. The proposed development is contrary to National Planning Framework 4 Policy 13 Sustainable Transport and Highland-wide Local Development Plan Policy 56 Travel, as the applicant has failed to provide sufficient information to enable an adequate assessment of the impact of construction traffic on the local road network and its users. The submitted Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Transport Assessment and supporting documentation underestimate the scale and nature of traffic impacts, do not adequately assess the capacity, condition and safety of affected rural roads, fail to properly consider cumulative impacts and associated activities such as timber extraction, and do not demonstrate that safe and suitable access arrangements can be achieved. As a result, it cannot be concluded that the development would avoid unacceptable impacts on road safety, network integrity, and the amenity of local communities.

Landscape Impacts

3. The proposed development would have a significantly detrimental landscape impact on Landscape Character Type 342: Farmed River Plains as it crosses the A862 south towards Easter Moniack, due to the introduction of prominent (and in some cases, dominant) vertical features within this landscape impacting its "*contrast of the flat, open plain and the adjacent concave slopes rising to steep hill and mountain edges*" key characteristic and the more intimate, rural part of this landscape around Easter Moniack. This is with particular regard to Viewpoints 7: Balchraggan, 8: Easter Moniack, 9: Knockbain, 11: Drumchardine and 54: A862, Kirkhill. This significant adverse impact has not been adequately mitigated with the proposed development failing to demonstrate compliance with National Planning Framework 4 Policy 11 Energy, Highland-wide Local Development Plan Policies 69 Electricity Transmission Infrastructure and 28 Sustainable Design.

Visual Impacts

4. The proposed development would have a significantly detrimental impact on visual amenity without adequate mitigation on the following visual receptor groups:

    - Users of the A862 including visitors along the North Coast 500 Tourist Route and those visiting nearby recreational destinations, users of local roads, Core Paths and several residential properties around Easter Moniack particularly as illustrated in, but not limited to, Viewpoints 8: Easter Moniack and 54: A862, Kirkhill;
    - Recreational users of Dochgarroch Lochs, Caledonian Canal;
    - Occupiers of the residential property, Grove Park at Cullaird, particularly in relation to impacts on residential visual amenity; and
    - Recreational visitors to Culloden Battlefield, particularly as illustrated in Viewpoint 16: Culloden Battlefield.

    These significant adverse impacts have not been adequately mitigated with the proposed development failing to demonstrate compliance with National Planning Framework 4 Policy 11 Energy, Highland-wide Local Development Plan Policies 69 Electricity Transmission Infrastructure and 28 Sustainable Design.

Built and Cultural Heritage

5. The proposed development, due to its scale, character and prominent siting, would result in significant adverse effects to the setting of the Battle of Culloden Inventory Battlefield and Culloden Muir Conservation Area which have not been adequately mitigated, contrary to National Planning Framework 4 Policies 7 Historic Assets and Places and 11 Energy, and Highland-wide Local Development Plan Policies 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage and 69 Electricity Transmission Infrastructure.

Natural Heritage

6. As assessed by NatureScot and RSPB Scotland, the application will result in an adverse effect on the integrity of the Darnaway and Lethen Special Protection Area (SPA). This is due to mortality associated with collision risk with OHL infrastructure for its qualifying feature of breeding capercaillie. The application is therefore contrary to National Planning Framework 4 Policy 4 Natural Places, Policy 11 Energy, and Highland-wide Local Development Plan Policy 69 Electricity Transmission Infrastructure, Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage, and 58 Protected Species, in that impacts on birds are not sufficiently addressed.

Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises

7. For the reasons set out above the application does not comply with

National Planning Framework 4 (2023)

- Policy 1 - Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises
- Policy 2 - Climate Mitigation and Adaptation
- Policy 4 - Natural Places
- Policy 7 - Historic Assets and Places
- Policy 11 - Energy
- Policy 14 - Design Quality and Place

Highland-wide Local Development Plan (2012)

- Policy 28 - Sustainable Design
- Policy 36 - Development in the Wider Countryside
- Policy 57 - Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
- Policy 58 - Protected Species
- Policy 61 - Landscape
- Policy 69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

In those circumstances, having regard to provisions of Schedule 9 Paragraph 3 (1) and (2) of the Electricity Act 1989 in the consideration of proposals for which consent under Section 37 is required, no or insufficient regard has been had to the desirability of conserving flora fauna and physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest and there has been a failure to take reasonable steps to mitigate the effects of the proposals thereon.

Signature: Bob Robertson

Designation: (Acting) Planning Manager – South

Authors:	Jack Wiseman (Principal Planner)
	Rohan Sinha (Principal Landscape Officer)
Background Papers:	Documents referred to in report and in case file.
Relevant Plans:	Plan 1 – Location Plan (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-066)
	Plan 2 – Figure 3.1 – Site Layout (Part 1 of 4) (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-074)
	Plan 3 Figure 3.1 – Site Layout (Part 2 of 4) (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-074)
	Plan 4 – Figure 3.2 – Limit of Deviation (Part 1 of 4) (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-135)
	Plan 5 – Figure 3.2 – Limit of Deviation (Part 2 of 4) (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-135)
	Plan 6 – Figure 3.3 – Limit of Deviation – Proposed Towers and OHL Alignment (Part 1 of 4) (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-136)
	Plan 7 – Figure 3.3 – Limit of Deviation – Proposed Towers and OHL Alignment (Part 2 of 4) (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-136)
	Plan 8 – Figure 3.4a – Tower Design – AS4 Tower Suite (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-093)
	Plan 9 – Figure 3.4b – Tower Design – L2 Tower Suite (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-094)
	Plan 10 – Figure 3.4c – Tower Design – L8 Tower Suite (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-095)
	Plan 11 – Figure 3.4d – Tower Design – L4 Tower Suite (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-149)
	Plan 12 – Figure 3.5a – Existing OHL Crossing – Crossing 1 (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-096)
	Plan 13 – Figure 3.6 – Typical Access Track Section (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-101)
	Plan 14 – Figure 3.7 – Typical Bellmouth Layout (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-102)
	Plan 15 – Figure 3.8 – Typical Watercourse Crossing Sections (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-103)
	Plan 16 – Figure 3.9a – Typical Tower Working Area Arrangement – Suspension Tower (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-104)
	Plan 17 – Figure 3.9b – Typical Tower Working Area Arrangement – Tension tower with EPZs (B2P-WSP-DA-70092380-105)
	Plan 18 - Figure 7.3a - ZTV Caledonian Canal Crossing - Bare Ground
	Plan 19 - Figure 7.3b - ZTV Caledonian Canal Crossing – Screening
	Plan 20 - Figure 7.6 - Visual Amenity Receptors and Viewpoint Locations - Part 1

Plan 21 - Figure 7.6 - Visual Amenity Receptors and Viewpoint Locations - Part 2

Plan 22 - Figure 7.6 - Visual Amenity Receptors and Viewpoint Locations - Part 3

Appendix 1 – Planning History

Reference	Description	Outcome
26/00750/PIP	Dulsie Wood Wind Farm - Erection and operation of a wind farm for a period of 40 years, comprising up to 9 wind turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 200m, access tracks, borrow pits, substation, control building, Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and ancillary infrastructure.	Pending consideration
26/00750/PIP	Erection of house (plot 5)	Pending consideration
26/00749/PIP	Erection of house (plot 4)	Pending consideration
25/04830/FUL	Upgrade existing forest access and formation of new forest road	Granted Planning Permission 17.02.2026
25/04801/S42	Section 42 application to vary Condition 2 (17/00127/S42) to include an additional area of extraction to yield a further 400,000 tonnes of sand and gravel	Pending consideration
25/04411/PAN	Proposed replacement of existing Black Bridge over the River Beauly together with temporary laydown / compound areas and other ancillary works	Reported to Committee 09.02.2026
25/03786/PAN	Modification to the existing Ness Weir	Reported to Committee 09.12.2025
25/03782/FUL	Change of use to play area and formation of pedal kart track facility (retrospective)	Granted Planning Permission 20.02.2026
25/03507/SCOP	Modification to the existing Ness Weir	Scoping Decision Issued 16.02.2026
25/02993/S37	Beauly - Denny Overhead Line Diversion - The temporary and permanent diversion of approximately 1.7km section of the existing 275/400kV Beauly Denny overhead line (OHL).	Raise Objection 23.09.2025 PLI Proceedings Commenced
25/02513/FUL	Change of use of land to short-term let caravan site	Granted Planning Permission 10.12.2025
25/02251/FUL	Erection of replacement office	Granted Planning

		Permission 27.08.2025
25/02235/FUL	Road improvements from Phase 4 Ness Castle / Torbreck Road / junction at B862 Dores Road	Pending consideration
25/02201/FUL	Knocknagael Substation Extension - Erection and operation of an extended substation comprising platform, 275kV air insulated switchgear plant equipment, laydown and construction compounds, access, landscaping, drainage and ancillary works.	Pending consideration
25/01992/FUL	Construction of shared use path from A862 / A833 junction to C1100 public road	Granted Planning Permission 05.09.2025
25/01164/FUL	Siting of 4no. pods for short term letting, erection of bike store, erection of managers house, formation of access road and associated works	Pending consideration
25/00800/PIP	Site for 3 Glamping Pods	Granted Planning Permission 10.11.2025
25/00503/S36	Beauly BESS - Construction and operation of a Battery Energy Storage System along with associated infrastructure and ancillary works, earthworks, access, drainage, landscaping and biodiversity enhancements.	Raise Objection 09.10.2025
24/05097/S36	Knocknagael BESS - Construction and operation of a 200MW Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) comprising two BESS and one substation compounds, associated infrastructure, site access, and landscaping.	Raise No Objection 27.08.2025
24/04644/PAN	Ness Weir II project - Modify existing weir, raising the crest height of weir, creating a fish pass, installing outlet sluice in the form of a tilting weir	Reported to Committee 11.12.2024
24/04588/SCOP	Construct and operate a 400 kilovolt (kV) overhead transmission line (OHL) supported by steel lattice towers over a distance of approximately 167 km, between proposed substations at Spittal (Banniskirk), Loch Buidhe (Carnaig) and Beauly (Fanellan), rationalisation and crossing of existing transmission infrastructure.	Scoping Decision Issued 18.12.2024

24/03064/SCOP	Section 37 application for the construction of a new double circuit steel structure 400 kV OHL between Beauly, Blackhillock, New Deer and Peterhead, approximately 194km in length, including the diversion of an existing 400kV OHL into a proposed new Coachford 400kV substation near Blackhillock, removal of the existing 132kV OHL from Beauly to Knocknagael substations, and rationalisation and crossings of the existing transmission network	Scoping Decision Issued 22.08.2024
24/02925/S42	Application under section 42 to develop land without compliance with (20/01783/PIP) condition 16 (woodland management plan)	Granted Planning Permission 15.08.2024
24/02885/SCRE	Construction and operation of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) exceeding 50MW comprising a compound of battery and electrical equipment, access track, landscaping and ancillary works	Screening Opinion Issued - EIA Not Required 04.09.2024
24/02647/MSC	Erection of house	Granted Planning Permission 18.12.2024
24/02655/SCOP	Fanellen substation - Proposed new 400kV substation and HVDC converter station comprising new buildings, platform, plant and machinery, access, laydown/work compound area(s), landscaping, site drainage, and other ancillary works (National Development)	Scoping Decision Issued 06.08.2024
24/02632/PAN	Battery energy storage (up to 100MW)	Reported to Committee 20.08.2024
24/00571/PREMAJ	Section 37 application for the construction of a new double circuit steel structure 400 kV OHL between Beauly, Blackhillock, New Deer and Peterhead, approximately 192 km in length, including the diversion of an existing 400 kV OHL into a new Coachford 400kV substation near Blackhillock, removal of the existing 132 kV OHL from Beauly to Knocknagael substations, and rationalisation and crossings of the existing transmission network	Pre-App Advice Issued 17.07.2024
24/01900/FUL	Conversion of existing steading to form 5 dwellings and associated works	Granted Planning

		Permission 26.09.2024
24/01533/PAN	Proposed new 400kV substation, HVDC converter, access, construction compound, landscaping and ancillary infrastructure.	Reported to Committee 01.05.2024
24/01399/SCRE	Construction and operation of a proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) (over 50MW) with associated infrastructure, access and ancillary works	Screening Opinion Issued - EIA not required 12.06.2024
24/01337/PAN	Proposed Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) up to 200 MW, access, landscaping and ancillary infrastructure	Reported to Committee 18.06.2024
24/01335/PAN	Extension to Knocknagael substation, access, construction compound, landscaping and ancillary infrastructure	Reported to Committee 18.06.2024
24/00644/MSC	Erection of house and garage	Granted Planning Permission 26.09.2025
23/05657/SCRE	Extension to existing substation	Screening Opinion Issued - EIA not required 10.05.2024
23/04900/MSC	Erect dwelling	Granted Planning Permission 04.09.2024
23/02752/FUL	Refurbishment of vacant toilet block to meet and greet/rod room	Granted Planning Permission 10.11.2023
23/01490/SCRE	Knocknagael substation extension	Screening Opinion - EIA required 23.06.2023
22/05527/S42	Section 42 application to develop land without compliance with condition 3 (17/02446/PIP Erection of 5 houses) (orientation and location of the dwellinghouse/s)	Granted 24.02.2023
22/05451/PAN	Erection and operation of extension to the Knocknagael Substation comprising new platform area, associated plant and infrastructure, ancillary facilities, laydown area(s), access roads and landscape works	Reported to Committee 08.02.2023
22/04622/FUL	Alterations and extension to car park	Granted

		Planning Permission 22.12.2022
22/02156/FUL	Change of use of upper floor of agricultural building to residential use	Granted Planning Permission 12.09.2022
22/01680/FUL	Conversion of steading to 3No. holiday letting units, erection of communal barn/office	Granted Planning Permission 27.09.2022
21/04938/FUL	Erection of lodge	Granted Planning Permission 06.12.02021
21/04243/S36	Cairn Duhie Wind Farm- Application under Section 36C of the Electricity Act to vary conditions 1 (Duration of the Consent, from 30 to 32 years) and 2 (Commencement of Development, from a period of 3 years to 6 years from consent)	Approved by Scottish Ministers 27.09.2022
21/01521/S36	Cairn Duhie Wind Farm Redesign - Erection and operation of wind farm for a period of 35 years, comprising of 16 wind turbines with maximum blade tip height of 149.9m, access tracks, borrow pits, switching station, substation, control building, temporary construction compound, battery storage infrastructure, and ancillary infrastructure	Approved by Scottish Ministers 02.02.2024
20/04165/FUL	Conversion of steading to house, cottage to office, demolition of cottage, installation of solar PV on agricultural shed	Granted Planning Permission 10.12.2020
20/03867/FUL	Formation of access and parking for camping pod	Granted Planning Permission 25.11.2020
20/02801/FUL	Erection of agricultural building	Granted Planning Permission 03.09.2020
20/02632/PIP	Erection of house	Granted Planning Permission 22.10.2020
20/01783/PIP	Visitor accommodation with associated landscaping, access, footpaths, parking and associated amenity buildings	Granted Planning Permission 30.08.2021

24/02831/FUL	Kilmorack Substation - construction and operation of a 132kV replacement substation, platform, plant and machinery, access, laydown/work compound area(s), drainage, landscaping, and other ancillary works	Granted Planning Permission 02.09.2025
24/02830/FUL	Aigas Substation - Construction of 132kV replacement substation, platform, plant and machinery, access, laydown/work compound area(s), drainage, landscaping, and other ancillary works	Granted Planning Permission 02.09.2025

Appendix 2: Development Plan and Other Material Considerations

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

National Planning Framework 4 (2023) (NPF4)

A3.1 National Development 3 (NAD3) - Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure

Policy 1 - Tackling the Climate and Nature Crisis

Policy 3 – Biodiversity

Policy 4 - Natural Places

Policy 5 – Soils

Policy 6 - Forestry, Woodland and Trees

Policy 7 - Historic Assets and Places

Policy 11 – Energy

Policy 14 - Design, Quality and Place

Policy 18 – Infrastructure First

Policy 22 – Flood Risk and Water Management

Policy 25 - Community Wealth Building

Highland Wide Local Development Plan 2012

A3.2 28 - Sustainable Design

29 - Design Quality and Place-making

30 - Physical Constraints

31 - Developer Contributions

36 - Development in the Wider Countryside

47 - Safeguarding Inbye/Apportioned Croftland

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

63 - Water Environment

66 - Surface Water Drainage

69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

72 - Pollution

73 - Air Quality

77 - Public Access

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

A3.3 Policy 2 - Nature protection, preservation and enhancement

No specific policies or land use allocations apply.

Highland Council Supplementary Planning Policy Guidance

A3.4 Developer Contributions (March 2018)

Highland Historic Environment Strategy (Jan 2013)

Highland's Statutorily Protected Species (March 2013)

Physical Constraints (March 2013)

Special Landscape Area Citations (June 2011)

Standards for Archaeological Work (March 2012)

Trees, Woodlands and Development (Jan 2013)

Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance (May 2024)

The Highland Council – Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects (2010)

OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Scottish Government and Other Planning Guidance

A3.5 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)

Scottish Energy Strategy (2017)

2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy (2011)

Energy Efficient Scotland Route Map, Scottish Government (2018)

Draft Scottish Biodiversity strategy to 2045: tackling the nature emergency (2023)

Biodiversity: Planning Guidance (December 2025)

Advising on peatland, carbon-rich soils and priority peatland habitats in development (NatureScot, Feb 2024) Scottish Energy Strategy (2017)

Developing with Nature Guidance (NatureScot 2023)

Landscape Institute (2019) Residential Visual Amenity Assessment. LI Technical Guidance Note 2/19

Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3)

Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (2019)

Scheduled Monuments Consents Policy (2019)

Managing Change in the Historic Environment: Setting (HES) (June 2016)

PAN 1/2011 - Planning and Noise (2011)

Community Benefits for Electricity Transmission Network Infrastructure:

Government Response, UK Department for Energy and Security and Net Zero

(2023)

Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects (2010)

Appendix 3 – Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy

Development Plan / Other Planning Policy

A4.1 The Development Plan comprises the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2), and associated statutory supplementary guidance. If the Council is satisfied that the proposal is not significantly detrimental overall, then the application will accord with the Development Plan.

National Planning Framework 4

A4.2 The Proposed Development comprises National Development by virtue of being a new onshore high voltage electricity transmission line of 400kV.

A4.3 NPF4 Policies 1, 2 and 3 relate to all development proposals in Scotland. NPF4 Policy 1 requires that significant weight is given to the global climate and nature crises. NPF4 Policy 2 requires that development proposals be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible and to adapt to current and future risks from climate change. NPF4 Policy 3 states that development proposals for national development will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity so that they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention. The assessment has considered the proposal in relation to these policies, and it is considered to be compliant.

A4.4 NPF4 Policy 4 states that development with unacceptable impacts on the natural environment will not be supported. Proposals likely to significantly affect European sites (e.g. SACs and SPAs) must undergo appropriate assessment. Development affecting an SSSI will only be supported where its integrity and objectives are not compromised, or where adverse effects are clearly outweighed by benefits of national importance. Similar tests apply to SLAs, though any adverse effects must be outweighed by benefits of at least local importance. These considerations are especially relevant given that parts of the proposal cross or lie close to such designated areas. Conflict with this policy exists insofar as it affects the capercaillie qualifying feature of the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA.

A4.5 NPF4 Policy 5 intends to protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development. It states that development proposals will only be supported if they are designed and constructed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy, which has been adequately demonstrated in the submission meaning that impacts on carbon rich soils are avoided in this instance. NPF4 Policy 6 relates to forestry, woodland and trees and intends to protect and expand forests, woodland and trees. The application is for essential infrastructure and lost woodland is to be mitigated by way of compensatory planting. In both cases, a degree of conflict with these policies exists due to the loss of irreplaceable blanket bog and ancient woodland habitats.

A4.6 NPF4 Policy 7 aims to protect and enhance historic environment assets and places. It is accepted that potential effects have been adequately assessed and mitigated for along the majority of the route. Nevertheless, significant conflict with this policy exists

where the Proposed Development traverses the setting of the Battle of Culloden Inventory Battlefield and Culloden Muir Conservation Area.

A4.7 Support for the development is provided by NPF4 Policy 11 by virtue of the Proposed Development being for grid transmission infrastructure. Nevertheless, Policy 11 also requires demonstration of how a range of environmental effects are addressed, including but not limited to impacts on communities, landscape and visual effects, transport effects and effects on natural and cultural heritage assets. A degree of conflict with Policy 11 therefore exists where adequate assessment and mitigation of effects has not been carried out, particularly in these areas.

A4.8 The Proposed Development cannot be said to improve the quality of the area, in conflict with NPF4 Policy 14. It does, however, include an intention to maximise community wealth building, some of which should be secured by way of a Local Employment Scheme condition, in accordance with NPF4 Policy 25.

Highland wide Local Development Plan

A4.9 Policy 28 relates to sustainable design and supports developments which promote and enhance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the people of Highland. It introduces the concept of achieving the right development in the right place and not to allow development at any cost. The Development Plan supports the broad principle of energy development. HwLDP Policy 69 specifically highlights that the Council will have regard to their level of strategic significance in transmitting electricity from areas of generation to areas of consumption. It will support proposals which are assessed as not having unacceptable impact on the environment including natural, built and cultural heritage features. As noted above, conflicts with policy on the protection of the natural environment, built heritage, transport and landscape and visual amenity are considered to exist.

Area Local Development Plans

A4.10 The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) does not contain land allocations related to the proposed development. They confirm the boundaries of Special Landscape Areas within these plan areas. Highland wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) Policies 28, 57, 61 and 67 seek to safeguard these regionally important landscapes. The impact of this development on landscape is primarily assessed in the Design, Landscape and Visual Impact section of this report.

A4.11 The IMFLDP2 contains policies on Nature Protection, Restoration and Enhancement (Policy 2). This sets out that national development will only be supported where it is demonstrated that the proposal will conserve and enhance biodiversity within and adjacent to a site. This is similar to the approach taken in NPF4 and is considered in the relevant sections of this report. The IMFLDP2 also sets out that developers will be required to demonstrate that adequate capacity, in terms of infrastructure, to serve the proposal exists or can be created by a programmed improvement or via direct developer provision or funding. Where this is appropriate, the need for enhancements to infrastructure is highlighted in this report.

Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement (2022), Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023), and Onshore Wind Sector Deal for Scotland (2023)

A4.12 The Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement supersedes the previously adopted Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement which was published in 2017. The document sets out a clear ambition for onshore wind in Scotland and for the first time sets a national target for a minimum level of installed capacity for onshore wind energy being 20 Gigawatts (GW). This is set against a currently installed capacity of 9.4 GW (June 2023). Therefore, a further 10.6 GW of onshore wind requires to be installed to meet the target. It is however acknowledged that targets are not caps. In delivering such a target Scotland would play a significant role in meeting the requirement of 25-30 GW of installed capacity across the UK identified by the Climate Change Committee.

A4.13 Like the previous iteration of the Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement, the document recognises that balance is required and that no one technology can allow Scotland to reach its net zero targets. The document is clear that in achieving a balance, environmental and economic benefits to Scotland must be maximised. In taking this approach, this echoes Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy. Benefits to rural areas, such as provision of jobs and opportunities to restore and protect natural habitats, are also highlighted in the document.

A4.14 The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan has been published for consultation. Limited weight can however be applied to the document given its draft status. Unsurprisingly, the material on in the document reflects in large part that contained in NPF4 and the Onshore Wind Energy Policy Statement (OWPS) 2022. A fundamental part of the Strategy is expanding the energy generation sector. The draft Strategy specifically addresses energy networks (page 36) and states "significant infrastructure investment in Scotland's transmission system is needed to ameliorate constraints and enable more renewable power to flow to centres of demand." It states that National Grid has identified the requirement for over £21 billion of investment in GB electricity transmission infrastructure to meet 2030 targets and that over half of this investment will involve Scottish transmission owners SPEN and SSEN. Overall, the draft Energy Strategy forms part of the new policy approach alongside the OWPS and NPF4 and confirms the Scottish Government's policy objectives and related targets reaffirming the crucial role that onshore wind and enabling transmission infrastructure will play in response to the climate crisis which is at the heart of all these policies.

A4.15 To deliver the ambition for onshore wind, the Onshore Wind Sector Deal for Scotland was introduced in September 2023. The document focuses on necessary high level actions by Government and the Sector to support onshore wind delivery. Jointly, Government and the Sector are committed to working together to ensure a balance is struck between onshore wind and the impacts on land use and the environment. The document looks to expediate decision making and consent implementation to achieve 20 GW of installation by 2030, meaning we should be seeing faster decisions on applications that are already in the system, with more consents being build out.

Summary

A4.16 The Development Plan provides significant support for the Proposed Development due to it being a National Development and its strategic significance in moving electricity from areas of generation to areas of consumption. Nevertheless, this policy support is contingent on the environmental effects of the proposal being adequately addressed. As detailed in the main body of this report, assessment of transport effects is considered to be inadequate and so the required level of mitigation, and consideration of whether that mitigation is achievable, has not been addressed. Landscape and visual effects and effects on cultural heritage assets have also not been adequately assessed or mitigated. Finally, the proposal will result in unmitigable collision risk to capercaillie, a qualifying interest of the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA. Taken in the round, the Proposed Development is considered to be contrary to the Development Plan and there are no material considerations to outweigh this non-compliance.

Appendix 4 – Viewpoint Appraisal

Cumulative Stage 1 = proposed development + three projects (Fanellan substation, Greens substation and Netherton Hub)
Cumulative Stage 2 = proposed development + other unrelated developments
The cumulative assessment is described in Technical Appendix 7.7, Volume 5, however, no detailed cumulative viewpoint assessment has been undertaken.
Paragraph 1.12 of Technical Appendix 7.5 notes that "*Where the viewpoint is representative of more than one type of receptor, consideration of the different sensitivity levels of each receptor type is provided, and subsequent assessment carried out accordingly*." However, the applicant's viewpoint assessment in this document doesn't assess all relevant visual receptors at each viewpoint. For example, the assessment of Viewpoint 12 only identifies residents as the visual receptor whereas this view would also be representative of road users although the applicant has acknowledged other visual receptors on the corresponding THC visualisation but not assessed them within the viewpoint appendix. This applies to Viewpoints 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 18.

			Proposed Development			**Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)**		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
VP1 River Beauly Distance 625 m Looking SE Visualisation THC 1a-f and 7.1	App	High (residents) Medium to High (recreational users) Medium (road users)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate (residents and recreational users) Minor to Moderate (road users)	Construction: **Significant** (residents and recreational users) **Not Significant** (road users)	Major adverse and **significant** (during construction and operation) as a result of the proposed development and Fanellan (Stage 1). No significant cumulative effects under Stage 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate (residents and recreational users) Minor to Moderate (road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents and recreational users) **Not Significant** (road users)			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
			Operation (summer): Low to Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate (residents and recreational users) Minor to Moderate (road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents and recreational users) **Not Significant** (road users)			
	THC	High (residents) High (recreational users) Medium (road users)	Construction: Medium to High	Construction: Moderate to Major (residents and recreational users) Moderate (road users)	Construction: **Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)	Major adverse and **significant** (during construction and operation) as a result of the proposed development and Fanellan (Stage 1). No significant cumulative effects under Stage 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium to High	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major (residents and recreational users) Moderate (road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Medium to High	Operation (summer): Moderate to Major (residents and recreational users) Moderate (road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of low to medium magnitude of change during construction and operation is disputed given the visible tower (including construction activities associated with it) introduces a highly prominent new feature in the view to the east from Black Bridge which would appear as a							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	detracting / discordant element into this short to medium range view. As a result, the officer appraisal considers the magnitude of change as medium to high and the visual effect as Moderate to Major adverse and significant for residents and recreational users, and Moderate adverse and significant for road users. The cumulative assessment of major adverse and significant level of effect for Stage 1 with Fanellan substation is agreed. It is further agreed that there would be no significant cumulative effects for Stage 2 at this viewpoint location.							
VP2 Creraig (Crerag) Distance 1660m Looking NE Visualisation THC 2a-f and 7.2	App	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate (residents) Minor (road users)	Construction: **Not Significant** (residents and road users)	Major and Moderate adverse and **significant** (during construction and operation) (residents), and Moderate adverse and **significant** (during construction and operation) (road users) as a result of the proposed development and Fanellan (Stage 1). No significant cumulative effects under Stage 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate (residents) Minor (road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate (residents) Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
	THC	High (residents, nearby recreational users)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate (residents, nearby recreational users)	Construction: **Not Significant** (residents, nearby	Major and Moderate adverse and **significant** (during construction and operation) (residents and nearby recreational users), and Moderate adverse and		

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
		Medium (road users)		Minor (road users)	recreational users and road users)	**significant** (during construction and operation) (road users) as a result of the proposed development and Fanellan (Stage 1). No significant cumulative effects under Stage 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate (residents, nearby recreational users) Minor (road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents, nearby recreational users and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate (residents, nearby recreational users) Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents, nearby recreational users and road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of low magnitude of change and Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) (residents) and Minor adverse (not significant) (road users) during construction and operation is agreed. The officer appraisal concludes a similar assessment of Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) for nearby recreational users. Construction activities including cranes, vehicle / helicopter movements and some felling of forestry would be detectable in the mid-distance occupying a small portion of the view. During operation, the proposed development would be perceptible in the mid-distance, mostly backclothed by landform, partially seen where intervening vegetation does not obstruct views, and would be seen in the context of the existing 275kV OHL in the same part of the view. The cumulative assessment of major and moderate adverse and significant for residents and nearby recreational users, and moderate adverse and significant for road users at Stage 1 with Fanellan substation is agreed. It is further agreed that there would be no significant cumulative effects for Stage 2 at this viewpoint location.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
VP3 Ruisaurie Distance 2091m Looking SE Visualisation THC 3a-f and 7.3	App	Medium to High (residents)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate (residents) Minor (road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of low magnitude of change and Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) (residents) during construction and operation is agreed despite the officer appraisal concluding a higher sensitivity for residents. The officer appraisal also concludes Minor adverse (not significant) effect for road users. Construction activities including cranes, vehicle / helicopter movements and some felling of forestry associated with The Aird would be perceptible in the mid-distance occupying a small portion of this wide view. During operation, the proposed development would be perceptible in the mid-distance, mostly back clothed by landform, and seen in the context of existing OHLs in the same part of the view. Felling associated with The Aird would result in part of the proposed development being skylined in the view, however, it would relatively be distant to be noticeable in the view. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which includes the proposed Spittal to Beauly OHL line which would be visible in this view. The cumulative effect would be no greater than Moderate as a result of the proposed development and other cumulative developments.							
VP4 Beauly Distance 1430m Looking S Visualisation THC 4a-f and 7.4	App	High (residents) Medium to High (recreational users) Medium (road users)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate (residents) Minor to Moderate (recreational and road users)	Construction: **Not Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stage 1. Significant cumulative effects (up to Moderate) assessed under Stage 2 during construction only as a result of the proposed Beauly BESS, Western Isles HVDC UGC and Ballach Wind Farm.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate (residents) Minor to Moderate (recreational and road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate (residents and recreational users) Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	THC	High (residents) High (recreational users) Medium (road users)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate (residents and recreational users) Minor to Moderate (road users)	Construction: **Not Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stage 1. Significant cumulative effects (up to Moderate) assessed under Stage 2 during construction only as a result of the proposed Beauly BESS, Western Isles HVDC UGC and Ballach Wind Farm.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate (residents and recreational users) Minor to Moderate (recreational and road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate (residents and recreational users) Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents, recreational and road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of low to medium magnitude of change during construction and operation (winter) and low magnitude during operation (summer) is agreed. Construction activity including cranes, vehicle / helicopter movements, tree canopy / forestry felling would be perceptible above and beyond intervening vegetation in the mid-distance. The proposed development would be perceptible during operation, slightly more visible in the winter over the summer, seen across a wide view in the mid-distance and in the context of existing OHL. The existing 132kV OHL to the fore of the proposed development would be removed resulting in taller towers, however, the overall character of the landscape would largely remain unaltered. In the summer, visibility would be more limited when the vegetation is in full leaf. The level of effect would be Moderate adverse and not significant for residents during construction and operation (winter) reducing to Minor to Moderate adverse and not significant in the summer. For road users, the level of effect would be							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	Minor to Moderate adverse and not significant during construction and operation (winter) reducing to Minor adverse and not significant in the summer. In relation to recreational users, the officer appraisal considers the level of effect as Moderate adverse and not significant during construction and operation (winter) reducing to Minor to Moderate adverse and not significant in the summer due to the higher sensitivity for these receptors. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stage 1. In relation to Stage 2, significant temporary cumulative effects are assessed during construction only as a result of the combined effect of the construction activities associated with the proposed Beauly BESS, Western Isles HVDC UGC and Ballach Wind Farm, and the proposed development which is agreed.						
VP5 Ardnagrask Distance 4320m Looking SE Visualisation THC 5a-l and 7.5	App	High (residents)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Negligible	Operation Year 15 (summer) Minor	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Not Significant**			
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate (residents)	Construction:	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
				Minor (road users)	**Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
			Operation (winter): Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate (residents) Minor (road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate (residents) Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Negligible	Operation Year 15 (summer) Minor (residents) Negligible to Minor (road users)	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of low magnitude of change and Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) (residents) during construction and operation is agreed reducing to Minor adverse and not significant by Year 15 when proposed planting on The Aird matures. The officer appraisal also concludes a Minor adverse (not significant) effect for road users during construction and operation is agreed reducing to Negligible to Minor adverse and not significant by Year 15 when proposed planting on The Aird matures. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements would be perceptible in the distance, however, the most perceptible activity would be the forestry felling associated with The Aird on the skyline at over 4.3km distance occupying a small portion of this wide view. During operation, the proposed development would be barely perceptible in the distance, however, the elements that would be most perceptible would be the skylined towers within the large, felled area of The Aird. However, this would not alter the overall character of the							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	view. During the summer, intervening trees would provide a small degree of additional screening, however, this would not alter the assessment. By Year 15, proposed planting on The Aird would have established making the proposed development less noticeable on the skyline thereby reducing the visual effect. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP6 Kiltarlity Distance 2479m Looking N / NW Visualisation THC 6a-f and 7.6	App	High (residents)	Construction: Negligible to Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible to Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	THC	High (residents and nearby recreational users) Medium (road users)	Construction: Negligible to Low	Construction: Minor to Moderate (residents and nearby recreational users) Minor (road users)	Construction: **Not Significant** (residents, nearby recreational users and road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible to Low	Operation (winter):	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents, nearby			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
				Minor to Moderate (residents and nearby recreational users) Minor (road users)	recreational users and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor (residents and nearby recreational users) Negligible to Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents, nearby recreational users and road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of negligible to low magnitude of change and Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) (residents) during construction and operation (winter) is agreed reducing to negligible magnitude and minor adverse and not significant effect in the summer months. The officer appraisal also concludes a Minor to Moderate adverse (not significant) (nearby recreational users) and Minor adverse (not significant) (road users) during construction and operation (winter) reducing to minor adverse (nearby recreational users) and negligible to minor adverse (road users) and not significant effect in the summer months. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements would be perceptible in the distance occupying a small portion of this wide view. During operation, the proposed development would be barely perceptible in the mid to far distance, interrupted by intervening vegetation and mostly back clothed by landform / forestry. In the summer, the effects would reduce further when the vegetation is in full leaf. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which includes the proposed Spittal to Beauly OHL line which would be visible in this view. It is also noted that the applicant has made a typo in relation to referring to this viewpoint for the proposed Knocknagael BESS in Technical Appendix 7.7, which will not be visible from this location.							
VP7 Balchraggan	App	High (residents)	Construction: Medium to High	Construction: Major	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
Distance 856m Looking N Visualisation THC 7a-f and 7.7			Operation (winter): Medium to High	Operation (winter): Major	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate to Major	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Medium to High	Construction: Major (residents) Moderate to Major (road users)	Construction: **Significant** (residents and road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium to High	Operation (winter): Major (residents) Moderate to Major (road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate to Major (residents) Moderate (road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents and road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	The applicant's assessment of medium to high magnitude of change and Major adverse (significant) (residents) during construction and operation (winter) is agreed reducing to medium magnitude and Moderate and Major adverse and significant effect in the summer months. The officer appraisal also concludes a Moderate to Major adverse (significant) on road users during construction and operation (winter) reducing to moderate adverse (significant) in the summer months. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements would be noticeable in the mid-distance occupying a moderate portion of this view. These elements would be detracting, creating an uncharacteristic activity in the view. During operation, the proposed development would be noticeable in the near to mid-distance, traversing across fields but seen the context of existing OHLs located beyond the proposed development. However, the new towers would be taller and detract within this relatively attractive view, partially breaking the skyline. In the summer, the effects would slightly reduce further when the vegetation is in full leaf, however, the effect would remain significant. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP8 Easter Moniack Distance 252m Looking N / NE Visualisation THC 8a-f and 7.8	App	High (residents)	Construction: High	Construction: Major	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): High	Operation (winter): Major	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium to High	Operation (summer): Major	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
	THC	High (residents, nearby tourists on the NC500)	Construction: High	Construction: Major (residents, nearby tourists on the NC500)	Construction: **Significant** (residents, nearby tourists on the	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
		Medium (local road users)		Moderate to Major (local road users)	NC500, local road users)			
			Operation (winter): High	Operation (winter): Major (residents, nearby tourists on the NC500) Moderate to Major (local road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents, nearby tourists on the NC500, local road users)			
			Operation (summer): High	Operation (summer): Major (residents, nearby tourists on the NC500) Moderate to Major (local road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents, nearby tourists on the NC500, local road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of high magnitude of change and Major adverse (significant) (residents) during construction and operation (winter) is agreed. However, the officer appraisal concludes a high magnitude of change even in the summer given the prominence and close proximity of the towers. The effect of Major adverse and significant is however agreed. The officer appraisal also concludes a similar effect as residents on users of the nearby NC500 Tourist Route. Further, the appraisal also concludes Moderate to Major adverse (significant) during construction and operation (winter / summer) for local road users. Construction activities including cranes, vehicle / helicopter movements, access tracks and forestry felling would be fairly prominent in the near to mid-distance occupying a large proportion of this view. These elements would be detracting, creating uncharacteristic activity in the view. During operation, the proposed development, the towers in particular, would be highly prominent on the skyline in what is largely an enclosed and framed view. Existing OHLs are visible beyond on higher ground beyond the A862, however, it is the tall towers and proximity of the proposed development that would draw the attention in this view. In the summer months, intervening vegetation would add some limited screening, nevertheless the towers would remain prominent. Overall, there would be a significant change to the baseline view as a result of the proposed development. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
VP9 Knockbain Distance 862m Looking N/E Visualisation THC 9a-l and 7.9	App	High (residents)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Low to Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Low	Operation Year 15 (summer) Minor to Moderate	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Not Significant**			
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate (residents) Minor to Moderate (road users)	Construction: **Significant** (residents) **Not Significant** (road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate (residents) Minor to Moderate (road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents) **Not Significant** (road users)			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
			Operation (summer): Low to Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate (residents) Minor to Moderate (road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents) **Not Significant** (road users)			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Low	Operation Year 15 (summer) Minor to Moderate (residents) Minor (road users)	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of low to medium magnitude of change during construction and operation, reducing to low magnitude by Year 15 when proposed planting on The Aird matures is agreed. However, the officer appraisal agrees with the landscape officer that the level of effect of Moderate adverse during construction and operation is significant. The officer appraisal also concludes a not significant effect (Minor to Moderate adverse) for road users during construction and operation, reducing to Minor adverse and not significant by Year 15. During construction and operation (year of opening), there would be large areas of felling associated with The Aird very noticeable on the hill slopes resulting in a change to the landscape character and nature of the view. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements and forestry felling associated with The Aird would be perceptible in the mid-distance occupying a moderate portion of this view. During operation, the proposed development would be readily perceptible in the mid-distance with the towers skylined and large areas of The Aird felled on the hillside. During the summer, intervening trees would provide a small degree of additional screening, however, this would not alter the assessment. By Year 15, proposed planting on The Aird would have established reducing the visual effect to not significant. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 from this viewpoint location which is agreed. It is however noted in Technical Appendix 7.7 that there would be some temporary significant cumulative effects from around this location during construction only as a result of the proposed Ballach and Fairburn Extension wind farms and the proposed development.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
VP10 A832, Newton Distance 6817m Looking S Visualisation THC 10a-i and 7.10	App	High (residents)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Minor	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Construction: **Not Significant** (residents and road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant** (residents and road users)			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of negligible magnitude of change and Minor adverse (not significant) (residents) during construction and operation is agreed. The officer appraisal also concludes a Negligible effect for road users during construction and operation. Construction activities would generally not be perceptible given the intervening distance, however, cranes and helicopter movements could be perceptible above the hills and The Aird including forestry felling. During operation, the proposed development would not be readily perceptible in the distance, although it may be visible as it crosses the upper slopes of The Aird including the area of felling which would appear as a distinct linear line through the woodland. In the summer, the proposed development would remain perceptible in the distance above intervening vegetation. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP11 Drumchardine Distance 1277m Looking SW Visualisation THC 11a-f and 7.11	App	High (residents)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate to Major	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Low to Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
	THC	High (residents, recreational users)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate to Major (residents, recreational users)	Construction: **Significant** (residents, recreational users, road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
		Medium (road users)		Moderate (road users)				
			Operation (winter): Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major (residents, recreational users) Moderate (road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents, recreational users, road users)			
			Operation (summer): Low to Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate (residents, recreational users) Moderate to Minor (road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents, recreational users) **Not Significant** (road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of medium magnitude of change and Moderate to Major adverse (significant) (residents) during construction and low to medium magnitude and Moderate adverse (significant) during operation (summer) is agreed. However, the officer appraisal considers that the magnitude of change during operation (winter) should be medium with the effect as Moderate to Major adverse (significant) rather than the applicant's assessment. The officer appraisal also concludes similar effects as residents on recreational users. The appraisal also concludes a Moderate adverse and significant effect for road users during construction and operation (winter) reducing to non-significant levels in the summer. Construction activities including cranes, vehicle / helicopter movements, felling and access tracks would be noticeable (some activity even prominent) in the mid-distance occupying a moderate portion of this view. These elements would be detracting thereby disrupting the scenic views of the distant hills beyond. During operation, the proposed development would be noticeable with some towers appearing prominent in the mid-distance of the view. Removal of existing OHLs would offset the effect of the proposed taller towers disrupting the skyline and the long-distance views beyond. In the summer, intervening vegetation would add a small degree of additional screening thereby reducing the magnitude and effect, although remaining significant. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
VP12 Pine Chalets, Newtonhill Distance 270m Looking W Visualisation THC 12a-f and 7.12	App	High (residents)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate to Major	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate to Major	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate to Major (residents) Moderate (road users)	Construction: **Significant** (residents, road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major (residents) Moderate (road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents, road users)			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate (residents and road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents, road users)			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of medium magnitude of change and Moderate to Major adverse (significant) (residents) during construction and operation (winter), and low to medium magnitude and Moderate adverse (significant) during operation (summer) is agreed. The officer appraisal also concludes significant effects for road users at this location during construction and operation. Construction activities including cranes, vehicle / helicopter movements, large areas of felling and access tracks would be noticeable (some activity even prominent) in the near to mid-distance occupying a moderate portion of this view. These elements would be detracting thereby disrupting the scenic views. During operation, the proposed development would be prominent with some towers appearing above the skyline in the view. The proposed development would result in a new overhead line through blocks of existing forestry over The Aird although large areas of clear felling would be barely perceptible in terms of the extent of visibility to nearby towers. In the summer, intervening vegetation would add a small degree of additional screening however the majority of the view would remain the same. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.						
VP13 A82 Inverness Distance 1176m Looking SW Visualisation THC 13a-l and 7.13	App	Medium (road users)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Low to Medium	Operation Year 15 (summer) Minor to Moderate	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Not Significant**			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	THC	Medium (road users)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Low to Medium	Operation Year 15 (summer) Minor to Moderate	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Not Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of medium magnitude of change during construction and operation reducing to low to medium magnitude by Year 15 when proposed planting on The Aird matures is agreed. The effect of Moderate and significant during construction reducing to non-significant levels during operation (winter / summer / Year 15) is also agreed. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements and forestry felling associated with The Aird would be noticeable in the mid-distance occupying a moderate portion of this view. Works to remove the existing Beauly to Knocknagael 132 kV OHL would also be noticeable in the view. During operation, the proposed development would be seen in short, transient views and seen traversing the slopes of The Aird with a clear-felled zone on the hillside and would be more noticeable in views from the north due to more open views. Existing OHLs are more prominent in this view. During the summer, intervening trees would provide a small degree of additional screening, however, this would not alter the assessment. By Year 15, proposed planting on The Aird would have established slightly reducing the visual effect. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 from this viewpoint location which is agreed.							
VP14	App	High (visitors)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
Caledonian Canal Distance 1123m Looking NE Visualisation THC 14a-f and 7.14			Operation (winter): Low	Operation (winter): Minor to Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Low	Operation (summer): Minor to Moderate	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	THC (Based on alternative location on Lock)	High (visitors, recreational users)	Construction: Medium to High	Construction: Moderate to Major	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium to High	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium to High	Operation (summer): Moderate to Major	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The positioning of this viewpoint is unfortunate which is located where tourists board the Jacobite Cruise. What you don't see in the visualisation is the cruise itself which would occupy half of the view and is therefore not the best representative view in my opinion given the amount of visual clutter. A better position would have been from the Lock itself as it crosses the Canal or from the picnic tables on the opposite side where visitors would have a clear 'Vista' view along both sides of the Canal with limited visual clutter. The applicant's assessment of low to medium magnitude of change and Moderate adverse (significant) during construction, and low magnitude and Minor to Moderate adverse effect (not significant) during operation (winter and summer) is disputed. This is largely due to the disagreement of the positioning of the viewpoint which is not representative of views from this location. As illustrated in the visualisations in the landscape officer's consultation response,							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	the tower (CB1-1) installation including cranes and helicopter would be fairly prominent and distracting above the Canal on the skyline, seen in 'vista' views from the Lock and picnic tables across the boarding of the Jacobite Cruise. Felling associated with the OC would also be noticeable in the mid-views. This would result in a Medium to High magnitude and Moderate to Major adverse (significant) effect during construction. During operation, the proposed development traverses the Canal with one tower (CB1-1) clearly visible in the 'vista' view, and no other OHLs would be visible from this location given intervening screening from vegetation. This would result in a Medium to High magnitude and Moderate to Major adverse (significant) effect during operation (winter / summer). No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 from this location which is agreed. The applicant has now retaken photography from the location suggested by the landscape officer and an updated visualisation has been provided in Annex B of its TN submitted on 22 May 2026 which also includes a proposed mitigation option in relation to the micro-siting of tower CB1-1 by 50m. On review of this visualisation, if the applicant proceeds with the tower movement mitigation option, the officer considers that the magnitude of change would be reduced to low and the effect would be Minor to Moderate and not significant. If the applicant retains the tower in its original position, the officer assesses a significant visual effect as noted above.							
VP15 Culduthel Mains Road, Inverness Distance 2397m Looking SW Visualisation THC 15a-k and 7.15	App	High (residents)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Minor	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	THC	High (residents)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Minor	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of negligible magnitude of change and Minor adverse (not significant) (residents) during construction and operation (winter / summer) is agreed. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements would be perceptible in the distance but would be seen in the context of foreground visual clutter. During operation, the proposed development would be perceptible in the mid to far distance above intervening trees and in the context of other OHLs, traffic and other vertical elements. In the summer, street and garden vegetation would provide some additional screening, however, the overall effect would remain the same. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP16 Culloden Battlefield Distance 3020m Looking SW/S	App	High (visitors)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate	Construction: **Not Significant**	Significant cumulative effects under Stage 2 as a result of the combined effect of the proposed Lynemore Wind Farm and the proposed development. No cumulative effects under Stage 1.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
Visualisation THC 16a-f and 7.16			Operation (summer): Low to Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Low to Medium	Operation Year 15 (summer) Moderate	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Not Significant**			
	THC	High (visitors)	Construction: Low to Medium	Construction: Moderate	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2. The proposed Lynemore Wind Farm has submitted Additional Information where previously two turbines that would have been visible from the battlefield are now eliminated resulting in no significant cumulative effects.		
			Operation (winter): Low to Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Low to Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Low to Medium	Operation Year 15 (summer) Moderate	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. It is unfortunate that the weather conditions for this viewpoint are poor and the proposed development is likely to be more visible than what has been illustrated. The applicant's assessment of low to medium magnitude of change during construction and operation is agreed. However, the officer appraisal agrees with the landscape officer that the level of effect of Moderate adverse during construction and operation is significant. The main reason being the prominence of the two to three towers highly visible on the skyline in front of Meall Mor. Whilst there are other existing OHLs visible in the same view, they are at a lower elevation and the eye would be drawn particularly to the part of the route which rises up and crosses in front of Meall Mor. Culloden Battlefield							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	is a highly sensitive location and the views in all directions are important. Whilst there would be no significant effects on the landscape character of the battlefield, it is the visual effect that would be significant and adverse. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements, access tracks and forestry felling would be noticeable on the mid-slopes to the south-west / south and partially crossing the skyline occupying a moderate portion of this view. During operation, the proposed development would be noticeable (with 2-3 towers even prominent breaking the skyline) beyond the lower-lying existing OHL. During the summer, there will be no change to the effect as tree cover and woodland is limited to provide any screening to the extent of visibility of the proposed development. By Year 15, proposed planting to the east of Meall Mor would have established screening the lower portions of the towers, however, the upper parts of the towers would still be skylined and noticeable. No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2. The proposed Lynemore Wind Farm has submitted Additional Information where previously two turbines that would have been visible from the battlefield are now eliminated resulting in no significant cumulative effects. The applicant has now retaken photography and an updated set of visualisations has been provided in Annex C of its TN submitted on 22 May 2026 which also includes proposed mitigation options in relation to reduction in tower height, and tower painting in different seasons. The officer appraisal still stands that the visual effect would be significant primarily due to the skylined towers in front of Meall Mor which are clearly visible and would draw attention to in the visualisations.							
VP17 B9091, Nairn Distance 6697m Looking SW / S Visualisation THC 17a-f and 7.17	App	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor (residents)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
				Negligible (road users)				
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor (residents) Negligible (road users)	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of negligible magnitude of change and Minor adverse (not significant) (residents) and Negligible adverse (not significant) (road users) during construction and operation (winter / summer) is agreed. Construction activities would not be readily perceptible at this distance however cranes and helicopter movements on the skyline may be visible in the far distance. During operation, the proposed development would not be perceptible in the far distance, however, where distinguishable, it would be seen in the context of existing OHLs on the slopes of the distant hills. In the summer, the proposed development would be distantly perceptible in places on the skyline, however, the overall effect would remain the same. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP18 Urchany	App	High (residents)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate to Major	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
Distance 1148m Looking SE/S Visualisation THC 18a-f and 7.18			Operation (winter): Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate to Major	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
	THC	High (residents) Medium (road users)	Construction: Medium	Construction: Moderate to Major (residents) Moderate (road users)	Construction: **Significant** (residents) **Not Significant** (road users)	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major (residents) Moderate (road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant** (residents) **Not Significant** (road users)			
			Operation (summer): Medium	Operation (summer): Moderate to Major (residents) Moderate (road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant** (residents) **Not Significant** (road users)			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	The applicant's assessment of medium magnitude of change and Moderate to Major adverse (significant) (residents) during construction and operation (winter / summer) is agreed. The officer appraisal also concludes no significant effects for road users at this location during construction and operation although the effect would be Moderate. The effect for road users would not be significant given the transient nature of the view, lower sensitive receptor and short section of route affected given the layering effect of vegetation whilst travelling on the minor road. Construction activities including cranes, vehicle / helicopter movements, areas of felling would be noticeable (some activity even prominent) in the mid-distance occupying a moderate portion of this view. These elements would be detracting thereby disrupting the skyline. During operation, the proposed development would be prominent with some towers breaking the skyline in the view above the existing OHL. In the summer, intervening vegetation would add a small degree of additional screening however the majority of the view would remain the same with some towers breaking the skyline. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP19 Via Regia Heritage Path, Cairngorms National Park Distance 9489m Looking NW Visualisation THC 19a-f and 7.19	App	High (recreational users)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Minor	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	THC	High (recreational users)	Construction: Negligible	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter):	Operation (winter):	Operation (winter):			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
			Negligible	Minor	**Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of negligible magnitude of change and Minor adverse (not significant) (recreational users) during construction and operation (winter / summer) is agreed. Construction activities including cranes and vehicle / helicopter movements would not be readily perceptible given the long distance. During operation, the proposed development would also not be perceptible given the long distance and screening from intervening landform. In the summer, there would be no change to the effect given the limited tree cover. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP54 A862, Kirkhill Distance 8858m Looking SW/S/SE Visualisation THC 20a-l and 7.54	App	Medium to High (recreational users on the NC500) Medium to High (road users)	Construction: Medium to High	Construction: Moderate to Major (recreational users, road users)	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Medium to High	Operation (winter): Moderate to Major (recreational users, road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Medium to High	Operation (summer):	Operation (summer): **Significant**			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
				Moderate to Major (recreational users, road users)				
			Operation Year 15 (summer) Medium to High	Operation Year 15 (summer) Moderate to Major (recreational users, road users)	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Significant**			
	THC	High (recreational users on the NC500) Medium to High (road users)	Construction: High	Construction: Major (recreational users, road users)	Construction: **Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): High	Operation (winter): Major (recreational users, road users)	Operation (winter): **Significant**			
			Operation (summer): High	Operation (summer): Major (recreational users, road users)	Operation (summer): **Significant**			
			Operation Year 15 (summer) High	Operation Year 15 (summer) Major (recreational users, road users)	Operation Year 15 (summer) **Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5.							

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	The distance of 8858m as noted by the applicant is incorrect given the close proximity of the proposed development to this viewpoint. It appears that it would be around 300m. The applicant's assessment of medium to high magnitude of change and Moderate to Major adverse (significant) for recreational and road users during construction and operation is disputed. The officer appraisal agrees with the landscape officer that the level of effect would be Major adverse (significant) as a result of a high magnitude of change and a higher sensitivity specifically for the users of the NC500 Tourist Route. The proposed development would have a dominant visual effect given the introduction of a new and detracting human development through open fields in a landscape of higher scenic value which would alter the perceptual and rural qualities of the view. Construction activities, forestry felling associated with The Aird and access tracks would be prominent and readily perceptible across the open valley floor in the near to mid-distance occupying a large proportion of this view. During operation, the proposed development would appear dominant at close range with other parts of the OHL visible in the mid-distance on the slopes of The Aird. The clear felling on The Aird would be clearly visible disrupting the scenic and rural qualities of the view. During the summer, intervening trees would provide some degree of additional screening, however, this would not alter the assessment given the proposed development would continue to detract from the baseline view. By Year 15, proposed planting on The Aird would have established which only would provide limited screening on the hill slopes. Nevertheless, the overall effect of the proposed development would remain the same. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 from this viewpoint location which is agreed.						
VP55 A82, Dochgarroch Distance 1281m Looking N/NE	App	Medium (road users)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
Visualisation THC 21a-f and 7.55	THC	Medium (road users)	Construction: Low	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of low and negligible magnitude of change and Minor and Negligible adverse (not significant) (road users) during construction and operation (winter / summer) is agreed. Construction activities would mainly be visible associated with the taller elements above the existing vegetation across a small portion of the view. No felling associated with The Aird would be visible due to intervening landform and vegetation. During operation, the proposed development would barely be perceptible, however, where distinguishable, only the tops of the towers would be visible through intervening vegetation. In the summer, the proposed development would be barely perceptible once roadside vegetation is in full leaf. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed.							
VP58 Belladrum Distance 1938m Looking N/NW Visualisation THC 22a-f and 7.58	App	Medium to High (recreational receptors)	Construction: Negligible to Low	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Negligible to Minor	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Negligible to Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			

			Proposed Development			Cumulative Assessment (Stages 1 and 2)		
Viewpoint	**App / THC**	**Sensitivity of Receptor** (Susceptibility of receptor to change / value of the view)	**Magnitude of change** (Scale of change / geographic extent / duration / reversibility)	**Level of Effect** (Sensitivity of receptor / Magnitude of change)	**Significance** (Major and Moderate to Major are Significant. Moderate may also be Significant)	**Magnitude of Change** (Scale of Change / Geographic Extent / Duration)	**Level of Effect** (Magnitude of change / Sensitivity of receptor)	**Significance**
	THC	High (recreational receptors)	Construction: Negligible to Low	Construction: Minor	Construction: **Not Significant**	No significant cumulative effects under Stages 1 and 2.		
			Operation (winter): Negligible	Operation (winter): Negligible to Minor	Operation (winter): **Not Significant**			
			Operation (summer): Negligible	Operation (summer): Negligible to Minor	Operation (summer): **Not Significant**			
	The view is as described in Table 1.1 of Technical Appendix 7.5, Volume 5. The applicant's assessment of negligible to low, and negligible magnitude of change and Minor and Negligible to Minor adverse (not significant) (recreational receptors) during construction and operation (winter / summer) is agreed despite the officer appraisal concluding a higher sensitivity of receptors at this location. Construction activities would be filtered and distant through gaps in vegetation and very occasionally above the tree line. Much of the activities would be back clothed by landform / vegetation and would not break the skyline. During operation, the proposed development would appear in glimpsed views from the festival grounds with the tops of some towers visible above the intervening tree line. However, the majority of it would sit below the skyline. Summer foliage would add an additional layer of screening, however, the overall effect would remain the same as the winter. No significant cumulative effects are assessed under Stages 1 and 2 which is agreed. This includes the proposed Spittal to Beauly OHL and Fanellan substation which would be partially visible in the distance.							