

Agenda Item	6.1
Report No	PLS/56/26

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: South Planning Applications Committee

Date: 7 October 2026

Report Title: 25/01599/S36: Glen Earrach Limited
Land 2700m West of Inchtellach, Bunloit, Drumnadrochit

Report By: Area Planning Manager – South

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Glen Earrach Pumped Storage Hydro (PSH) scheme - construction and operation of a PSH.

Ward: 12 – Aird and Loch Ness

Development category: National Development (Section 36 Application)

Reason referred to Committee: Consultation on a National Development

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

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council **RAISE NO OBJECTION** to the proposal as set out in section 11 of the report.

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 The Highland Council has been consulted by the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (ECU) on an application made under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended) for the construction and operation of the Glen Earrach Pumped Storage Hydro (PSH) facility and associated infrastructure. The application is for PSH with a storage capacity of around 34,000 megawatt hours (MWh) and, subject to the final configuration, around 2,000 megawatts (MW) of installed electrical pumping capacity and 1,800MW of installed electrical generating capacity (subject to pump-turbine selection).
- 1.2 The proposed development would be operated by transferring water between a headpond (upper reservoir) located at Loch nam Breac Dearga and a tailpond at Loch Ness (lower reservoir), with an average gross head (vertical distance between headpond and tailpond) of around 480m. The maximum water level of the existing upper lochs would be raised by constructing dams to increase their natural storage capacity. The two reservoirs would be connected by an underground waterway system including up to three headrace tunnels.
- 1.3 Operation would involve alternating between pumping mode, when surplus electricity is used to pump water to the upper reservoir for storage, and generating mode, when water is released downhill through reversible pump-turbines to produce electricity for export to the transmission grid.
- 1.4 Key elements of the development, as described and assessed within the proposals and the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) include:
- Loch nam Breac Dearga headpond (upper reservoir) including a main dam (approximately 1000m long and 59m high) and two saddle dams, saddle dam 1 (approximately 410m long and 24m high) and saddle dam 2 (approximately 370m long and 24m high), spillway and Upper Control Works (UCW);
 - Secondary bund downstream of the main dam;
 - Gas Insulated Switchyard (GIS) within a secure permanent compound;
 - Loch Ness tailpond (lower reservoir);
 - Lower Control Works (LCW) including a partially submerged structure in Loch Ness with access provision, bulkhead gates, smolt and trash rack screens;
 - Bored underground waterways to transfer water between the headpond and tailpond, two headrace tunnels, two tailrace tunnels, pressure shaft and surge tanks/chambers;
 - Bored dry tunnels for access and cabling;
 - Underground power cavern complex approximately 300m long, 30m wide and 55m excavated height, housing the main inlet valves, pump turbines along with various mechanical and electrical equipment;
 - Underground valve cavern complex approximately 120m long, 10m wide and 20m excavated height, housing mechanical equipment used to isolate the headrace tunnels;
 - Borrow pit area of some 20ha;
 - 11 temporary compounds;

- Temporary worker accommodation village of some 21.5ha, for up to 1,000 staff which will contain various facilities including a shop, gym, sports amenities and medical care;
- 6 permanent compounds for the GIS switchyard and tunnel portals;
- New site access along with approximately 11.5km of new or upgraded tracks across the site. These will extend to a 10m wide corridor for two-way traffic during construction reduced to single lane once operational;
- 31 new permanent watercourse crossings including the construction of 5 bridges along with two temporary river crossings;
- Temporary diversion of the Affric-Kintail Way Long Distance Route;
- Landscaping and earthworks; and
- Tree planting and habitat compensation/enhancement.

1.5 This proposal falls under the provisions of the Electricity Act due to the combined power output of the operational development and the proposed development being over 50MW. It is classed as National Development by National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The intended operational lifetime for the scheme is 125 years, with mechanical/electrical plant refurbishment or overhaul every 15 to 30 years depending upon the component. Routine maintenance and inspections of specific infrastructure would also occur at shorter intervals in accordance with manufacturer requirements.

1.6 There are two options for the Upper Control Works (UCW) where water enters the waterways when generating electricity and where the waterways exit into the headpond when pumping water up from Loch Ness. Both would be submerged in the headpond and have similar above ground infrastructure. Option A would be southwest of the spillway and Option B is located between Saddle Dam 1 and Saddle Dam 2. There are also two options for the location of the underground power cavern complex, which would be located approximately 595m below ground level (75m AOD) under the headpond. Option A would be located east of Loch nam Breac Dearga and Option B would be located northeast of Loch nam Breac Dearga. The power cavern may be one single cavern, or two connected adjacent sections. A final decision would be made on these options post-consent when further information on ground conditions is available.

1.7 A micro-siting allowance has been proposed by the applicant to accommodate unknown ground conditions which includes:

- A 50m limit of deviation either side of existing access tracks which allows for a 100m corridor for proposed permanent access track;
- A 15m buffer either side of the indicative alignment of the temporary access track allowing for a 30m construction corridor;
- A working width of 50m for the realignment of paths; and
- A 200m buffer from the location as shown for UCW to allow for geological uncertainty.

The applicant anticipates that the final detailed design of various elements of the proposed development would be covered by condition and addressed with the Planning Authority at the time of project procurement. This would allow some flexibility on the approved design details, given manufacturers regularly update the specification of equipment and designs that are available. Refinement would

be required to remain within the parameters of the approved description of development and Environmental Impact Assessment.

- 1.8 A grid connection comprising a transmission line will be required to connect the proposed development via the new GIS switchyard adjacent to the powerhouse to the national electricity grid. For regulatory reasons, this will be subject to a separate consenting process with Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN-T) as the applicant. As is common for renewable energy projects, the form of connection, routing and any associated infrastructure requirements are to be confirmed by SSEN-T post-determination of this application. The intended grid connection infrastructure has been assessed in the EIAR, albeit at a high level given the number of unknown elements, and the applicant has provided Further Environmental Information (FEI) regarding the proposed connection to the consented Bingally substation.
- 1.9 The proposed project also requires the Dochfour Weir to be upgraded, as well as any additional canal and loch side infrastructure to enable the transportation of abnormal loads and barge loads to and from the site via Loch Ness and the Caledonian Canal. These associated developments would necessitate separate planning permissions, with their intended design and environmental effects, where known and identifiable at this initial stage, being appraised within Section 7 of this report. These additional elements, as well as the intended grid connection, are considered to form part of the wider EIA Project.
- 1.10 The applicant made use of the Council's Pre-Application Advice Service for Major Developments (23/03715/PREMAJ) in February 2024. The major pre-application response summarised the key issues, noting that pumped storage hydroelectric schemes are national developments, identified in NPF4, therefore, the need for such projects is established. The response noted that the Council is supportive of renewable energy developments and its associated infrastructure where it can be appropriately sited and designed to not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments. It stated that this site is challenging and raised concerns that would require to be addressed in any future application; these included:
- Potential impacts on the qualifying interests of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) - the River Moriston SAC, Urquhart Bay Woods SAC and Moray Firth SAC;
 - Landscape and visual effects on the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig Special Landscape Area (SLA), as well as impact on Scheduled Ancient Monuments, such as Urquhart Castle, both in isolation and with any cumulative schemes;
 - Disturbance of carbon rich soils and peatland;
 - Ecological impacts and the need to deliver biodiversity enhancement;
 - Transport and outdoor access impacts during construction;
 - Assessment of flood risk, drainage, and measures to protect private water supplies; and
 - The temporary worker village impacts for the site and surrounding area.
- 1.11 A Proposal of Application Notice (24/04410/PAN) was submitted to THC on the 8 October 2024. The PAN provided a formal opportunity to comment on the

consultation approach. The PAN was noted with no specific comments at the THC's South Planning Applications Committee on 19th November 2024. The applicant held five pre-application consultation community events between May and September 2024. The first two events were held on 23 May 2024 at the MacDonald Drumossie Hotel in Inverness which involved business and community representatives with a meeting for the local community held on 24 May 2024 at Glenurquhart Public Hall, Drumnadrochit. Drop-in style events were held on 14 August 2024 at Balnain Village Hall, 18 September 2024 at Millennium Hall, Invermoriston and 19 September 2024 at the Wildside Centre, Foyers. The events were publicised through Community Councils, distribution of leaflets, through the proposed development website, social media and in the local press.

1.12 The application is supported by an EIA Report (EIAR), the contents of which has been informed through an EIA Scoping exercise (24/02045/SCOP). The EIA Scoping Report was submitted with a request for an EIA Scoping Opinion to the ECU on 26 April 2024. A Scoping Response was issued to the ECU on 19 October 2024. The EIAR contains chapters covering: the project and site description; evolution of design and alternatives; approach to EIA; planning policy; landscape and visual; terrestrial ecology; ornithology; aquatic and marine ecology; water environment; flood risk and water resources; cultural heritage; access, traffic and transport; noise and vibration; geology and ground conditions; socio-economics, tourism and recreation; climate; forestry and summary of effects. The application is also accompanied by a Pre-Application Consultation Report (PAC) and Planning Statement.

1.13 No substantive variations to the application have been made since the application was made. Several rounds of EIA Further Environmental Information (FEI) were however submitted during the consideration of the application. This comprised:

Round 1 - July 2025

- updated visualisations from selected viewpoints requested by the Council;
- hydrological assessment and water level information in relation to designated environmental and cultural heritage receptors, as requested by NatureScot and Historic Environment Scotland (HES);
- revised peat management information in response to an objection from Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) on peat disturbance at the temporary workers accommodation; and
- corrections covering water level information and biodiversity net gain.

Round 2 - September 2025

- aquatic ecology, water level modelling and further details regarding the applicant's approach to the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in response to an objection from NatureScot.

Round 3 - June 2026

- Urquhart Bay Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to assess erosion and geology, respond to technical questions on the fish pass, following the continued objection from NatureScot.

Round 4 - September 2026

- Further details of the intended grid connection, Dochfour Weir, consideration of the project as a whole in EIA terms following the Raeshaw decision, along with a consolidated Statement to Inform HRA for Urquhart Bay Wood SAC and Ness Woods SAC.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The proposed development site is located approximately 9.5km south of Drumnadrochit and 6.5km north of Invermoriston, predominately under one ownership, the Balmaccan Estate. It is mainly rugged upland terrain featuring plateau moors used for rough grazing with pockets of woodland and commercial forestry to the east and south/southwest. It includes the summits of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh at 699m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) and Glas-Bheinn Mhòr at 651m AOD with Loch nam Breac Dearga (the location of the headpond) in the wide valley between these two hills. The terrain then descends from the rocky moorland plateau through Creag Nan Eun Forest to the A82 Trunk Road and the northern shore of Loch Ness (the tailpond).
- 2.2 The main site access would be from the Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) Balnain car park exit on the A831 public road, 6km west of Drumnadrochit, with a secondary access proposed from the A82 at Alltsigh, 5km north of Invermoriston. The main access route would use a forest track that runs east and then south in an arc through a large area of forest before reaching the River Coiltie. It is proposed to construct the Lower Control Works (LCW) as a marine operation, entirely from Loch Ness with a permanent access from the A82 on completion. The settlements of Alltsigh, Balbeg and Grotaiig are located within the red line site boundary. Alltsigh comprises a youth hostel and scattered houses and is located approximately 2.9km south of the headpond. Grotaiig and Balbeg are approximately 3km and 3.5km east respectively of the headpond and include houses and holiday rental properties. The village of Foyers is on the opposite side of Loch Ness, approximately 1.3km from the LCW. The EIAR identified eight residential and two residential/visitor accommodation properties, that could potentially be affected by the proposed development.
- 2.3 Recreation activities within the site includes walking and cycling but also mountaineering, rock climbing and fishing. The Great Glen Way, Loch Ness 360, Great Glen Canoe Trail and the Affric Kintail Way all run through the red line site boundary. There are also a high number of paths and short distance trails crossing the site including Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit route, the Glen Coiltie walking loop and four Core Paths. There are 23 other Core Paths within 5km. Loch Ness is described by VisitScotland as “probably Scotland’s best-known Loch” with various tourist and recreation attractions within 5km including Urquhart Castle, Invermoriston Bridge, Loch Ness Cruises, Loch Ness Visitor Centre and the Loch Ness viewpoint, Falls of Foyers and Falls of Divach, Boleskine House, Nessieland, and Glenmoriston Shooting Ground amongst many others. There are also a wide range of shops, cafes, restaurants and visitor accommodation in the surrounding area.

Environmental Designations, Habitats and Ornithology

- 2.4 The North Inverness Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Dubh Lochs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies within the northern part of the site boundary. The qualifying feature is breeding Slavonian Grebe with the site supporting three pairs. Designated sites for ecology and ornithology within 10km are tabled below. There are no locally designated nature conservation sites within 1km, however, the site is located near to, and partly within, the East Inverness-Shire Buglife Important Invertebrate Area (IIA). The site is also within the Northern Highlands Natural Heritage Zone.

Designation	Distance to Site Boundary (Approximate)	Qualifying Interests
Ness Woods SAC	0.7km south	Mixed woodland, oak woodland and otter
Inverfarigaig SSSI	Concurrent with Ness Woods SAC	Upland mixed ash woodland
Easter Ness SSSI	Concurrent with Ness Woods SAC	Upland mixed ash woodland and upland oak woodland
Urquhart Bay SAC and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	1.9km east	Alder woodland on floodplains
Dubh Lochs SSSI	2km north/northeast	Ornithological features
Balnagrantach SSSI	2.4km north	Breeding Slavonian Grebe
Loch Knockie and nearby lochs SPA	4.6km southeast	Breeding Slavonian Grebe
Knockie Lochs SSSI	4.6km southeast	Post-breeding Slavonian Grebe
Glen Affric to Strathconon SPA	9.5km northwest	Breeding Golden Eagle
Loch Ruthven SAC	9.8km east	Clear water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation, otter
Loch Ruthven SPA and Ramsar Site	9.9km east	Breeding Slavonian Grebe

- 2.5 The EIAR states the area surveyed was considered of limited value to foraging or commuting bats with one main group of trees with the potential to support roosting bats. Terrestrial site surveys detected evidence of protected species including otter, water vole, pine marten, red squirrel and badger. Some suitable wildcat habitat was identified. Following agreement with relevant stakeholders through the Scoping process, targeted surveys were not carried out for bat activity, great crested newt, beaver, red squirrel, mountain hare, hedgehog, common amphibians and reptiles and invertebrates. Site surveys recorded 18 important breeding moorland bird species (including wader, grouse and perching birds), a breeding site for one raptor, and also sites for divers and Slavonian Grebe.
- 2.6 The proposed development area includes 0.78ha of native broadleaf woodland that is noted on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) and classified as ancient (of semi-natural origin). It is located on steep ground at the edge of Loch Ness, near and along the River Coiltie, within the Urquhart Bay Wood and Ness Woods SACs.
- 2.7 The principal habitats recorded at the site include raised and blanket bogs with large patches of temperate shrub heathland to the north and around the headpond. To the east of the headpond towards Loch Ness there is dry grass and arctic, alpine and subalpine scrub. Along the northern bank of Loch Ness is Ruskich Wood with Scots pine woodland, commercial coniferous woodland, broadleaved deciduous woodland and mixed deciduous woodland. There are large areas of shallow peat across the area for the proposed headpond with a number of small pockets of deeper peat in naturally occurring basins in the bedrock. Peat depth surveys recorded varying depths of peat with an average depth of between 0.52m (Phase 1 survey) and 0.5m (Phase 2 survey). Peat depths reach >3m in some areas with two survey probes measuring >5m.

Landscape Designations, Wild Land and Landscape Character

- 2.8 The site lies partly within the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig Special Landscape Area (SLA). The Monadhliath Wild Land Area (WLA), Glen Strathfarrar NSA and Glen Affric National Scenic Area (NSA) are within the 20km study area.

Designated Landscape	Distance and direction from the proposed development
Special Landscape Area (SLA)	
Loch Ness and Duntelchaig	Within the site
Wild Land Areas (WLA)	
Monadhliath	14km to southeast
National Scenic Areas (NSA)	
Glen Strathfarrar	12km to northwest

Glen Affric	16km to west
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- 2.9 The headpond would be located in Landscape Character Type (LCT) 220 Rocky Moorland Plateau. The access to the headpond, construction sites and temporary workers accommodation would be located in LCT 226 Wooded Glen – Inverness and the tailpond would be located in LCT 225 – Broad Steep-Sided Glen. LCT 220 – Rugged Massif, LCT 221 – Rolling Uplands – Inverness, LCT 224 – Farmed and Wooded Foothills and LCT 227 – Farmed Strath – Inverness are located within the wider study area. LCT 229 and LCT 220 are also located within this wider area.

Built Heritage

- 2.10 There is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM), prehistoric Dun Scriben Fort (SM6220), located within the red line site boundary approximately 1.5km to the northwest of the tailpond. There is also one SAM, prehistoric Craig Mony Fort (SM5808), which overlooks Drumnadrochit and is located within the EIA 1km study area. There is one Listed Building within the site, Alltsigh House (LB15016 - Category B) located to the south, approximately 2.7km from the proposed headpond. There is also one Category A, nine Category B and four Category C Listed buildings within the 1km study area. The majority of these assets date to the post-medieval period and are linked to the growth of settlements along Glen Urquhart to the north of the site boundary and Foyers on the eastern side of Loch Ness. A further nine SAMs and 31 Listed buildings were identified within a 3km wider study area. There were no Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Registered Battlefields, World Heritage Sites, or Conservation Areas identified within the site or the 1km study area.

Hydrology

- 2.11 The site is situated on the northern side of the Loch Ness catchment. The headpond and associated tunnels lie between two sub catchments of Loch Ness, Allt Saigh in the south and River Coiltie in the north, which both flow into Loch Ness. Loch Ness is connected to Loch Dochfour via the Bona Narrows; it is a water resource for the northern section of the Caledonian Canal and provides a location for various recreational activities. There are also three existing large-scale hydro-electric schemes in operation on Loch Ness, two located at the southeastern end of the loch closer to Fort Augustus – Foyers and Glendoe, with Glenmoriston on the western bank. The entire site is within Groundwater Drinking Water Protected Areas (GWPA); the Inverness GWPA in the east of the site and the Northern Highlands GWPA in the western part. The eastern part of the site is within the Loch Ness Surface water Drinking Water Protected Area (SWPA).

- 2.12 Water levels in Loch Ness and Loch Dochfour are driven by a combination of catchment inflows (a large proportion of which are modified by reservoirs and hydro schemes), the operation of Foyers PSH, and spill over Dochfour Weir and Dochgarroch Lock. Levels are controlled within Loch Ness in order to ensure that water supply into the Caledonian Canal is maintained to ensure navigability and minimum flows are maintained in the River Ness to prevent flooding of Inverness. Extensive works have been undertaken to reduce flood risk within Inverness through the construction of the River Ness Flood Protection Scheme. Within the wider area, Loch Ness and its upstream catchment feeds flood water into a Potentially Vulnerable Area (PVA) with regard to flood risk – PVA 01/21 Inverness. This has increased the standard of protection from the River Ness, downstream of Ness Bridge, from tidal flooding. Areas between the Ness Bridge and Ness Islands are not defended as part of the scheme and remain at risk during extreme fluvial flood events based on the SEPA Flood Maps.
- 2.13 SEPA Flood Maps confirm fluvial flood risk from both the River Coiltie and the River Enrick where they meet to enter Loch Ness, particularly at the A82 at Drumnadrochit. However, the maps do not give an indication of flood risk from smaller watercourses in close proximity to the site. The watercourses are likely to have a quick response to rainfall events, and the prospect of flooding is considered low and was scoped out of the EIAR. The maps show the same areas are at risk of pluvial flooding with further ponded areas of high likelihood flooding along the A82 around Drumnadrochit. Due to the steeply graded and semi-impermeable nature of the site and surrounding area, it should be expected that local storm events will produce rapid surface water run-off. The addition of hardstanding areas and new tracks also has the potential to change natural flow paths and increase surface water run-off from these areas.

Cumulative Development

- 2.14 The effects of the proposed development were assessed in combination with those of other operational, consented, under construction and in-planning projects within 23km. These cover a range of project types including PSH projects, wind farms, substations and associated transmission infrastructure such as overhead lines. Appendix 1 – Cumulative Developments provides the list of projects assessed by the applicant (EIAR Table 4-8). Since the submission of the application, Loch Kemp PSH Scheme, on the opposite side of Loch Ness from this proposal, was presented to the South Planning Applications Committee on 19 June 2025 where Members determined that the Council raise objection to ECU. This has now been heard at a Public Local Inquiry (PLI) with a decision awaited from Scottish Ministers. Bingally substation, which will provide the grid connection for this project (approximately 15km to the northwest) has been granted planning permission as has Crathaich Wind Farm (approximately 10km to the northwest), whilst the Council raised an objection to ECU for Culachy (approximately 20km to the south west) and Loch Liath (approximately 9km to the northwest) Wind Farms which have been heard at PLI. Culachy Wind Farm has recently been refused by Scottish Ministers with a decision awaited for Loch Liath Wind Farm.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

3.1	16 February 2026	25/03507/SCOP: Modification to the existing Ness Weir	EIA Scoping Response Issued
3.2	9 December 2025	25/03786/PAN: Modification to the existing Ness Weir	Reported to SPAC
3.3	26 June 2025	25/02079/PNO: Prior notification under Regulation 62 - subterranean ground investigation and associated works required in connection with Glen Earrach Pumped Storage Hydro	Prior Approval Not Required
3.4	10 December 2024	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 SPAC
3.5	9 October 2024	24/04410/PAN: Development of pumped storage hydro with storage capacity of up to 30,000 megawatt hours with up to 2,000 megawatts installed electrical generation capacity. Water will be pumped, via proposed tunnels, into and from turbines located between Loch Ness and Loch nam Breac Dearga	Reported to SPAC
3.6	19 September 2024	24/02045/SCOP: Proposed pumped hydro storage scheme Glen Earrach/Loch nam Breac Dearga scoping report	EIA Scoping Response Issued
3.7	19 September 2024	24/00617/PREMAJ: Loch nam Breac Dearga Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme - Erection and operation of a pumped storage hydroelectric scheme and associated infrastructure.	Pre-application Advice Pack Issued

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Advertised: Section 36 Application and EIA Development

Date advertised:

- Inverness Courier – 25 April 2025 and 2 May 2025
- The Scotsman - 25 April 2025

- Edinburgh Gazette - 25 April 2025

Further Environmental Information date advertised:

- Inverness Courier – 8 July 2025, 12 September 2025, 26 June 2026 and 4 September 2026
- Edinburgh Gazette - 8 July 2025, 12 September 2025 and 4 September 2026

Representation Deadline: 5 October 2026

Representations Received by The Highland Council: 1 representation (1 comment of support)

Representations Received by The Energy Consents Unit: 77 representations (66 Objections and 11 comments of support)

(Details of representations above correct on 21 September 2026)

4.2 Material considerations raised in objections are summarised as follows:

- Does not comply with the Electricity Act or NPF4 Policies 3,4,5 and 11 as insufficient mitigation has been applied as part of the proposed development.
- Impact on natural heritage including direct and indirect ecological impacts on North Inverness Lochs SPA, River Moriston SAC, Urquhart Bay Woods SAC, Moray Firth SAC, River Farigaig, Loch Ness and associated river catchments along with the work of Rewilding Europe at Loch Ness.
- The Inverfarigaig SSSI is missing from the assessment. The integrity of the SSSI would be impacted as it joins Loch Ness which is in conflict with NPF4 Policy 4.
- Impact on aquatic ecosystems from differing temperatures, oxygen levels and water volume affecting Atlantic Salmon, European Eel, 3/5 spined stickleback, freshwater pearl, Brown Trout, Arctic Char and bryophytes on the loch.
- Spread of invasive species from Loch Ness into Loch Na Breac Dearga and other hill lochs such as the European minnow which impacting the ecological system.
- Significant impact on salmon with numbers of migrating salmon from the River Ness already low. Changes in water levels will also impact shoreline habitats and ecosystems including birds such as Osprey and other wildlife such as Moray Firth Bottlenose Dolphins.
- Sterilisation of biodiversity on over 100m of shoreline along Loch Ness at the LCW with danger to swimmers, sailors, divers and anglers.
- Impact on birds from the industrialisation of the landscape including destruction of bird nesting sites and proximity to construction activity and changes in loch levels.
- Impact on habitat of mammals including otters and water vole.
- Loss of peatland will release thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide with eroded peat ending up in Loch Ness.
- Impact on fishing in Loch Na Breac Dearga and depletion of fish stocks in Loch Ness impacting community angling associations.

- Operation could cause a 52cm change to water levels which together with other schemes could rise to 1.25m which will impact recreation, ecology and navigation (including operation of Deepscan Cruises, Castle Cruises, cruiser rental businesses and Urquhart Bay Harbour), additional measures are needed to support the proposed “stop generating” control mechanism.
- Risk of increased flooding and increased water levels in Loch Ness including during severe storms and along the B852 which would restrict access to Inverness, local community services and for tourists. Drumnadrochit sewage treatment works would also be impacted by increased flood risk.
- Cumulative impact of multiple PSH development in the Great Glen impacting hydrology and water levels of Loch Ness and River Ness including seasonal water levels which will impact ecology, water and shorelines – also resulting in biodiversity loss, loss of recreation opportunities, ability to retain local residents and attract tourists.
- Dependence on Dochfour Weir upgrade for which no details have been submitted, or consented, with no evidence that it would provide safe mitigation.
- Inadequate time to convene an effective Water Management Board, reliance on restricted historical data, limited sampling, desk top modelling and assumptions plus substantive errors in the assessment.
- Water pollution control relies on mitigation after the event as opposed to prevention measures.
- Significant impact on recreational walking routes for an extended period with diversions and disruptive construction affecting local recreation and tourism.
- Inappropriate diversion for the Affric-Kintail Way only 20m from the construction works and only 2m wide which would not cater for cyclists, horse riders and walkers.
- Traffic volume increase, disruption to the A82, particularly during tourist season, resulting in congestion on the A831 at the junction with the A82, inadequate site access from the A831 and increased risks of accidents to walkers, horse riders and pedestrians on narrow roads with limited walkways plus cumulative impacts on roads with other schemes.
- Errors in traffic assessment including sensitivity of receptors on the A831, specifically the Strathnacro section which is well used by walkers, tourists and the local community as the gateway to Glen Affric. Bingally substation has not been included in the cumulative assessment and “fear and intimidation” to the local community using surrounding routes has been underassessed.
- The access track from the A831 will be upgraded and sealed with tarmac. This will be visible from the A831 through Glen Urquhart with noise echoing. No more felling should take place until all construction work requiring the same access is completed to shield the impact. Mitigation of run-off into the River Coiltie and River Enrick should also be considered.
- Up to 1,000 temporary workers, equating to a village which will double the size of Drumnadrochit, drawing on local services creating problems for the local community and filling tourist accommodation. Ambulance response

times, already slowed by traffic congestion, will be further compromised. Enduring months or years of intense HGV flow and noisy, round-the-clock construction will force out residents from the community and fundamentally alter the character.

- Impact on operations of Forestry and Land Scotland with the volume of construction through woodland resulting in loss of income for contractors, hauliers, sawmills and the wider supply chain.
- Light pollution.
- Impact on cultural heritage including scheduled monuments and listed buildings including Dun Deardail, Cherry Tree Island Crannog and Urquhart Castle due to varying water levels.
- Impact on the character of the area including the Great Glen and Loch Ness with the iconic natural and cultural heritage which creates local identity including industrialising the landscape which will impact tourism.
- Construction impact on views from Meall Fuar-mhonaigh of the work compounds at Loch nam Dearga and permanent views of Loch nam Dearga significantly altered. The outlook will have an unnatural “squared off” appearance of the 1km long dam and two small dams to the north with a significantly larger footprint and 11.5km of new access tracks.
- Concentration of renewable energy infrastructure (including Foyers and Red John PSH developments) across a relatively small area which has reached saturation point with fundamental risk to the SLA and wildlife including birds of prey.
- Long term visual impact of permanent structures in Loch Ness which will alter the natural loch shoreline along with the outlook across open views and a relatively unspoiled natural setting.
- Visual impact from construction of the LCW along the shores of Loch Ness over several years seen from multiple locations around the loch.
- Impact on the setting of the Category B Listed Boleskine House from the permanent structures along the Loch Ness shoreline.
- Medium and long-term impacts of construction and operational noise at Boleskine House.
- Impact of noise associated with blasting and tunnelling.
- Operational noise.
- Increased water levels affecting Urquhart Bay Woodlands SAC, wider ecosystem and protected species including otters. The woods currently experience seasonal flooding and the introduction of further PSH will increase the number and severity of flood events.

4.3 Non-Material considerations raised:

- Security of the PSH.
- Outdated technology which essentially comprises a huge battery and will be superseded shortly by more efficient and less invasive battery alternatives in more appropriate locations.
- It would only provide between 15 and 20 hours of stored electricity which will not make a significant contribution to the storage required.
- Scotland already produces more electricity than it needs or can export to England. By 2030 and beyond, Scotland will have significant excess

capacity. The Scottish Government target of 20GW of onshore wind by 2030 will be met comfortably.

- Given the PSH will not be operational until the 2030s is it actually required.
- The applicant will sell electricity into the grid for a higher price than it pays the grid for the electricity to pump the water.
- Commercial need will drive the operation of all PSH schemes which could result in breaches of existing CAR licence/s.
- The scheme uses spare wind farm energy to pump water, and concerns were raised when there is no wind for a prolonged period meaning more energy is used than created.
- Whilst the applicant has committed to a three-year study on Loch Ness thermocline, this should have been carried out well in advance of the planning application submission and provided as supporting information.
- Concerns are raised as to whether statutory bodies and other interested parties have the resources to hold the developer to account should there be breaches of planning condition if the application is consented.
- The whole project has not been adequately assessed with “salami slicing” of different elements of the development.
- Concerns that coordination between the various PSH operators will be effective;
- The applicant has referenced a community benefit package of 5% of “gross margin revenues”, with figures of between £20m and £25m per annum noted. Basing the community benefit on “gross margin revenues” raises concern as it is linked to the performance of the PSH, therefore, it could be a higher or lower than the figures stated. It was also noted that 5% of “gross margin revenues” will be significantly less than 5% of “gross revenue” as suggested in the media.
- Construction will disturb extensive bedrock, potentially releasing trapped radon gas leading to concerns that local homes will be at increased risk of long-term radon exposure.

4.4 Material considerations raised in support are summarised as follows

- Provide a significant contribution to Net Zero.
- Improve energy security.
- Socio-economic benefits.

4.5 All letters of representation received by THC are available for inspection via the Council's Eplanning portal which can be accessed through the internet www.wam.highland.gov.uk/wam. Those representations received by ECU can be accessed via www.energyconsents.scot. It should be noted that the single representation received by THC is a duplicate of a submission to ECU.

5. CONSULTATIONS

Consultations undertaken by The Highland Council

5.1 **Glen Urquhart Community Council (Host) object** to the application raising concerns regarding the significant adverse landscape and visual effects, detrimental impact on designated Ancient Woodland, peatland, protected species, ecology and water resources. They noted other issues including

increased flood risk, impact on cultural heritage, recreation and local communities in the wider Loch Ness area.

- 5.2 The Community Council also highlights concerns regarding construction traffic, noise and vibration, pressure on local infrastructure and services, impacts on tourism, and the cumulative effects of other energy developments around Loch Ness. Additionally, they consider the submitted EIAR does not adequately assess or mitigate these impacts and questions the certainty of proposed mitigation, biodiversity enhancement, climate benefits and community benefits, noting that many measures remain indicative only rather than secured.
- 5.3 Whilst the project may align with NPF4 objectives on climate and renewable energy it fails to meet the balancing requirement specifically for Policy 4 which protects natural places, Policy 5 which discourages development on carbon rich soils and peat, Policy 11 which demands sensitive siting and protection of environmental assets and Policy 20 which calls for protection of aquatic systems and natural bodies. It concludes that development should be done in the right place, and in the right way, with full regard for Scotland's environmental and cultural integrity.
- 5.4 Overall, the Community Council concludes that the environmental and community impacts would outweigh the benefits of the proposal and objects to the application. It seeks either refusal of the scheme or the imposition of robust conditions, independent monitoring and legally binding mitigation and community benefit arrangements.
- 5.5 **Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council object** to the application raising concerns regarding landscape and visual impacts, ecological effects, peatland loss, pollution risks, traffic disruption and cumulative impacts on Loch Ness. They highlight concerns regarding the LCW, impacts on Loch Ness water levels and aquatic ecology, along with the potential effects on tourism, local communities and road networks during construction. They consider the environmental and community impacts outweigh the claimed benefits of the proposed development which fails to satisfy relevant NPF4 policy requirements, particularly when viewed alongside other existing and proposed PSH around Loch Ness.
- 5.6 **Strathnairn Community Council object** to the application raising concerns regarding the adequacy of the supporting information submitted, detrimental environmental, landscape visual impacts, effects on tourism and recreation, traffic impacts, cumulative effects of multiple energy infrastructure projects within the Great Glen and Loch Ness area. The Community Council considers that the application lacks sufficient detail on the programme for construction, restoration and decommissioning, and provides insufficient certainty regarding the delivery of environmental mitigation and habitat restoration measures. They also question the need for the development and dispute the applicant's claims regarding energy efficiency, carbon savings and wider environmental benefits, seeking further clarification on the assumptions used to support these conclusions.

- 5.7 **Other Community Councils** – the following Community Councils in the wider surrounding area were consulted as they may be impacted by the routing to the site but did not respond to the consultation:
- Dores and Essich Community Council;
 - Fort Augustus and Glemoriston Community Council (Host);
 - Inverness West Community Council;
 - Kiltarlity Community Council; and
 - Strathglass Community Council.
- 5.8 **Access Officer** does not object to the application and note the submission of an Outline Access Management Plan (AMP) subject to a condition requiring a finalised detailed Access Management Plan. Additional detail is sought within the finalised AMP including mapping of access routes, proposed Core Path diversions and all relevant Rights of Way identified by ScotWays. Particular concern relates to potential impacts on several Rights of Way, access to Glas-Bheinn, recreational use of the River Ness and Great Glen Canoe Trail. They highlight the need to assess and mitigate cumulative impacts on outdoor access arising from multiple developments within the Great Glen.
- 5.9 **Community Wealth Building Team** do not object to the application. They note the applicant is one of the signatories of the Highland Social Value Charter, and they are closely engaged with the company regarding its ongoing commitments and community benefit proposals.
- 5.10 **Development Plans Team** do not object to the application. However, they note the proposed development proposal will only be considered to be in overall conformity with the Development Plan provided suitable mitigation is secured and further justification is provided regarding the need for additional pumped storage hydro capacity in Highland. As with other PSH schemes within Highland, at various stages in the planning process, there is no independent confirmation (from NESO or OFGEM for example) of a specific quantitative need for more PSH in Highland. The current excess of wind farm generated power in Highland should be resolved within the next few years, potentially 2031, but this is dependent on current grid infrastructure work programmes staying on target, when its export to areas of higher demand within Scotland and the wider UK network should have been facilitated via grid improvements. The Development Plans Team noted that current excess electricity can also be utilised in alternative ways such as via battery energy storage and conversion to other energy products such as hydrogen and “green” ammonia. The 480m hydraulic head between Loch nam Breac Dearga and Loch Ness is stated as the reason why this location is particularly suitable for PSH.
- 5.11 The response acknowledges the significant mitigation and benefits proposed by the applicant, including large-scale native woodland regeneration, peatland restoration, biodiversity enhancement, substantial construction employment, local economic benefits and substantial proposed long-term community benefit (although this is a non-material consideration). However, they raised concerns regarding the landscape and visual impacts from Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit,

on Loch Ness, within the SLA more broadly and associated with the LCW and construction traffic facilitating the lower works.

- 5.12 Whilst the above is noted, they conclude that the acceptability of the proposed development ultimately depends on planning judgment, specifically whether the landscape and visual impacts, amongst other concerns, outweigh national policy support for renewable energy.
- 5.13 **Ecology Officer objects** to the application given a lack of clarity regarding some aspects of calculation of biodiversity units, delivery of peatland enhancement and the potential impact of the OHL connection. The Ecology Officer considers that the biodiversity metric employed by the applicant may overstate biodiversity gains, particularly where native woodland creation has been treated as an enhancement of existing heathland rather than as a separate woodland habitat. Consequently, they sought further clarification regarding the biodiversity units claimed and the overall net gain figures presented.
- 5.14 In relation to peatland compensation, the Ecology Officer supports peatland restoration in principle but considers that the restoration package currently proposed does not fully meet the expected compensation requirements. Whilst approximately 1,140ha of peatland restoration is proposed through a combination of on-site and off-site measures, falling short of the expected compensation ratio for peatland losses. As such, they sought additional restoration and enhancement measures. This issue was still to be resolved with further advice expected in their updated consultation response following the latest round of FEI.
- 5.15 Given the lack of detail regarding the grid connection at this stage the Ecology Officer noted that no definitive conclusion can be reached on the ecological implications of the connection infrastructure and further assessment will be required through the subsequent consenting process.
- 5.16 Whilst their objection is noted it is considered that these details can be clarified through pre-commencement conditions. Additionally, the Ecology Officer recommended a comprehensive package of mitigation and monitoring measures be controlled through conditions including a Habitat Management Plan, Species Protection Plans, Bird Protection Plan, Environmental Clerk of Works supervision, water quality and fish monitoring, biosecurity measures, GIS data and long-term habitat management and restoration commitments.
- 5.17 **Environmental Health** do not object to the application subject to conditions controlling construction noise, vibration, blasting, dust impacts and private water supplies. They consider operational noise and vibration are unlikely to result in significant effects due to the distance between the development and nearby receptors. Potential impacts on two private water supplies have been identified; however, these can be managed through monitoring, mitigation measures and a detailed Water Management Plan. Additionally, the proposed worker accommodation and ancillary activities such as catering and retail premises will fall under various legislation governing caravan site licensing, food safety and general health and safety at work. Overall, the environmental and public health

effects of the development can be adequately controlled through planning conditions and mitigation measures.

- 5.18 **Flood Risk Management Team** do not object to the application, subject to conditions requiring Dochfour Weir is upgraded prior to the PSH, the weir upgrades are overseen by an appropriate Operational Management Plan, agreed stop-generation/curtailment level and SUDS. FRMT previously objected pending further justification from the applicant. Following clarification from the ECU that the proposed Dochfour Weir works do not form part of the Section 36 application and that it will be dealt with as a separate application considered on its own merits, FRMT withdrew its objection to the proposal. The stop-generation level is to be agreed by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA and the THC's Flood Risk Management Team. The condition will ensure that operation of the pumped storage hydro scheme does not increase flood risk to people or property and does not result in any increase in the frequency or magnitude of flooding within the Loch Ness catchment.
- 5.19 FRMT notes that any future works at Dochfour Weir would require separate consideration, additional consents and further flood risk assessment, and would be undertaken entirely at the developer's commercial risk.
- 5.20 **Forestry Officer** does not object to the application subject to conditions relating to tree protection, woodland management and compensatory planting. The proposal would result in the loss of approximately 10.89ha of woodland, including areas of designated Ancient Woodland and native woodland, primarily associated with access track upgrades and lower control works. The Forestry Officer supports the significant woodland enhancement proposals, including around 674ha of compensatory/native woodland planting, enhancement of 55ha of Ancient Woodland, native woodland creation and deer management measures. However, further detail is required to ensure compensatory planting fully complies with the Control of Woodland Removal Policy, particularly where Ancient Woodland is affected. Overall, they conclude that the significant public benefits of the pumped storage hydro scheme, together with substantial woodland creation and enhancement measures, outweigh the adverse forestry impacts. The application is therefore considered acceptable on balance, subject to the conditions noted.
- 5.21 **Historic Environment Team – Archaeology** do not object to the application subject to a condition requiring a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI). They agree that archaeological potential across much of the site area is low with the mitigation measures recommended to reduce predicted adverse impacts considered appropriate. They note that scrutiny of any specific lidar data and the subsequent ground-truthing of the results will be required in the first instance. Additional phases of work, such as evaluation or excavation may be identified as a result of the ground-truthing walkover survey. They recommend Good Practice Measures are set out including the marking out of any identified sensitive areas and the implementation of a protocol in the event of the discovery of previously unrecorded assets.
- 5.22 **Historic Environment Team – Conservation** - No response received.

- 5.23 **Landscape Officer objects** to the application. Whilst they broadly accept that the LVIA is robust and prepared in line with guidance and agrees with many of its conclusions, they consider that the assessment understates the significance of effects associated with the headpond infrastructure (main dam, saddle dams, compounds and access tracks), particularly as experienced from the summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh within the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA. Other elements of the scheme are generally accepted as having limited or acceptable effects. Concerns are raised regarding aspects of the LVIA methodology, including poor quality and inconsistent photography, and omissions in the assessment of recreational receptors, particularly users on Loch Ness such as canoeists. Highlights a missed opportunity to retain or enhance public amenity provision at the A82 through a new or improved layby and interpretation which can be controlled.
- 5.24 In terms of the SLA, they consider the LVIA insufficiently assesses individual Special Qualities and underestimates operational impacts. The proposed development, particularly the headpond structures, would appear prominent from Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, introducing large-scale engineered features into largely unbroken views and adversely affecting the perception of wildness and naturalness. This would significantly disrupt the relationship between the hill and its wider setting. Overall, concludes that the proposal would give rise to major adverse and significant effects on the “Dramatic Great Glen” Special Quality during operation, contrary to the applicant’s conclusions, and therefore objects to the development. While landscape changes to certain ridgelines and views are acknowledged, and some effects are not significant at greater distances, the key impact is at Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, although the overall integrity of the SLA is not considered to be compromised by the proposed development.
- 5.25 **Transport Planning Team** do not object to the application subject to conditions including a review of the traffic impact assessment and cumulative traffic effects, prohibiting construction traffic on the A831 east of the site access, a contractor-led Construction Traffic Management Plan, a Wear and Tear Agreement and road bond, a finalised Abnormal Indivisible Load Assessment, and access improvements at Balnain. Whilst they have not objected, they raised concerns regarding the transport strategy, particularly the decision to use the A831 at Balnain as the main construction and operational access instead of the preferred A82 route. While it accepts that the A831 can accommodate HGV traffic, it considers the predicted construction traffic levels to be optimistic for a development of this scale and questions assumptions relating to on-site material sourcing, delivery of the LCW by water, workforce travel arrangements and the treatment of timber haulage traffic. Therefore, a more robust assessment of construction traffic impacts is sought.
- 5.26 The additional justification provided in the FEI is acknowledged for the A831 access strategy, including engineering, environmental and community benefits. However, it is considered that the current Traffic Assessment does not reflect a realistic worst-case scenario. These matters are expected to be addressed through the recommended planning conditions.

Consultations Undertaken by the Energy Consents Unit

- 5.27 **British Telecom (BT) Group** do not object to the application. They initially noted there is an active radio link in close proximity to the site boundary to the south (along Loch Ness) which may cause interference to BT's current and presently planned radio network. Following the confirmation of grid references and a 100m minimum clearance from any structure to the radio link path they confirmed the proposed development would not cause interference to the radio network.
- 5.28 **BugLife** object to the application. They state that due to inadequate invertebrate surveys and assessment, there is insufficient information for an informed decision on the magnitude of the impacts to both aquatic and terrestrial invertebrates. Buglife is concerned loss potentially high value invertebrate habitats has not been assessed. They fundamentally disagree with the ecological assessment concluding that the impact on aquatic invertebrates would be negligible. This has meant there is no specific mitigation or compensation in place. BugLife notes that whilst NPF4 is supportive of renewable energy projects, national development projects such as this scheme must be considered against all NPF4 policies, with significant weight given to the nature crisis and the requirement of Policy 3 for national developments to "only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention". They cannot support the loss of biodiversity with no enhancement for aquatic habitats to benefit invertebrates and argue that the proposed development will lead to a loss of overall biodiversity.
- 5.29 Following the submission of FEI including further aquatic invertebrate survey work responding to their initial concerns BugLife maintained their objection. They consider the FEI is still not sufficient evidence to demonstrate that increased Loch Ness water level fluctuations would not adversely affect aquatic invertebrate communities. They feel the assessment of impacts is based on unsupported assumptions about tolerance of species to changing water levels and believes the likely effects on sensitive species and wider ecological relationships have not been adequately evaluated.
- 5.30 **Health and Safety Executive (HSE)** do not object to the application.
- 5.31 **Highlands and Islands Airports (HIAL)** do not object to the application. They note that the position and height of the proposed development would not infringe the safeguarding criteria and operation of Inverness Airport.
- 5.32 **Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** do not object to the application. HES reviewed potential impacts on a number of Scheduled Monuments, including Dun Scriben, Dun Deardail, Urquhart Castle and Cherry Island Crannog, and agreed with the applicant's assessment that effects on their cultural significance and settings would be negligible or neutral. It also accepted the modelling which indicates that proposed water level changes in Loch Ness would not result in significant indirect physical impacts on heritage assets.
- 5.33 Following the submission of FEI including further water level modelling, HES noted that while the information showed that more frequent changes in Loch

Ness water levels would occur, the fluctuations would remain within the loch's existing maximum and minimum water levels. On this basis, HES maintained their original conclusion that there would not be significant indirect physical impacts on nationally important heritage assets, including Cherry Island Crannog and Urquhart Castle. They are satisfied that Cherry Island Crannog would not become fully inundated as a result of the proposed development and that changes in water levels would remain within the historic range already experienced by the loch.

- 5.34 **Jacobite Loch Ness Cruises object** to the application. They operate cruises from both Dochgarroch Loch and Clansman Harbour on Loch Ness and consider the EIAR does not adequately address the effects of Loch Ness water level fluctuations on navigation, tourism and its operations. It is particularly concerned about the frequency and extent of water level changes, cumulative impacts from other PSH schemes, and the reliance on the proposed Dochfour Weir upgrade as mitigation. Jacobite Cruises also argues that tourism impacts across the wider Loch Ness area have not been properly assessed and seeks further evidence that no significant adverse effects would occur. Additionally, they raised concerns regarding the consultation process, stating that its previous engagement and submissions were not properly reflected in the applicant's consultation records.
- 5.35 **Joint Radio Company** do not object to the application.
- 5.36 **Ministry of Defence - Defence Infrastructure Organisation (MOD DIO)** do not object to the application. The proposed development falls outwith MOD safeguarded areas and does not affect other defence interests.
- 5.37 **Mountaineering Scotland object** to the application. They raised concern regarding the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development, particularly from the nearby hill summits of Meall Fuar-Mhonaigh and Glas-bheinn Mhor, which are popular hillwalking destinations. It considers that the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment underestimates the long-term visual effects of the development on the mountain environment. Their main concern relates to the operation of the headpond. With the repeated water level fluctuations exposing shorelines of bare rock, boulders and shingle, removing marginal vegetation and creating a conspicuously artificial landscape feature. It considers that these drawdown effects would emphasise the man-made nature of the reservoir and be readily apparent to hillwalkers.
- 5.38 Whilst accepting that the development would not significantly interrupt wider mountain views, Mountaineering Scotland disagree with the suggestion that the headpond would resemble a natural upland loch. They argue the reservoir's artificial form, exposed shorelines and associated infrastructure would make it clearly distinguishable from a natural landscape feature.
- 5.39 **National Air Traffic Control Services (NATS)** do not object to the application. The proposed development does not conflict with their safeguarding criteria.
- 5.40 **NatureScot object** to the application. They raised concerns regarding potential effects on the integrity of the River Moriston SAC and Urquhart Bay Woods SAC. Their concerns focused on the potential effects of the proposed operation of the

scheme and associated Dochfour Weir mitigation proposals on Atlantic salmon migration, freshwater pearl mussel interests, River Ness flows, Loch Ness water levels and the hydrological regime supporting alder woodland communities. NatureScot requested further information regarding fish passage, changes to flow regimes, operation of the proposed fish deterrent measures, impacts on spawning habitat and the potential extent and duration of woodland inundation.

- 5.41 Following submission of multiple rounds of FEI, NatureScot has been engaged throughout the determination process and has informally indicated that a number of previous concerns have been clarified. However, at the time of drafting this report, NatureScot's formal objection remained outstanding pending submission of a further consultation response.
- 5.42 In relation to the North Inverness Lochs SPA, NatureScot previously advised that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA. However, following more detailed consideration of the indicative grid connection, NatureScot requested further information regarding potential effects on Slavonian grebe and the final routing and assessment of the connection infrastructure. Their updated position on this matter remains awaited. NatureScot has advised that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of Ness Woods SAC or Moray Firth SAC.
- 5.43 NatureScot's role as the Scottish Government's statutory adviser on natural heritage matters is a significant material consideration. Accordingly, it is recommended that the Council's final position aligns with NatureScot's advice. Subject to NatureScot withdrawing its objection and all recommended mitigation, habitat management, monitoring and compensation measures being secured by condition and legal agreement, it is considered that the proposal could proceed without unacceptable effects on the qualifying interests of the affected designated sites noted.
- 5.44 **Ness District Salmon Fishery Board (NDSFB) object** to the application. They considered the proposed development would cause significant and potentially irreversible impacts on Loch Ness and the River Ness ecosystem, particularly for Atlantic salmon. Its principal concerns were that PSH operations could disrupt salmon migration, alter the natural hydrology of Loch Ness, damage shoreline invertebrate communities through repeated water level drawdown, and require modifications to Dochfour Weir that would adversely affect river flows and fish passage. NDSFB also raised concerns regarding cumulative impacts with other PSH schemes, insufficient ecological evidence, construction impacts, landscape effects, and the lack of a demonstrated need for the development. It concluded that the scheme conflicted with NPF4 policies relating to biodiversity, water management and environmental protection and should be refused.
- 5.45 Following the submission of FEI responding to their initial concerns NDSFB maintained and reinforced their objection. They argue the new modelling confirmed its concern that the River Ness would become a hydropeaking river, experiencing frequent and rapid water level fluctuations rather than the currently stable flow regime. NDSFB consider the risks to Atlantic salmon has been underestimated, particularly during spawning, fry development and smolt migration, and fundamentally disagree with the ecological assessment

concluding that impacts would be negligible. They also feel that shoreline ecology in Loch Ness would be damaged by repeated water level drawdowns and disputed the conclusions regarding macroinvertebrate impacts. They maintain their objection.

- 5.46 **Network Rail** do not object to the application. They noted that AIL construction traffic would pass over the Railway Overbridge 302/001 at Longman Road, Inverness. Given abnormal loads will impact Network Rail infrastructure the applicant is advised to have early engagement with their Abnormal Loads Team.
- 5.47 **Office for Nuclear Regulation** do not object to the application. They make no comment as the proposed development is outwith any nuclear site consultation zones.
- 5.48 **Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)** object to the application. They are not satisfied that impacts on the nationally important Slavonian grebe population and associated SPAs can be ruled out. They consider the vulnerable conservation status of the species, the scale and duration of the development, and potential operational effects create an unacceptable risk. They do not consider the proposed mitigation and survey evidence are sufficient to demonstrate no adverse effects on protected sites.
- 5.49 Following the submission of FEI responding to their initial concerns RSPB still consider the applicant has not demonstrated with sufficient certainty that the proposed development would avoid adverse effects on Slavonian grebes and related protected sites. Given the species has critically vulnerable status in the UK, they consider the mitigation measures proposed are inadequate. They maintain their objection.
- 5.50 **Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Scotland** had no comment on the application.
- 5.51 **Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SEN) Transmission** do not object to the application. Following review of the proposed development and its proximity to their existing operational infrastructure they have no concerns. Additionally, they do not anticipate any conflict between the proposed development and their new assets planned between Beaully and Fort Augustus.
- 5.52 **Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)** do not object to the application subject to conditions requiring Dochfour Weir is upgraded prior to the PSH, the weir upgrades are overseen by an appropriate Operational Management Plan, agreed stop-generation/curtailment level, finalised Peat Management Plan, finalised Materials Management Appraisal, details of watercourse crossings and pollution prevention measures. In relation to flood risk, SEPA accepted much of the Flood Risk Assessment methodology but considered that the proposed generation cut-off level of 17.6m AOD was too high and could increase flood risk around Loch Ness, including at Fort Augustus and downstream on the River Ness. SEPA initially objected pending either a reduction in the operational cut-off level or further justification from the applicant. Following clarification from the ECU that the proposed Dochfour Weir works do not form part of the Section 36 application and that it will be dealt with as a

separate application considered on its own merits, SEPA withdrew its objection to the proposal. The stop-generation level is to be agreed by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA and the THC's Flood Risk Management Team. The condition will ensure that operation of the pumped storage hydro scheme does not increase flood risk to people or property and does not result in any increase in the frequency or magnitude of flooding within the Loch Ness catchment.

- 5.53 SEPA notes that any future works at Dochfour Weir would require separate consideration, additional consents and further flood risk assessment, and would be undertaken entirely at the developer's commercial risk. The applicant is also required to continue engagement with SEPA's Water Permitting Team in relation to the associated Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations 2018 (EASR) licence application.
- 5.54 SEPA initially raised concerns with regards to the volume of peat disturbance, which was estimated at 400,000m³ with approximately 25% of this related to compounds and temporary workers accommodation. Following their comments the workers compound along with other facilities was minimised which reduced peat disturbance by 42%. This resulted in approximately 20% reduction in the total project peat disturbance which is welcomed by SEPA. Peat mitigation measures can be controlled through the submission of a revised and finalised Peat Management Plan, finalised Materials Management Appraisal based on intrusive ground investigations, construction of watercourse crossings in accordance with best practice and the EIA commitments and implementation of pollution prevention and environmental management measures.
- 5.55 **Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF)** had no comment on the application. However, they noted they were not included in the Scoping opinion stage in 2024 and asked to be included in future consultation on projects of this nature.
- 5.56 **Scottish Gas Networks (SGN)** do not object to the application. They note that they have no high-pressure assets in proximity to the proposed development.
- 5.57 **Scottish Water** do not object to the application. The proposed development is within a drinking water catchment where a Scottish Water abstraction is located and is designated as a Drinking Water Protected Area (DWPA). Measures will be required to protect water quality during construction and operation. They advise that, subject to the scheme operating without adversely affecting Loch Ness water levels, flow over the Dochfour Weir, or the Invermoriston abstraction, the development is expected to have a low impact on water resources. They request ongoing engagement as the proposed development progresses and emphasise the importance of appropriate pollution prevention along with mitigation measures.
- 5.58 **Scotways** stated they had no capacity to respond to the application.
- 5.59 **Transport Scotland** do not object to the application subject to conditions requiring the route for abnormal loads on the trunk road network, accommodation measures for abnormal loads including removal of street furniture, junction widening, any additional signing, and a Construction Traffic Management Plan

(CTMP). Construction traffic would use the A82, A831, A887 and A833, with HGV movements on parts of the A82 increasing beyond assessment thresholds. Whilst this is noted they agree that construction traffic would have only minor effects on the A82, along with other affected routes, and considers mitigation measures and conditions are appropriate.

- 5.60 **The Woodland Trust object** to the application. This is due to the loss of Ancient Woodland, concerns over harm to irreplaceable woodland habitats and veteran trees as the proposed development would result in the direct loss of woodland associated with the LCW, access tracks and enabling works along with potential indirect impacts arising from construction activity and tunnelling. They consider the application has not adequately demonstrated that impacts on Ancient Woodland and veteran trees can be avoided or mitigated, nor that the public benefits of the scheme outweigh the loss of irreplaceable habitat in accordance with NPF4 Policy 6 and the Control of Woodland Removal Policy. Having reviewed the FEI they maintained their objection.

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY/OTHER POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 Appendix 2 – Development Plan and Other Material Policy Considerations of this report provides details of the documents which comprise the adopted Development Plan, including details of pertinent planning policies as well as adopted supplementary guidance, and other material considerations which are relevant to the assessment of the application.

7. PLANNING APPRAISAL

- 7.1 Should Ministers approve the development, it would receive deemed planning permission under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended). Although not a planning application, the Council processes Section 36 applications in a similar manner given that planning permission may be deemed to be granted.
- 7.2 Schedule 9 of The Electricity Act 1989 contains considerations in relation to the impact of proposals on amenity and fisheries. These considerations mean the developer is required to:
- have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings, and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and
 - reasonably mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects.
- 7.3 It should be noted that for applications under the Electricity Act 1989 that the Development Plan is just one of a number of considerations, and therefore Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 which requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, is not engaged. That said, the application is still required to be assessed against all policies of the

Development Plan relevant to the application, all national and local policy guidance, and all other material considerations relevant to the application.

Planning Considerations

7.4 The key considerations in this case are:

- a) Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy
- b) Energy and Economic Benefits
- c) Tourism and Recreation
- d) Community Benefit
- e) Siting, Design, Materials and Layout Evolution
- f) Construction
- g) Landscape and Visual Impacts (including on Wild Land Areas)
- h) Noise and Vibration
- i) Roads, Transport and Access
- j) Hydrology, Flooding and Water Environment
- k) Water, Drainage and Peat
- l) Natural Heritage (including ornithology)
- m) Biodiversity Enhancement
- n) Forestry
- o) Built and Cultural Heritage
- p) Other Material Considerations

Development Plan / Other Planning Policy

- 7.5 The Development Plan comprises National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), the adopted Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) and all statutorily adopted supplementary guidance, including Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance. Appendix 3 - Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy of this report provides an assessment of compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy. The IMFLDP2 identifies the Loch Ness area as a "sustainable tourism potential growth area," crucial for the local economy.
- 7.6 NPF4 outlines that Scotland is facing unprecedented challenges and that we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and embrace and deliver radical change so we can tackle and adapt to climate change, restore biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing and build a wellbeing economy while striving to create great places. Therefore, NPF4 sets out that choices need to be made about how we can make sustainable use of our natural assets in a way that benefits communities.
- 7.7 NPF4 outlines 18 national developments that support the plan's spatial strategy. National developments would be a focus for delivery, as well as exemplars of the Place Principle, placemaking and a Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach to economic development. Six of the national developments support the delivery of sustainable places. Among these is national development number 2 – Pumped Hydro Storage and 3 - Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure.

- 7.8 In summary, the principle of pumped hydro storage development is well established in national policy, with the proposed development being of national importance for the delivery of the national Spatial Strategy. NPF4 considers that pumped hydro storage development would play a significant role in balancing and optimising electricity generation and maintaining the operability of the electricity system as part of the transition to net zero. It is further necessitated with the move towards a decarbonised system with much more renewable generation, the output from which is defined by weather conditions. This is also reflected within other material policy considerations, with Government policy giving significant weight to the importance of achieving net zero through the deployment of renewable energy development at pace. Government legislation and policy maintain the commitment to attaining net zero by 2045. When determining renewable energy proposals, the ability to meet these targets therefore demands substantial weight when undertaking the planning balance exercise.
- 7.9 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 would clearly require a balancing exercise to be undertaken, which is reflected throughout NPF4. At the regional level, HwLDP also offers support for renewable development proposals where they are located, sited and designed such as they would not be significantly detrimental overall, individually or cumulatively with other developments. A more detailed analysis of relevant policy and guidance is provided in Appendix 3 - Compliance with the Development Plan / Other Planning Policy.

Energy and Economic Benefit

- 7.10 The Council continues to respond positively to the Scottish Government's renewable energy agenda. Whilst there has been a focus on onshore wind energy in Highland for the last generation, large scale pumped hydro storage schemes are becoming a viable complementary renewable energy source alongside on and offshore wind energy. The Highland region offers significant opportunities for pumped hydro storage development given the requirement for an upper and lower reservoir to successfully generate electricity. Onshore wind energy developments in Highland accounts for around 22% of the installed onshore wind energy capacity in Scotland (Looking at Renewable Energy Planning Database (REPD), July 2026) and the opportunities for pumped hydro storage development can further diversify and help balance demands on the transmission network.
- 7.11 Notwithstanding any impacts that this proposal may have upon the landscape resource, amenity and heritage of the area, the development could be seen to be compatible with Scottish Government policy and guidance, making a substantial contribution to meeting the Government, UK and European energy targets, with the development having the potential to generate up to 1,800MW and with a considerable storage capacity of around 34,000 megawatt hours (MWh) making it one of the largest PSH schemes in the UK alongside other

proposals based within Highland including Earba (1,800MW and up to 40,000MWh) and Fearn (1,800MW and up to 37,000MWh).

- 7.12 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 17: Climate explains that to facilitate the proposed annual power generation, surplus energy generated from renewable and low carbon sources is used to pump water from Loch Ness to Loch nam Breac Dearga and to “prime” the Pumped Storage Hydro (PSH) scheme. The large amount of energy stored by the proposed development means that it would both store significant amounts of surplus wind energy, which would otherwise be lost and displace conventional generation reducing emissions. The proposed development therefore has the potential to rapidly supply clean electricity to the national grid, and it is estimated that it will save the UK energy system around £3 billion in costs over its first 20 years and forecast to be carbon negative within 18 months of completion. By 2030, it could reduce the carbon intensity of the UK energy system by around 10%.
- 7.13 Pumped hydro storage development provides an important mechanism for the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO₂), and other greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions into the atmosphere by reducing the consumption of fossil fuel generated mains electricity. However, during their manufacture, construction and decommissioning, renewable developments can result in the emissions of GHGs, particularly where natural carbon stores, such as peat, are present and potentially impacted by the development, often termed “carbon balance”. The EIAR assesses the GHG emissions and uses carbon dioxide equivalent in tonnes (tCO₂e) where equivalence means having the same warming effect as CO₂ over 100 years. The energy imported, stored and generated back to the grid during the first year of operation is expected to be 4,209GWh. The operational emissions over the design life of the proposed development (assumed to be 125 years) are estimated to be 4,087,800 tCO₂e (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent). Almost 90% of this results from pumping water up to the headpond between cycles. Therefore, given the significant scale and generation capacity of the proposed development, the carbon payback time is expected to be achieved in the second year of operation.
- 7.14 The proposed development anticipates a construction period of approximately 8 years. The applicant divides this into two years pre-construction and enabling; and six years of main construction. A design life of 125 years is assumed with proper maintenance. The carbon intensity of the proposed development varies over its anticipated operational lifespan due to the proposed development's reliance on electricity from the UK grid to pump water from the tailpond to the headpond and variance in expected generation. Carbon intensity is expressed in “kgCO₂e/kWh” which stands for kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalent per kilowatt-hour. This unit is used to measure the carbon footprint of electricity generation or consumption and quantifies the greenhouse gas emissions associated with producing or using one kilowatt-hour of electricity. In 2030, the first year of operation, the carbon intensity of the proposed development was calculated to be 0.05 kgCO₂e/kWh. In 2045, the year Scotland is due to reach net zero, the carbon intensity is anticipated to drop to 0.01 kgCO₂e/kWh. To compare the proposed development against a counterfactual gas-fired (CCGT) generating facility, a representative figure for the carbon intensity of an CCGT is

assumed to be significantly higher at 0.33 kgCO₂e/kWh. As noted above, by 2030, the development could reduce the carbon intensity of the UK energy system by around 10%.

- 7.15 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 16 Socio-economics, Tourism and Recreation provides an assessment of the impact on the local, regional and Scottish economy. During construction, the applicant's evaluation of the socio-economic impact and operation was assessed as having beneficial effects for the regional Highland economy. It would create new temporary jobs through the construction programme, and a high proportion of the economic and employment impacts would come from the tunnelling works, and the powerhouse and lower control works, which require extensive excavation and support work.
- 7.16 The pre-construction and enabling phase is anticipated to generate a peak temporary workforce of 375 people or 100 person years of employment (PYE) in year one and 375 PYE in year two which equates to a total of 475 gross direct PYEs. Taking into consideration leakage (take up outside Highlands) and displacement (jobs lost when workers move to this development) this gives a net average additional employment of 285 PYE per annum likely to be taken up within the Highland Council area and 338 net average additional PYEs in the wider area (outside Highlands). It is estimated that construction would contribute approximately £49.5million to the national economy of which £21.4million is likely to be within the Highland area.
- 7.17 The construction phase is anticipated to generate an average of 588 PYEs over five years, and up to six, which equates to 2,940 PYEs in total over the construction period. Taking into consideration leakage and displacement this gives a net average additional employment of 1,765 PYE jobs per annum within the Highland Council area and 2,094 in the wider area (outside Highlands). It is estimated that this would contribute approximately £306.8m to the national economy of which £132.7m is likely to be in the Highlands area.
- 7.18 During operation it is estimated that there would be 41 net direct full-time equivalent jobs in the Highland Council area. This is estimated to result in approximately £2.3million gross direct value added per annum to the Highland economy. The new jobs are not considered likely to lead to a significant increase in demand for housing or primary health care services, due to the contained on-site workers accommodation proposed.

Tourism and Recreation

- 7.19 Loch Ness is a scenic attraction for visitors with cultural significance at a local, regional, national and international level used for a variety of water based recreational activities, including boating, fishing and swimming. The Great Glen Canoe Trail passes through Loch Ness, and a number of leisure cruises operate on the loch throughout the year. The surrounding area includes a wide range of visitor attractions and facilities. The works have the potential to impact on the enjoyment of the surrounding landscape (a key reason for tourist visits to the Highlands) and the setting of attractions, such as Urquhart Castle. The EIAR states that the works would not occur in the immediate vicinity of tourist attractions or accommodation except for the LCW at Loch Ness and the ability to

undertake recreational activities would only be impacted in the small area around these works. It notes that visitors would still be able to access and enjoy the attractions and wider scenery in the locale. Whilst it concedes that this may have an impact on the experience of visitors, particularly where the purpose of the visit is to appreciate the scenic landscape, the design has been incorporated relatively well into the natural loch shore and the wider landscape views would remain intact. It concludes that although tourists may have a particular sensitivity to visual effects, access to tourist facilities would be largely unaffected and increased spending during construction and operation would bring economic benefits to the area.

- 7.20 Concerns were raised in the public consultation about the potential for construction to impact the level of enjoyment experienced by visitors. EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual notes the effects would not be significant. It recognises construction works have the potential to detract from the enjoyment of guests staying in Foyers and other visitors, particularly those seeking to enjoy the scenic setting on Loch Ness but concludes that this is not significant.
- 7.21 Adverse impacts are most likely to be most acute during the construction phase which will extend up to 8 years in total. It is considered that this can be managed through environmental mitigation measures as specified elsewhere in this report and can be secured by appropriate conditions.
- 7.22 Whilst the development generally may not stop people from visiting the area for the first time to take part in walking above Loch Ness, cruising on the loch or various other recreational activities and surrounding tourist attractions, it has the potential to discourage repeat visits. There may also be indirect effects that are not considered by the EIAR, for example, loss of customers for tourist accommodation during construction. However, there is the potential for such businesses to adapt to assist with the expected influx of workers associated with the proposed development and wider project, even with the contained on-site workers accommodation taken into account. Previously, there has been a positive economic impact of other renewable energy projects for local businesses (B and Bs, hotels, property lettings, shops) who have benefited from major construction works in the wider area. Additionally, some representations note that jobs required at the operational stage would decrease significantly. Whilst this is correct, 41 permanent full-time jobs is a considerable number given the relatively rural nature of this part of the Highlands.

Community Benefit

- 7.23 NPF4 Policy 11, in particular paragraph c), notes that development proposals should only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities. Additionally, NPF4 Policy 25 provides support for development that is consistent with local economic priorities and where they contribute to local and / or regional community wealth building strategies. The Council published the Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment in June 2024. The strategy provides a framework that sets out how the Council would utilise different activities to maximise the impact of investment in local areas and

support more local ownership of assets and wealth. The nine-point plan articulates the expectations of the Highland area for any renewables and green energy developments in the region.

- 7.24 The applicant has submitted a standalone Socio-Economic Statement (March 2025) outlining their proposals for community benefits. This includes a tailored community benefits approach through robust engagement. The aim is to provide long-term revenue to support local initiatives with a community benefit fund model.
- 7.25 The applicant initially published a Letter of Intent on 2 April 2025 setting out their principles for delivering a long-term Community Benefit Fund. This was followed by the applicant signing up to the Highland Social Value Charter in May 2026 where they committed to allocate 5% of its annual gross margin to a Community Wealth Fund which has been estimated to deliver over £20 million every year throughout the anticipated 125-year operational lifetime of the development. It is anticipated that from the Community Wealth Fund 80% will be dedicated to the local Loch Ness catchment area and 20% will be allocated for strategic Highland-wide projects. Community benefit is entirely separate from the planning process, and the Highland Social Value Charter does not pre-determine planning decisions but sets commitments that where a development is approved, it delivers tangible community benefit and a legacy for communities.
- 7.26 The applicant is also seeking to develop key worker homes for permanent staff as part of an appropriately scaled development in the Balnain/A831 area. Discussions have begun with THC Community Wealth Building Team. This would have mutual benefits for both GEE and the local community. Furthermore, as part of the consultation process for community benefit funding, the potential for the development of affordable housing solutions is being actively explored. At present, as there is no firm permanent housing proposal forming part of the proposed development or wider EIA Project, it is not deemed a material planning consideration, and no weight can be afforded to this matter in the decision-making process.
- 7.27 NPF4 Policy 11 c) offers support to schemes where community socio-economic benefits are maximised, with NPF4 Policy 25 enabling support to be given to schemes which contribute towards a local or regional wealth building strategy or have an element of community ownership. With no community ownership being proposed the proposal cannot be given any additional support under NPF4 Policy 25. A condition could however be imposed to require a Local Employment Scheme for the construction of the development which refers to the provisions set out within the socio-economic assessment contained within the EIAR. The recommendation before Members is to include such a condition to maximise the socio-economic benefits of the proposed development.

Siting, Design, Materials and Layout Evolution

- 7.28 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 3 Evolution of Design and Main Alternatives outlines the site selection and evolution of the proposed development. The area was previously subject to feasibility studies, carried out by SSE, who investigated Balmacaan as a site for PSH in 2009/2010, with Loch nam Breac Dearge proposed as a headpond on the northern shore of Loch Ness. The applicant chose to

develop this existing concept as the topography and geology of the area provides a substantial height difference (approximately 480m) over a relatively short horizontal distance which supports efficient generation. It also has proximity to a large water body, favourable geology, grid connection potential and existing access infrastructure.

7.29 The design of the proposed development evolved in parallel with the EIA process taking into consideration engineering feasibility, environmental constraints and consultation feedback. Design development included:

- Consolidation of major temporary and permanent works and relocation to the north of the site near the River Coiltie to reduce the impact of construction traffic on the Grottaig local community;
- Consolidation of the above ground infrastructure into a single location;
- Construction access from the north via the FLS forestry road to remove unnecessary traffic from the A82;
- Refined design of the LCW to limit disruption on the A82 along Loch Ness;
- Temporary diversion of the Affric - Kintail Way during construction to maintain use;
- Scaling down of the access from the A82 at Alltsigh; and
- Relocation and resizing of temporary workers accommodation to avoid existing woodland.

7.30 The headpond would be located within the valley between the hills of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, Nighean a Mhill and Glas-bheinn Mhor. It comprises the existing Loch nam Breac Dearga as modified with three concrete faced rockfill dams with external slopes with a gradient of approximately 1:2. These consist of the main dam, saddle dam 1 and saddle dam 2. It would also include a spillway and the Upper Control Works (UCW).

7.31 The main dam would be located at the southwest end of the headpond which would be approximately 1km in length with a maximum height of 59m above the existing ground. Saddle dam 1 would be located at the north end of the headpond and would be approximately 410m in length with a maximum height of 24m above the existing ground. Saddle dam 2 would be located at the northeast end of the headpond and would be approximately 370m in length with a maximum height of 24m. The two saddle dams together span the gap between Glas-Bheinn Mhor and Nighean a Mhill. All embankments would be concrete faced rockfill dams. The spillway would be located at the northeast extremity of the headpond and adjacent to Meall Fuar-mhonaidh at a low point and would allow the headpond to safely spill in the event of unusually high water.

- 7.32 The water would leave the headpond at the UCW which would lie within the base of the headpond. It would then enter the waterways when generating electricity and then return via the UCW to the headpond when pumping water up from Loch Ness. The application includes two options for location of the UCW due to uncertainty of ground conditions. Option A lies within the headpond and southwest of the spillway. Option B lies within the headpond between saddle dam 1 and saddle dam 2.
- 7.33 As well as the waterways connecting the upper and lower ponds, a series of dry tunnels would be formed. These comprise the main access tunnel, up to two cable/ventilation tunnels, the valve cavern access tunnel, cross adits between tunnels and enabling tunnels around the power cavern. There are two options for the design of the dry tunnels, one of which would be taken forward depending on the outcomes of further ground investigation works.
- 7.34 A second dam comprising either a small earthen or concrete dam would be located downstream of the main dam. It would protect the downstream watercourses during periodic scour valve tests at the valve cavern.
- 7.35 A permanent access track would be provided along one of the construction branches for the inlet channel. It would be below the operational water level and only accessible when the headpond is drawn down during maintenance.
- 7.36 A borrow pit search area is located within the headpond to provide material for the construction of the dams and would be encompassed into the headpond once the dams are built and the area flooded. A second borrow pit may be required and would be located at either an existing borrow pit along the FLS access track or opening a new borrow pit in the same area. The finalised details and location would be confirmed at the detailed design stage.
- 7.37 Waterways would connect the headpond and tailpond which include low-pressure headrace tunnels, pressure shafts, high-pressure headrace tunnels and low-pressure tailrace tunnels. There are two options for the length and location of the waterways which is dependent on further ground investigation works and would be developed at the detailed design stage. The proposed development requires two underground caverns:
- The power cavern complex is located directly below the headpond and at a level of 75m AOD (595m below ground level) and comprises the power cavern, measuring approximately 300m long, 30m wide and 55m high. It will contain the main inlet valves, pump turbines and associated machinery. It also contains the transformer cavern, of similar length and width as above but with a height of 20m, which will house the transformers and associated machinery. These two caverns will be connected by gantries and the cable tunnels. There are two locations for the power cavern complex. Option A is below the east of Loch nam Breac Dearga and Option B is below the northeast of Loch nam Breac Dearga.
 - The valve cavern complex provides the means of isolating the headrace tunnels. The valve cavern will be 120m long, 10m wide and 20m high and contain mechanical equipment used to isolate the headrace tunnels. Entry would be via an access tunnel.

- 7.38 The waterways would terminate at the LCW tailpond located on the eastern bank of Loch Ness. This would comprise four discreet intake-outlet structures and a gated access road directly off the A82. It would also include a smolt screen separated from the main structure to prevent entrapment of young salmon. The LCW design would be finalised at the detailed design stage to allow for optimising flows of water discharging into Loch Ness. It would require navigational lighting with a lit marker to identify the smolt screen. Motion sensor lighting would also be in operation.
- 7.39 The LCW would comprise a level platform (approximately 262m long and 32m wide) beneath which are there are four intake-outlet structures at 60m intervals. The LCW is designed as a predominantly flat structure, with no surface buildings or other significant above-ground infrastructure. The main platform level is 18.5m AOD, the smolt screen access platform is 17.5m AOD with the average loch level 15.85m AOD. At this location the A82 is approximately 28m to 29m AOD, so the main LCW platform sits approximately 10m below the level of the road.
- 7.40 Once the development is operational, there would be six permanent compounds with their location function and size (shown in EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 2 Project Site and Description Table 2-4). Other associated development includes a GIS switchyard which would comprise control buildings, busbars, a perimeter fence and overhead and/or underground cables, tunnel portals and a valve house which would comprise a control building over a submerged discharge valve in an outlet chamber, approximately 10m deep, along with car parking. The GIS switchyard will be located in the northern part of the development site, close to the temporary worker accommodation and the main tunnel portal area.
- 7.41 The project has been developed alongside the broader engagement on the potential of effects on water levels in Loch Ness and consequently downstream flows in the River Ness. The existing Dochfour Weir plays a key role in managing water level for navigation, environmental flows and fish passage. Amendments to Dochfour Weir are proposed to mitigate effects on environmental features in Loch Ness, particularly salmon.
- 7.42 The proposed Dochfour Weir upgrade would comprise the installation of a new automated variable-control weir structure along the upstream side of the existing weir, supported by new piles, concrete beams and control infrastructure. The current proposal is not for a permanent increase in the height of existing weir, instead it would be converted into a regulated structure through the installation of a new variable-control weir immediately upstream of the existing Telford structure. The existing service and waste weir crest levels of 15.53m AOD and 15.73m AOD respectively would remain, with inflatable pneumatically operated gates installed to allow temporary adjustment of the crest level. The concept design indicates a control range of approximately 1.1m to 2.0m, although the final specification has yet to be determined.
- 7.43 The scheme would also include replacement or upgrading of the existing fish pass and smolt pass, installation of an acoustic fish deterrent system to reduce smolt losses into the Caledonian Canal, new control buildings and associated operational infrastructure. The upgraded weir would actively regulate water levels

and downstream flows through the use of pneumatically operated gates capable of raising and lowering the effective crest level of the weir, while seeking to avoid direct impacts on the historic Telford structure. The works would be subject to a separate planning application under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.

- 7.44 An indicative grid connection comprising approximately 2km of underground 400kV cable installed by micro-tunnelling from the Glen Earrach GIS switchyard, followed by approximately 16km of overhead line extending northwest to the connection point at Bingally substation (as noted in the submitted FEI AI_3_34 Context Document Grid Connection Assessment and AI_4_06 Grid Connection - Further Clarification). The assessments adopt a precautionary scenario based on 49 towers of approximately 60m height, although the applicant emphasises that no final tower design, route, span lengths or tower spacing has yet been determined. The connection would require temporary construction working areas, laydown areas and access tracks during construction, together with a permanent maintenance access track along much of the overhead line route. The assessment assumes a construction duration of approximately three years and utilises an indicative route corridor with a 350m assessment buffer.
- 7.45 Detailed design, tower locations, access arrangements, construction compounds and environmental mitigation would be developed through a separate future grid connection consent application by SSEN made under Section 37 of the Electricity Act.

Construction

- 7.46 The applicant has outlined the construction programme for the proposed development over an eight-year period. It has been divided into two years pre-construction and enabling works and six years for main construction. Construction activity would peak from years two to four with the tunnelling works and construction of the headpond, which are likely to run in parallel. It is anticipated that tunnelling would be a 24-hour operation. The site includes 11 temporary compounds and six permanent compounds.
- 7.47 An outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been provided (EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 3.1), and a detailed CEMP would be controlled by condition. The outline CEMP sets out the environmental management agenda to minimise construction environmental impacts and a framework Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) which sets out measures to minimise adverse effects from construction traffic. The EIAR also includes an outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan, an outline Peatland Restoration Plan, outline Access Management Plan and outline Water Management Plan.
- 7.48 The CEMP should include site specific environmental management procedures which can be finalised and agreed through appropriate planning conditions. Due to the scale of the development SEPA would control pollution prevention measures for surface water run-off via a CAR Construction Site Licence along with the hydropower element of the proposed development. The applicant has also committed to the appointment of an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) to oversee

the project. This can dovetail with a Planning Monitoring Officer role to supervise compliance with the conditions attached to any consent.

- 7.49 In addition to the requirement for submission and agreement on a CEMP, the Council would require the applicant to provide a financial bond regarding final site restoration (restoration bond) in the event of non-operation and to provide a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP). A Community Liaison Group (CLG) would be conditioned to ensure that the Community Council and other stakeholders are kept up to date and consulted before and during the construction period.
- 7.50 A Material Management Appraisal (MMA) (EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 15.1) estimates that 9,670,000m³ of material would be generated by the proposed development. This assumes that the entire borrow pit search area is quarried. Construction of the headpond would generate a total volume of 8,710,000m³ of excavated material. The main component that will re-use this material is construction of the headpond embankments at approximately 6,100,000m³. The excess material from those works would be used for landscaping workers accommodation, on-site concrete batching, aggregate for hard standings/backfill and road surfacing. There would be an ultimate excess of approximately 100,000m³ excavated material, although the applicant anticipates there would be a negligible excess as the design develops and optimisations are put in place by the contractor.
- 7.51 The applicant has considered the LCW excavation work separately to the UCW excavation work given the separation distance from the main construction area. Approximately 150,000m³ of sandstone will be excavated in situ as part of the LCW works, increasing to around 240,000m³ when bulked. Due to the impracticality of transporting this material approximately 16km by road to the headpond for reuse, it is proposed that the excavated sandstone will instead be removed by water transport.
- 7.52 SEPA note that the MMA requires to be produced before any intrusive ground investigations have taken place and will need to be updated after such works. Given the need for these investigation works and the fact that a use has not been currently identified for all excavated materials, SEPA requests a condition to any consent requiring a finalised MMA be agreed with THC in consultation with them. The finalised appraisal should be based on ground investigations and provide an updated mass balance, identifying the fate for all excavated materials with clear detailed plans relating to any proposals to remove material from the site. SEPA state that there should be no long-term storage of material on site and material should only be temporarily stored within the identified construction areas, unless agreed with the Council in consultation with them.
- 7.53 Normal construction working hours between 8am and 7pm during weekdays and between 8am and 1pm on Saturdays would generally apply for the surface works, such as the access tracks, dams, powerhouse, upper control works and lower control works. The applicant notes that these could be subject to some variation to suit the ongoing work, weather conditions and time of year. This might include extending Saturday working to 7pm during critical path construction phases, with no working on Sundays or Bank Holidays (including site deliveries) unless agreed

in advance with the Council. Underground operations are anticipated to continue 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The applicant also states two blasts per 24 hours are likely.

- 7.54 There are likely to be some adverse impacts caused by construction traffic and disruption. The recommended hours for activities which are audible at any noise sensitive receptor are between 8am and 6pm Monday to Saturday (with a requirement for a reduced 45dB LAeq 1 hour between 1pm to 6pm on Saturday as opposed to 55dB LAeq 1 hour for the rest of the week) with no works on Sunday. However, it is understood that for a development of this size, there is some merit in allowing some work to be carried on outwith normal working hours if it is likely to significantly reduce the overall length of the construction period and the impact on surrounding residents can be kept to a minimum. Any such variations can be considered and addressed in detail required by planning conditions on construction management and subject to approval by the Council.
- 7.55 Applicants must comply with reasonable operational practices with regard to construction noise so as not to cause nuisance. Section 60 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 sets restrictions in terms of hours of operation, plant and equipment used and noise levels etc. and is enforceable via Environmental Health rather than Planning powers. Environmental Health requests a condition to secure details of how contractors would employ the best practicable means to reduce the impact of noise from construction activities.
- 7.56 Light pollution significantly affects the rural countryside, from disturbing the way animals and plants perceive daytime and nighttime to making developments visible across wide areas. For safety reasons, temporary lighting would be required for all external construction activities during hours of darkness and low natural light. This lighting would be designed to minimise illumination, glare or light spillage to nearby receptors. Once operational, external lighting would only be provided at key areas such as the LCW but only required during essential operational and maintenance activities. The LCW smolt screen would also be fitted with navigational lighting. Full details of the specification of lighting are to be provided and are controlled by condition.

Construction Infrastructure

- 7.57 There would be 11 temporary construction compounds, including the temporary workers accommodation, which in total amounts to 260,420m² of construction area, with the proposed location and use shown in EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 2 Table 2-3, along with the indicative arrangement and design shown in EIAR Volume 3 Figure 2.26 Indicative Construction Compound Layout. Whilst the referencing of temporary construction compounds is between TC01 and TC17 this is due to omissions and redesign through the design evolution with 11 temporary construction compounds required for the finalised design. The pre-construction and enabling phase would include access improvements at the site entrance on the existing FLS track, site clearance and set up of temporary compounds within the River Coiltie Area. This includes compounds Temporary Compound (TC)01, TC02 and TC03 which are satellite compounds for storage, plant, equipment and welfare and located on the main construction access track before the temporary works accommodation. TC05 for temporary workers accommodation would be

constructed in this phase to the north of the site near the site entrance. TC06, a small compound at the entrance of TC05, which houses firefighting equipment would also be built during enabling works. Pre-construction works would include the formation of borrow pit access, construction of the new access track from the existing FLS track to the main tunnel portal, the temporary Core Path diversion and construction of the main access tunnel.

- 7.58 The main construction phase would include formation of access tracks, public path diversions and construction of the headpond (including borrow pit), LCW, dry tunnelling works, wet tunnelling works, the GIS switchyard, power cavern complex, electro-mechanical and ancillary equipment installation and commissioning. The main access track runs from the workers accommodation at TC05 south and divides into two tracks which run west of the loch and the main dam and saddle dam; and east to saddle dam 2. The headpond construction complex (TC13) located at Loch nam Breac Dearga would be used to construct the concrete faced rockfill main dam and saddle dams. The main dam would require the diversion of the existing watercourse.
- 7.59 There is a small pressure shaft compound (TC17) on the access track to saddle dam 2. A borrow pit search area would be created within the headpond to source construction material and minimise the need to import at the start of construction. This would be used for the main dam, saddle dams and construction compounds. The main access tunnels would be driven from PC07 and PC08 near the site entrance. This would include access for the power cavern complex. The Lower Control Works (LCW) construction complex would be located on the north shore of Loch Ness (TC16). Works would include construction of a retaining wall down to 18m AOD and intake-outlet structure.
- 7.60 Compounds TC09, TC10 and TC11 are satellite compounds for storage located along the construction access road between the temporary workers accommodation and the dividing of the access track east and west. Compounds PC04 (above ground GIS switchyard), PC07 (tunnel portal 1), PC08 (tunnel portals 2 and 3), PC12 (main dam valve house), PC14 (ventilation shaft) and PC15 (valve cavern access and tunnel portal) would all be used during construction and remain post construction as permanent site compounds. All compounds would have timed floodlighting with motion sensors.
- 7.61 The indicative plan and sections of the temporary workers accommodation can be seen on EIAR Volume 3 Figure 2-28. It would cover approximately 21.59ha and include accommodation along with various resources for up to 1,000 workers. It would be located to the northern section of the site approximately 425m south of the River Coiltie access crossing point. It would include medical facilities, shops, catering, a gym and sports amenities, site offices, firefighting services, water treatment, distribution infrastructure, waste management and recycling facilities, gas storage and distribution. Staff would be housed on-site, and a park and ride system would be implemented. These details can be controlled through a Staff Travel Plan as part of the attached CTMP condition.
- 7.62 Representations were received raising concern regarding lighting of the temporary construction compounds and workers accommodation. The Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) requires all construction lighting to be

directional, low-glare and designed to minimise light spill beyond the immediate working area. Temporary lighting would be switched off when not required, with compound lighting generally controlled through timers and motion sensors. It is considered the detailed arrangements to be agreed through the CEMP and controlled by planning conditions to minimise impacts on the surrounding environment.

- 7.63 The temporary workers accommodation would be constructed on a levelled, load-bearing surface and operate as a temporary facility during construction. Once no longer required, all buildings, infrastructure and hardstanding would be removed, and the site reinstated using stored soils, peat and vegetation wherever practicable.
- 7.64 The applicant proposes a programme of active restoration, including reinstatement of ground cover, seeding, and native tree and scrub planting. Planting in the surrounding Glen Coiltie area would commence at an early stage to allow vegetation to establish while the compound remains operational, with restoration of the compound footprint taking place following its removal. This is controlled by condition.

Construction Workforce

- 7.65 Given the substantial workforce required over a number of years, the applicant has proposed that staff who do not live locally would be accommodated on-site in temporary worker accommodation to avoid significant impacts on local housing/tourism accommodation. The EIAR states workers would be given the opportunity to spend locally in shops, cafes and restaurants and potentially visit local attractions in a managed way by shuttle bus. It explains the main works are located away from Loch Ness, limiting the extent of potential impacts on visitor attractions to those on the west side of Loch Ness, which includes the Falls of Divach, The Loch Ness Centre, Nessie Land and Urquhart Castle. However, construction traffic would pass visitor accommodation located along the A82 and A831.
- 7.66 Local economic benefits would largely arise from spending by locally recruited staff and a small number of management personnel. The applicant states that the strategy is intended to balance local economic benefits with the need to avoid adverse impacts on local housing, services and the visitor economy. Detailed workforce accommodation and travel arrangements would be secured through management plans and a Workers' Village Strategy, including controls on vehicle use, workforce travel and community interactions.
- 7.67 The applicant notes the local community plan documents for Glen Urquhart references concerns with GP capacity in the area and that allied health services, including dental, physiotherapy and podiatry are located in Inverness. It states that on-site health care and recreational facilities would be provided to avoid increasing pressure on local services. In response to local feedback, the worker accommodation and other compounds were moved further to the north of the site. Construction of the LCW would potentially impact the local community at Foyers and this is raised as a concern by Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council. The EIAR concludes this would not be significant. The EIAR also notes that the

main access was relocated to the A831 from the A82 to reduce impacts on the road network.

- 7.68 Given the substantial workforce on site, the camp will effectively operate as a new settlement within a relatively remote rural setting for a number of years. This has caused concerns and is referenced in a number of representations received. Representations suggest that the level of detail regarding the worker camp is insufficient. The applicant has provided a plan (Temporary Workers Accommodation Plan Figure 2.28) and sections (Temporary Workers Accommodation Section Figure 2.29) for the worker camp, along with other site compounds and borrow pits referenced, which can be controlled by condition should the application be granted consent. They confirmed that facilities for power generation, water supply, and waste treatment will be provided.
- 7.69 Construction power is currently assumed to be provided by on-site diesel generators, although the applicant is actively exploring lower-carbon alternatives, including a temporary grid connection and the use of domestically produced biofuels. The EIAR assessed the scheme on the basis that on-site generation may be required, while recognising that a temporary electrical connection would be the preferred option due to reduced fuel use, traffic movements and generator noise.
- 7.70 The temporary workers accommodation village is intended to operate as a largely self-contained facility. Water would be sourced locally, treated on site and distributed throughout the accommodation and construction compounds, with a detailed Water Supply Strategy to be prepared post-consent.
- 7.71 Foul drainage would also be managed on site, with a package treatment plant currently considered the most likely solution. Waste handling, segregation and recycling facilities would be provided within the village.
- 7.72 The applicant proposes that all detailed arrangements relating to power supply, water provision, foul drainage and waste management are secured through a Workers' Village Strategy to be approved before the pre-construction and enabling phase commences.
- 7.73 Representations noted that the worker accommodation would bring additional noise, traffic, environmental damage and light that will have an impact on residents in the surrounding area. Given the sizeable set back from residential properties, the intervening landform along with mitigation measures including minimising the extent of construction areas, careful siting of compounds and stockpiles, prompt removal of temporary infrastructure, and sensitive design of construction lighting, it is considered that the location and actions noted will diminish potential detrimental impacts to neighbour amenity. No concerns were raised regarding potential long-lasting impacts to habitat or ecology. Given the temporary nature of the worker camp and other site compounds, it is expected that the workers accommodation site will recover to its previous condition following reinstatement and planting which can be controlled by condition. In terms of traffic, whilst there will be vehicles coming and going from the site, workers staying in accommodation on site will help to significantly reduce vehicle movements.

- 7.74 Environmental Health note the worker accommodation will require its own suitable Private Water Supply (PWS) and compliance with relevant water quality, public health and environmental regulations. Conditions could be attached requiring a final Construction Environmental Management Plan and Water Management Plan to control this.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- 7.75 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 6 provides the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which looks at the potential design, visual and landscape impacts of the proposed development. This includes cumulative effects with other proposed hydro, renewable energy and electrical infrastructure development within the study area. Chapter 6 sets out the assessment of impacts which include:
- a landscape assessment of potential effects of the development on landscape character, designated and protected landscapes; and a visual assessment of potential effects of the development on visual amenity of those present within the landscape, including established views from residential areas and routes.
- 7.76 It is supplemented by Volume 4: Visualisations and Volume 5 which includes:
- Appendix 6.1 – Landscape and Visual Methodology
 - Appendix 6.2 – Landscape Assessment
 - Appendix 6.3 - Visual Assessment
 - Appendix 6.4 – Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan
- 7.77 The LVIA concluded that significant residual effects on landscape character and visual amenity would be possible from 15km from the central part of the site boundary. However, the Study Area was extended to around 20km to the northeast and southwest due to the extent of theoretical visibility in these directions and the potential for likely significant effects. Initially this included 12 viewpoints; a further viewpoint was added at a layby on the A82 in response to consultation with the Council.
- 7.78 Potential effects were considered for the construction phase and at Year 1 (completion of the construction phase and reinstatement of temporary construction works areas) and Year 15 of operation with photomontages to illustrate the change associated with proposed mitigation, landscaping, planting and regeneration measures. The construction phase is programmed to take eight years with two years for preconstruction and enabling followed by a six-year construction phase. This includes UCW and LCW construction of three years and the tunnel portal for one year.
- 7.79 Following a review of the LVIA, sufficient information has been provided to enable an assessment. Concerns were raised regarding the poor quality of baseline photography used for visualisations. Following resubmission of some viewpoints, the photomontages are considered to have been produced in line with Highland Council and NatureScot's standards, however, the baseline photography has not substantially improved from the original submission. The methodology for the LVIA

is broadly in accordance with the Landscape Institute Third Edition Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GVLA3).

- 7.80 The EIAR states that decommissioning of PSH schemes is extremely rare and in the unlikely event that the proposed development was to be decommissioned the potential effects on the landscape and visual resource during decommissioning would be no worse than those assessed during the EIAR and so was scoped out of the assessment.
- 7.81 The Council's Landscape Officer notes that the LVIA set out in Chapter 6 of the EIAR broadly accords with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) Third Edition, however the baseline photography used for visualisations raises concern. The LVIA is generally thorough and whilst they agree with many of the findings on the significance of landscape and visual effects, they consider that the most significant effects on the proposed development would be in relation to the headpond embankments (main dam, saddle dams 1 and 2), compounds and access tracks experienced from the summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh. The popular summit is part of the "Dramatic Great Glen" Special Quality (SQ) of the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA. They are generally content with the effects in relation to other elements of the proposed development including the Lower Control Works, secondary bund, and other operational elements.
- 7.82 The LVIA does not assess the duration of significant effects for recreational water-based receptors who would view various elements of the proposed development from the waters of Loch Ness itself. Additionally, the LVIA does not assess users of the Loch Ness Canoe Trail as it states that it is outwith the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and the trail is mostly along the western edge of the loch. The Landscape Officer disagrees with this approach as when in a canoe or kayak on Loch Ness receptors could be on either side of the loch and significant effects would extend to these users, similar to those experienced on Jacobite Cruises or other boats. No route analysis has been provided.
- 7.83 In relation to the lower control works, the applicant notes that the A82 layby opposite Ruskich Woods northeast of Altsigh (represented by VP13 – A82 Layby) will be converted to a junction to create a private access road to these works. The applicant has missed an opportunity to either retain or create a new layby near this junction to encourage visitors to stop and enjoy the views across Loch Ness and the Great Glen including providing some interpretation boards about the area and the proposed development. It is unfortunate that the new access road would be completely private. The applicant is encouraged to explore this option which could be controlled by condition.

Visualisations

- 7.84 The Landscape Officer noted that the updated baseline photography used for visualisations is still of a poor standard and does not fully conform to guidance, particularly in relation to Viewpoints 1, 2A, 5, 7 and 13. In some instances, it is worse than the original EIAR photography which initially raised concern and led to the request for it to be resubmitted. Whilst the applicant notes that some viewpoints could not be replicated in the same location as the original photography, notably Viewpoint 1, this is surprising for a summit location like Meall

Fuar-mhonaidh. It is unclear if there were different photographers / assessors undertaking the work on the updated photography. Whilst these concerns are noted, the visualisations provided are an aid to the assessment of the application and when viewed alongside all other EIAR maps and figures, and with the benefit of undertaking site visits, are adequate to determine the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.

- 7.85 The visualisations noted above appear noticeably artificial when showing the upper reservoir at maximum capacity and full drawdown extent along with the compensatory planting. Additionally, elsewhere these visualisations are taken in either hazy or misty conditions. The applicant has responded on these points and considers that the concern regarding the visualisations was addressed previously and the original case officer at that time appeared to be content with what was provided.
- 7.86 Visualisations for wind energy proposals would be expected to show the worst-case scenario with regards to landscape and visual impacts. Unusually for a pumped storage hydro scheme of this scale, there is only one viewpoint where receptors will overlook the upper reservoir and associated infrastructure: VP1 – Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit. The visualisations provided for VP1 show the upper reservoir at maximum water level. Whilst the full drawdown extent is also shown it is difficult to discern how this would appear within the landscape as the visualisations have been shown with a light grey shading as opposed to a brown peat-stained shade that would be expected in the drawdown area once operational for a number of years. The mid-point between maximum and minimum drawdown extent would be the most likely scenario for receptors viewing the proposed development given the fluctuating levels of the upper reservoir. Given the lower elevation of all other viewpoints no other images provided show the drawdown implications.
- 7.87 Mountaineering Scotland, along with a number of representations raised concerns regarding drawdown scars and fluctuating water levels would expose bands of bare rock, boulders and shingle around the upper reservoir margins, removing vegetation and creating an obviously artificial feature within the upland landscape. They consider these drawdown effects would make the man-made nature of the reservoir highly visible to hillwalkers and detract from the experience of mountain users, despite having limited effects on wider views and skylines. Mountaineering Scotland considers the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed headpond have been underestimated, particularly when viewed from the nearby hill summits of Meall Fuar-Mhonaidh and Glas-bheinn Mhor.
- 7.88 The water level within the upper reservoir would be raised significantly following the inundation and enlargement of Loch nam Breac Dearga. The existing loch has a top water level of approximately 482m AOD, whereas the completed headpond would operate between a minimum level of 475m AOD and a maximum level of 518m AOD. The maximum operating water level would be approximately 36m higher than the existing loch level. The reservoir would have an overall operating range of 43m and a working storage volume of approximately 29Mm³.
- 7.89 Based on the proposed installed generating capacity of up to 1.8 GW, a complete discharge of the upper reservoir from maximum operating level to minimum

operating level would take approximately 19 hours of continuous electricity generation at full output. Conversely, returning the same volume of water from Loch Ness to the headpond would take approximately 21 hours of continuous pumping at maximum capacity.

- 7.90 The fluctuations in water level would be subject to the demands of the electricity market and may vary considerably day to day, therefore, there would be no predictable pattern of generation and pumping or predictable levels of drawdown on any given day. However, the potential for people to experience either the Loch nam Breac Dearga or Loch Ness be fully drawn down or fully filled at any given time would be rare because this would usually occur only if a maximum generation or pumping episode had just occurred. Whilst the LVIA gives consideration to the landscape and visual effect of the full potential drawdown, judgements have been made based on a varying situation and how the development would be viewed for the majority of the time. There are relatively few locations where receptors would be able to see the full drawdown from, with the upland Meall Fuar-mhonaidh viewpoint the key example.

Landscape Impact

- 7.91 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 6 assessed the direct and indirect impact on LCTs and landscape designations and Appendix 6.2 sets out the detailed assessment. EIAR Figure 6.4 shows the Landscape Designations and Figure 6.5 shows the LCTs within the operational Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV). The site lies partly within the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA. The Monadhliath Wild Land Area (WLA), Glen Affric National Scenic Area (NSA) and Glen Strathfarrar NSA lie on the periphery of the ZTV. It was agreed at scoping stage that the WLA and NSA are unlikely to be impacted by the proposed development and were scoped out of the assessment.
- 7.92 The site is located within LCT 222 Rocky Moorland Plateau, LCT 225 – Broad Steep-Sided Glen and LCT 226 Wooded Glen. LCT 220 – Rugged Massif, LCT 221 – Rolling Uplands, LCT 224 – Farmed and Wooded Foothills and LCT 227 – Farmed Strath are located within the 20km study area. LCT 229 – Enclosed Farmland and LCT 223 Flat Moorland Plateau are located on the fringes of the study area and were descope from the assessment. EIAR Chapter 6 gives a detailed description of LCTs.

Landscape Character Types

- 7.93 The proposed development will be located across 3 different Landscape Character Types (LCT) - LCT 222: Rocky Moorland Plateau – Inverness, LCT 225 – Broad Steep Glen and LCT 226 – Wooded Glen Inverness.

LCT 222: Rocky Moorland Plateau – Inverness

- 7.94 The headpond infrastructure including the secondary bund, access tracks and compounds (including the GIS switch gear and tunnel portals) would be located in this LCT. It has a strong sense of identity which includes the landmark summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, wildness, tranquillity and strong recreational value. The

EIAR classifies the landscape value as High. The NatureScot 2019 Landscape Character Assessment describes the key characteristics as:

- Open, gently rolling moorland plateaux with distinct edges descending to adjoining straths and glens or rising to merge with Rugged Massif;
- Plateau with a patchy texture of small rocky outcrop hills, bogs and lochans in no clear hierarchy or discernible pattern;
- Hilltops and upper slopes dominated by rocky heather moorland, except in the northeast where extensive, contrasting conifer forests dominate;
- Regenerating trees and scrub in glens with rivers and sheltered lower hillsides;
- Strong contrast in landcover and settlement between the plateau and adjoining straths and glens;
- Sparsely inhabited and little evidence of active land use;
- A few historic sites indicating past settlement and land use;
- Orientation is difficult due to the lack of hierarchy, pattern and foci in the landform and landcover;
- Within the plateau distance and scale are generally difficult to perceive due to the lack of elements of known size;
- Distinct edges isolate the plateau from adjacent areas and give the sense of a vast, remote, upland moor;
- At the plateau edges, expansive views over inhabited straths and glens create surprise;
- Eastern areas have a semi-exposed character with occasional views of distant hills framed by the distinct edges of conifer forests; and
- Perception of remoteness on the open plateau, from the rugged patchy texture and absence of obvious human artefacts.”

7.95 Construction (including preconstruction and enabling works) of the headpond, secondary bund, access tracks and flood light compounds, including tunnel portals, would be located in this LCT near the River Coiltie. This includes widening of the existing access track up to 10m within a 30m maximum construction corridor to minimise environmental impacts. The scale of construction would substantially alter the more wild, and natural aspects of the upland moorland displacing areas of moorland plateau in a moderate part of the LCT which is fundamental to many of the key characteristics of the LCT. It would affect the perception of remoteness and tranquillity on the open plateau. Floodlighting would also affect the perception of remoteness. The applicant considers this would be in a series of small pockets within the LCT extending from the Workers Accommodation (TC05) to the headpond; however, this is spread over 11 construction worksites. This would affect the perception of remoteness on the plateau and absence of human artefacts; however, the applicant considers the geographical area over which the change would be experienced would also be limited. This is disputed, as the geographical extent would extend across a moderate part of the LCT which also includes the access track and lighting associated with the proposal including the workers accommodation lighting and vehicles using headlights on access tracks.

7.96 Construction of new tracks through the rising plateau moorland, from the River Coiltie extending towards the proposed headpond would create additional tracks and movement of construction plant within the landscape. The temporary construction compounds would also result in substantial additional activity and

built form in this part of the LCT. The new temporary access tracks along with temporary construction compounds would affect the remoteness and lack of human intervention of the open plateau with the introduction of movement and plant, particularly at the workers accommodation. However, the applicant considers the geographic area over which the change would be experienced would be limited due to siting within the valley associated with the River Coiltie and between Glas-bheinn Bheag and Glas-bheinn Mhor, and existing native and coniferous vegetation cover. The applicant notes that changes near to the River Coiltie would be within the context of large areas of forestry rather than open moorland, a small-scale hydroelectric scheme on the River Coiltie and an existing borrow pit. However, this part of the LCT is unspoilt and existing hydroelectric scheme is small-scale and well blended into the landscape. The applicant considers this concentrated area of temporary construction compounds on the more contained, lower ground, lessens the impact on the remoteness and lack of human intervention characteristics in this part of the LCT.

- 7.97 The construction of the headpond and associated infrastructure would result in the modification to the existing Loch nam Breac Dearga on open moorland and would result in the loss of dwarf birch and montane scrub, albeit the applicant considers this to be a localised area. The applicant considers the displacement of the small areas of moorland vegetation, which is a key characteristic of the LCT, is in the context of rocky outcrops which break up the vegetated areas, therefore reducing perception of the scale of change that this landscape element would be lost in. However, the rocky outcrops form part of the natural landscape and they do not necessarily mitigate the scale of this substantive change to the extent noted by the applicant.
- 7.98 Overall, the scale of the construction operations would substantially alter the wilder and more natural aspects of the upland moorland in a small part of the LCT, which is fundamental to many of the key characteristics of the LCT. However, the applicant considers the geographical extent of the change experienced would be limited due to the containment of construction activity by the landform of the LCT and native and coniferous vegetation cover in the surrounding landscape. Again, whilst this may be correct to some extent the scale of development is extensive. The applicant considers the duration of change would be medium term, however, peak activity at the headpond and tunnel portals would be short-term.
- 7.99 At operational Year 1, the permanent infrastructure of the substantial headpond, secondary bund, permanent access tracks and permanent compounds would be directly present across a small part of the LCT and would displace open moorland. There would be changes to some of the key characteristics of the LCT, including the remoteness and limited human intervention, however the applicant considers the changes would be experienced across a limited proportion of the LCT. The permanent infrastructure would be concentrated largely within two areas of the LCT which also lessens the degree of influence. The applicant considers Medium magnitude of effect, assessed alongside the Medium sensitivity would result in a Moderate Adverse effect, which is considered to be Significant. These findings are disputed as the infrastructure would result in a High magnitude of change given the large scale of the proposals and extent of alteration to some of the key

characteristics of the LCT. This would result in a Major to Moderate Adverse and Significant effect, which is to be expected for a development of this scale.

- 7.100 The headpond and associated embankments would permanently displace a small area of open moorland and would result in the substantial expansion of Loch nam Breac Dearga. The secondary bund would also introduce an additional small body of water in the landscape but is only expected to be full every six months. The new waterbodies would not be uncharacteristic in the context of numerous lochs and lochans within the wider LCT although would be larger in scale and a more regular form. The straight edges of the headpond waterbody associated with the three embankments and the spillway would contrast from natural lochs and rugged character on the open plateau; however, this would only be perceptible from a very small part of the LCT. The introduction of the large embankments and their linear form would contrast with the lack of landscape pattern in the LCT. The applicant considers the perception of scale would be reduced due to the surrounding large-scale landscape and the change would only be perceived from pockets of the LCT due to the context of the undulating landform and presence of native and coniferous vegetation in the wider landscape.
- 7.101 The permanent access tracks would include sections of new track across the moorland plateau. Such tracks would result in localised scarring on the landscape and would be located in a part of the LCT with existing influence from forestry tracks. However, the new tracks would be on a higher elevation which would encroach on the perception of remoteness on the open plateau. The permanent compounds, including four tunnel portals and switching station, would be largely concentrated in a small part of the LCT on lower ground and within the context of forestry plantation, a borrow pit and a small hydroelectric scheme near to the River Coiltie. A ventilation shaft with fencing and one tunnel portal would be located in the upland landscape, however the geographical area over which such infrastructure would be perceptible from would be limited due to the containment of landform, which would limit impact on the remote qualities of the plateau landscape.
- 7.102 The temporary construction compound areas would be reinstated after construction although these would appear as disturbed moorland for the short term until they re-establish over time. The applicant considers that the proposed landscape and ecological mitigation, including peatland restoration, native (including riparian) woodland planting, montane would scrub, dwarf birch, juniper and Scots pine regeneration and planting as well as Ancient Woodland enhancement in the wider landscape, around the headpond and near to the River Coiltie, would be barely perceptible at Year 1 of operation. It is unclear how the applicant can reach this conclusion given the substantial levelling works required and landscaping that would be in its infancy and yet to become established. This is evident in a number of the applicant's visualisations.
- 7.103 Deer fencing would be erected as part of the proposed development with existing fencing present in the landscape and is not considered to have an adverse effect on the landscape character. Operational lighting comprising motion-sensor lighting would be required at the permanent compounds and substation (PC04) introducing occasional light sources within localised parts of the LCT. This would affect the perception of remoteness on the plateau, however the geographical area

over which the change would be experienced would also be limited. Overall, the applicant considers there would be a localised direct effect on the LCT associated with the headpond, secondary bund, permanent access tracks and permanent compounds. There would be changes to some of the key characteristics of the LCT, including the remoteness and limited human intervention but the applicant considers the changes would be experienced across a limited proportion of the LCT. The permanent infrastructure would be concentrated largely within two areas of the LCT which they feel lessens the degree of influence. The duration of change would be long-term. The EIAR assessed the effect as Moderate Adverse and Significant. However, this effect is judged to be Major to Moderate Adverse and Significant as noted above.

- 7.104 At Year 15 of operation, there would remain a localised direct effect on the LCT associated with the headpond, secondary bund, permanent access tracks and permanent compounds. The land used for construction would be fully reinstated by Year 15. The new planting near to the River Coiltie and the landscape around the headpond would have established and would assist in the integration of the new infrastructure, predominantly the tracks and compounds, into the local landscape. The new planting would contribute to swathes of native planting and regeneration of vegetation across the LCT, which is a key characteristic of the LCT and would contribute to reinstating historic native planting across this landscape. Overall, whilst there would remain a direct effect on the LCT associated with the headpond and the concentration of permanent compounds concentrated in a localised part of the LCT around the River Coiltie, it is not considered that these would become a dominating feature in the wider landscape. Effects on the key characteristics of the LCT would therefore be limited and perceived across small parts of the LCT. The EIAR assessed the effect as Minor Adverse and not significant. It is agreed that the effect would be not significant at Year 15, however, the effect is considered to be greater at Moderate Adverse given the overall large-scale feature within this landscape.

LCT 225 – Broad Steep Glen

- 7.105 The permanent LCW would be located within this LCT. It incorporates the Great Glen and Loch Ness which together create the district's most prominent landscape feature. Despite some detracting features, such as Foyers Power Station and forestry plantation, the LCT maintains strong cultural associations and a distinct sense of identity. Loch Ness itself has highly scenic qualities with a sense of wildness and tranquillity in parts. The area is well-served by numerous recreational routes, including pleasure craft, Core Paths and recreational routes, such as the Loch Ness 360 trail. The LCT is almost entirely covered by the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA. The EIAR classifies the landscape value as High. The key characteristics of this LCT are given as follows:
- A clearly defined, broad, linear, steep sided, V-shaped glen and deep loch cutting through mountains and hills, with limited areas of flatter ground;
 - Large-scale conifer forests with small areas of open moorland covering most of the glen sides, particularly the lower slopes;
 - Small patches of broad-leaved woodlands, mostly in side glens, and close to the shore;
 - Agricultural land on less steep slopes, glen intersections and alluvial plains;

- A few settlements, with a well-defined core, located at glen intersections and on gentler slopes, separated by long stretches of relatively uninhabited land;
- Contrast between the busy trunk road and larger settlements on the west side and the quiet minor road on east side which has fewer settlements separated by large undeveloped areas;
- Strong evidence of past settlement in the number and diversity of archaeological and historic sites from prehistoric times to the 20th Century;
- Contrast between the visual and seasonal diversity of broadleaf woodland and bright, open pockets of farmland and the forested and moorland surroundings;
- Contrast between the smaller scale landscapes of settled, lower slopes and the large-scale moorland and forested backdrop; and
- A simple linear and enclosed visual composition of bands of land, water and sky, with long skylines of even height, and the glen and loch as unifying features.

7.106 The EIAR states that there would be a perceptual impact on setting affecting views across the loch and construction noise would affect the tranquillity during preconstruction and enabling albeit within the context of the A82. Construction would include an access off the A82, jack up barges, moored barges, concrete batching plant, tall construction plant and localised earthworks, as well as the movement of construction material across the waterbody of the Loch. This would remove mature loch side broad leaved vegetation, part of which is designated Ancient Woodland altering the contrast between the woodland and forestry in the LCT. The extent would be evident across a large proportion of the LCT. It would impact a long stretch relatively uninhabited stretch between settlements, although this would be set within the context of Foyers power station and the A82 corridor, with Loch Ness being accustomed to accommodating pumped hydro schemes, including Loch na Cathrach.

7.107 The influence of construction would comprise a considerable part of the LCT, predominantly within Loch Ness and its shore. The works at the headpond would be perceptible from pockets of the LCT with some changes to setting and within the context of the A82. Construction lighting would include navigational buoys, tower crane light and low lighting of construction barges within the context of Foyers along with other boats on the loch.

7.108 Overall, the applicant considers there would be a localised direct effect on the LCT associated with the LCW. However, due to the openness across the water body of Loch Ness, there would be a wider influence across the LCT associated with the scale of construction plant and activity which would appear uncharacteristic within a stretch of undeveloped shoreline. This would be in combination with movement across the loch associated with the transportation of construction material. The change would be less pronounced due to the context of similar development and cranes present at the loch shore at Foyers, and the large scale of the landscape. The remainder of key characteristics of the LCT would remain intact. The duration of change would be medium-term, however peak activity at the headpond, tunnel portals and LCW would be short-term. The EIAR concluded the effect would be Moderate Adverse and Significant.

- 7.109 At Year 1 of operation the LCW would be a new intervention in a relatively undeveloped shoreline. However, this would be within the context of the A82 and Foyers power station. The permanent loss of the mature loch side broad leaved vegetation, part of which is designated as Ancient Woodland is a key characteristic of the loch shore and would alter the contrast between woodland and forestry. The applicant considers it would not be dissimilar to the rock stabilisation further along the shore; however, this has a more natural appearance and is of a smaller scale. Additionally, they feel the enormous extent of Loch Ness would lessen the impact.
- 7.110 Whilst the elevated bridge structure would appear relatively apparent against the backcloth of newly planted, but yet to become established vegetation, the treatment of the abutments and bridge deck using a system of timber panels would screen the concrete deck and create a more natural treatment and visually recessive structure and bridge profile. The timber structure would continue around the edge of the smolt screen and the diffusers which would add accents of natural materials across the new structure. The LCW platform would be broken up to some extent using a variety of muted surface treatments reflecting the colours in the landscape and natural rock tones. Areas of raised planting beds with native understorey and tree planting would begin to break up and soften the retaining wall and the newly created rocky shoreline in between the diffusers would further integrate the LCW into the loch shore landscape. Motion-sensor lighting would be required at the LCW along with navigational lighting around part of the smolt screen. Whilst this would be perceptible across a relatively wide geographical influence across the LCT, due to the openness of Loch Ness, the applicant considers this would be in the context of existing lighting on the loch shore at Foyers and vehicle headlights on the A82.
- 7.111 During operation, the water level changes within Loch Ness would occur more frequently than the existing fluctuating levels because of the proposed development, although this is not considered to result in any material alteration to the appearance of the loch shore which along with the horizontal nature of the loch surface, would remain unaffected. Further details relating to potential effects on cultural heritage assets within the LCT, such as Cherry Island crannog, are contained in EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage. The operational infrastructure at the headpond would be perceptible from pockets of the LCT, experienced from the loch towards the northern and southern head of the loch and on the loch shore on both the eastern and western side of the loch. There are few areas where both the LCW and the headpond would both be perceptible, which lessens the perceived change. The movement of maintenance vehicles along a section of existing forestry track off the A831 would be in close proximity to the LCT, however, the applicant considers this is unlikely to be perceptible due to the containment by forestry plantation.
- 7.112 The permanent access tracks and permanent compounds would also be perceptible from parts of the LCT. This would generally be from small parts in the northern section, however there would be a considerable area with influence from occasional maintenance activity on the existing Alltsigh access track. Due to this being an existing track and the context of forestry operations in the wider landscape, the applicant considers there would be no adverse effect on the LCT. A number of the key characteristics of the LCT would remain unchanged, including

the contrast between the busier western side of the loch and quieter eastern side of the loch, the landform of the glen and deep loch, albeit with a localised alteration at the loch side, the presence of large-scale conifer forests and agricultural land. The simple linear and enclosed visual composition of bands of land, water and sky would remain as would the long skylines of even height with the glen and loch as unifying features. Whilst the LCW would create a new visual focus along the western shoreline, the careful use of natural materials to break up the access road and platform, lack of buildings and limited vertical structures would ensure that the visual focus directed along the linear route of the glen and up to the skyline would remain uninterrupted. Overall, there would be a localised direct effect on the LCT associated with the LCW. The EIAR concluded that the effect would be Minor Adverse and not significant which is agreed to be accurate.

- 7.113 At Year 15 of operation, the new planting associated with the LCW will have established, reinstating a wooded shoreline around the infrastructure and integrating the bridge piers into the landscape. Whilst there would remain a localised direct effect on the LCT, the vast majority of the key characteristics of the LCT would remain unaffected by the proposed development. The EIAR concluded that the effect would be Minor Adverse and not significant. Again, this is agreed with, the long-term operational impacts on this LCT being acceptable owing to the appropriate design of the LCW.

LCT 226 – Wooded Glen Inverness

- 7.114 The permanent access track from the A831 to the UCW is located within this LCT. The LCT comprises extensive areas of plantation forestry, which, despite being a detracting feature to scenic quality for parts of the LCT, contributes to the historic mosaic landscape pattern and provides functional landscape value. The LCT has cultural value due to the large number of archaeological remains and local distinctiveness due to the vegetation cover and hydrology. The LCT also comprises recreational opportunities including Core Paths, recreational routes, such as part of the Affric Kintail Way, Loch Ness 360 Trail and the Great Glen Way along with local walking routes. The EIAR classifies the landscape value as Medium. The key characteristics of this LCT are given as follows:

- Long glens set within uplands and mountains, divided into upper and lower glens by a cross-cutting narrow farmed strath;
- Lower glens are broader, with steep upper slopes, undulating lower slopes and a narrow floor mostly occupied by river terraces; upper glens are narrower and more rugged, influenced by the surrounding mountains;
- Rivers, water bodies (lochs and sometimes reservoirs), river flats and areas of wetland in valley floors;
- Balance between open and enclosed space formed by the diverse mix of landscape patterns, land uses, conifer forests, woodlands and fields;
- Distinctive mix of rugged hillsides, extensive Caledonian pine forest and lochs in the upper glens;
- Actively farmed and relatively settled lower glen floors, with small clusters of houses near roads, and farms and crofts in open areas at the base of slopes; Contrast between the settled and farmed floor of lower glens and their open heather moorland and forests of the upper slopes;

- Sparse settlement in upper glens, limited to a few farms and crofts, isolated lodges and clusters of estate buildings usually sheltered by trees or woodland;
- Central, major through-road in lower glens, with minor roads along the glen sides which are integrated with the landform and settlement pattern;
- Single track road along the base of the upper glens, terminating at the upper edge of the glen;
- Large number and range of archaeological remains in the lower glens;
- Strong sense of history in upper glens created by the Caledonian pinewood stands;
- Intimate, semi-enclosed landscape within the glen floor with limited visibility, due to the screening effect of trees and landform;
- Distant views along the glens from open hill ground creating a feeling of openness and exposure; and
- Increasing sense of naturalness and remoteness traversing the upper glens into mountainous interior.

7.115 The construction of the permanent access track would take place through this LCT. It would be a maximum of 10m wide to allow for two-way vehicle movement. The applicant considers the works would be a very slight alteration to the characteristics of the LCT due to existing forestry operations, however, the existing access track is currently narrow and not surfaced. There would be a limited impact on the perceptual setting of the River Coiltie due to the forestry vegetation. Whilst the applicant considers the activity would not be dissimilar to the existing forestry operations, however, it is hard to agree with this conclusion given this will be a substantial new access with multiple HGVs trips per hour servicing up to 1,000 staff on site, albeit accommodated in shuttle buses.

7.116 During construction the applicant considers the impact would be limited to construction plant movement along existing forestry tracks in the upper glens along a temporary track. The geographic area would be limited due to containment from forestry vegetation and in their opinion activity would not be dissimilar to forestry operations which reduce the sense of naturalness and remoteness of this part of the LCT. As noted earlier, this conclusion is questioned. The applicant considers there would be a highly localised and indirect influence from the construction of the headpond and compounds limited by the existing vegetation and wider landscape. Overall, they feel the construction operations within the LCT would be limited and would have a very slight alteration to the landscape receptor in a localised part of the LCT. The duration of change would be medium-term, however, peak activity at the headpond and tunnel portals would be short-term. The EIAR assessed the effect as Negligible Adverse which is not significant. Whilst it is agreed that there would be no significant effects, it is considered that the effect would be Minor Adverse rather than Negligible given the additional construction plant movement along the track. It is likely to have more construction plant movements than those on existing forestry tracks.

7.117 At Year 1 of operation there would be occasional maintenance traffic movement along the permanent access track directly within the LCT. This would not be dissimilar to existing forestry Operations within the LCT. The geographic area over which the change would be experienced would be highly limited due to the

containment from the existing forestry vegetation. The applicant considers there would be highly localised indirect influence on the LCT from other aspects of the proposed development, which would be limited by containment from existing vegetation cover in the LCT and wider landscape. The remaining key characteristics, linking to the intimate, semi-enclosed landscape, land use across the LCT and vegetation pattern, would remain intact. Overall, they feel the operational maintenance traffic within the LCT would be limited and would have a very slight alteration to the landscape receptor in a localised part of the LCT. The EIAR assessed the effect as Negligible Adverse which is not significant.

- 7.118 At Year 15 of operation, the applicant considers the changes would be similar to that of Year 1, however, it would have been expected that mitigation measures such as planting and landscaping would have become established in the locale. Again, the EIAR assessed the effect as Negligible Adverse which is not significant. These findings are agreed with the impact on this LCT being well considered and within acceptable limits.

Surrounding Landscape Character Areas

- 7.119 LCT 220 - Rugged Massif is located to the south of the site on the same side of Loch Ness, LCT 221 - Rolling Uplands, LCT 224 - Farmed and Wooded Foothills and LCT 227 - Farmed Strath are located on the opposite site of Loch Ness around Foyers. They are all within the 20km study area and would not be directly impacted by the proposed development and in summary, none of these surrounding LCTs would be significantly affected.
- 7.120 **LCT 220 - Rugged Massif** has a strong sense of identity due to the scale of mountains present and a sense of remoteness and wildness with expansive views of Loch Ness, woodland, heathland and adjacent straths and glens resulting in scenic qualities. A small part of the LCT is located within the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA. Overall, the indirect effects on the setting of the LCT would be limited to small pockets of elevated land within the LCT, and there would be a very limited alteration to any of the key characteristics of the LCT. The duration of change would be medium-term, however peak activity at the headpond would be short-term.
- 7.121 At Year 1 of operation the indirect effects on the setting of the LCT would be limited to small pockets on elevated land and there would be a very limited alteration to any of the key characteristics of the LCT. At Year 15 of operation the new planting associated with the headpond would assist in partial containment of the permanent infrastructure and would reduce perceptual effects on the LCT.
- 7.122 **LCT 221 - Rolling Uplands** comprises large swathes of smooth rolling hills which are punctured by the occasional rocky outcrop, which create localised patterns on the upper slopes between areas of heather moorland, resulting in natural heritage value. Vistas from hilltops and plateaus are vast, evoking a profound sense of openness and exposure, and limited settlement contributes to scenic value and tranquillity qualities. The uninhabited interior has wildness qualities, albeit noting the context of large wind farm developments, and the archaeological evidence contributes to cultural heritage value.

- 7.123 Within the Study Area, defined recreational routes are limited to a very small section of the Loch Ness 360 Trail. Considering all these factors, the landscape value of this LCT in the Study Area is assessed as Medium by the applicant. Overall, the indirect effects on the setting of the LCT would be limited to small pockets, largely on the edge of the LCT, and there would be a very limited alteration to any of the key characteristics of the LCT. The duration of change would be medium-term, however peak activity at the headpond and LCW would be short-term. At Year 1 of operation the indirect effects on the setting of the LCT would be limited to small pockets, largely on the edge of the LCT, and there would be a very limited alteration to any of the key characteristics of the LCT. At Year 15 of operation, the new planting associated with the LCW and near to the headpond would assist in partial containment of the permanent infrastructure and would reduce perceptual effects on the LCT.
- 7.124 **LCT 224 - Farmed and Wooded Foothills** comprises a good landscape condition, particularly in the settled and farmed parts, and exhibits cultural heritage value due to the presence of archaeological relics. The LCT comprises a complex geology, which offers natural heritage value. Numerous Core Paths are found within this LCT, parts of the Loch Ness 360 trail recreational route and recreational activity within the conifer forests and woodland, offering recreational value. The scenic, wildness and tranquillity qualities are limited in comparison to other LCTs in the Study Area due to the strong influence that forestry and felling operations have on the character of the LCT. A large proportion of the LCT is covered by the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA. Considering all these factors, the landscape value of this LCT in the Study Area is assessed as High.
- 7.125 Overall, many of the key characteristics of the LCT would be unaffected. The duration of change would be medium-term, however peak activity at the headpond and LCW would be short-term. At Year 1 of operation, most key characteristics of the LCT would be unaffected and the geographic area of the LCT within the Study Area that would be indirectly affected by the proposed development would be very limited. At Year 15, the new planting associated with the LCW and landscape surrounding the headpond would assist in partial integration of the permanent infrastructure into the landscape and would reduce perceptual effects on the LCT.
- 7.126 **LCT 227 - Farmed Strath** is comprised of two separate straths running southwest to northeast and these areas feature flat or gently undulating strath floors bordered by steep, rocky upland slopes, resulting in natural heritage value. The LCT comprises a strong sense of identity due to the contrasts in vegetation cover and landform compared with the adjacent uplands. The perceptual qualities are more limited compared to other LCTs due to the limited wildness, tranquillity and scenic qualities due to the influence of the road network and considerable forestry cover. Several Core Paths and recreational routes, including the Loch Ness 360 Trail and the Affric Kintail Way, traverse these areas. A very small part of the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA lies within this LCT. Considering all these factors, the landscape value of this LCT in the Study Area is assessed as Medium. Overall, the indirect effects on the setting of the LCT would be limited to small pockets and there would be a very limited alteration to any of the key characteristics.

- 7.127 At Year 1 of operation the scale of the permanent infrastructure on the moorland plateau would have an influence on the outward views from the LCT but it should be noted that views are generally directed along the strath, which would be unaffected. New planting within the landscape around the headpond would be barely perceptible at Year 1. At Year 15, the new planting near to the headpond would have become established reducing perceptual effects on the LCT. The EIAR assessed the effect during construction and operation as Negligible Adverse and not significant which is agreed.

Loch Ness and Duntelchaig Special Landscape Area

- 7.128 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment in Chapter 6 of the EIAR gives an overview of the impacts and effects of the proposed development on landscape designations within the study area. The applicant conceded there are significant effects on the SLA's Special Qualities, particularly from the key viewpoint Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, but do not consider the proposed development would have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA overall.
- 7.129 In general, Highland Council's Landscape Officer does not contest these reported LVIA findings, however, they consider the applicant has understated the geographical extent of some of the proposal's significant effects. These are judged to be experienced beyond the limited areas identified by the applicant, particularly once operational longer term.
- 7.130 Noted for its ever-changing compositions, this area is dominated by the vast linear feature of Loch Ness and its dramatic landform trench, flanked by steep, towering wooded slopes that lead to undulating moorland ridges and a contrasting remote interior plateau of upland lochs, small woods and rocky knolls. The SLA is particularly sensitive to additional large features upon the side slopes or ridge lines of the glen. This is because these may contrast with the distinct linear form of the glen, the characteristic concentration of built elements along the shore or over flatter adjacent areas, interrupt the sequential experience travelling along the glen, affect the perception of its scale, and change the open nature of views passing between the shore and the surrounding slopes. Both sides of Loch Ness are sensitive to the introduction of built development which would intrude on views up and down the loch and also across the loch. Combinations of developments which would result in a series of linear or point features may distract from the sequential experience when travelling along the loch. The addition of some developments may introduce levels of activity which would disturb the tranquillity experienced during still weather conditions. Whilst it may not qualify as Scotland's most diverse loch scene, the sheer scale and striking linearity of Loch Ness along with the popular myth associated with it make the location unique.
- 7.131 Key Landscape Characteristics are noted as:
- The striking, linear landform trench containing Loch Ness offers a dramatic sequence of landscape elements along its 23-mile length. The horizontal water's surface combines with adjacent steep slopes to create a simple and distinctive profile of contrasting planes and edges. The skyline is generally

horizontal although there are occasional features such as hill peaks, pylons, telecommunications mast and distant views of wind turbines;

- The steep sided slopes of the glen are frequently incised by burns, rivers and waterfalls which fall over sheer rocky cliffs;
- There are long vistas of grand proportions, and the sheer scale of the loch dwarfs the numerous boats, and yachts which frequent its waters;
- At regular intervals along the loch there are small areas of low-lying pasture with associated settlements, which nestle at the mouths of the rivers flowing into Loch Ness. These offer a human scale juxtaposed against the vast extent of open water and dramatic linear landform character. Public access to the loch's shore is typically limited to these areas of habitation due to the steepness of the glen side slopes;
- To the east of Loch Ness an undulating moorland plateau characterised by rocky knolls and small-scale woods and forests, and peppered with upland lochs, creates an intricate landscape mosaic which contrasts strongly with the adjacent simple drama of the Great Glen;
- The few quiet bays and more accessible areas of shore and forest give relief from the unrelenting linearity of Loch Ness and provide opportunity to savour its tranquillity;
- Historic features frequently form point foci within the glen, typically commanding positions of good defence, access or better farmland. These form landmarks while moving sequentially along the glen; and
- On the western shore there are more recent crofting townships and older irregular townships.

7.132 Approximately half of the site is within the SLA boundary including the largest scale upper works and lower works infrastructure including the main dam, saddle dams 1 and 2, Alltigh access track and inlet/outlet structure on the Loch Ness shoreline. The A82 access, borrow pits, laydown area temporary and permanent construction compounds are outwith the SLA. The ZTV indicates that many elements of the proposed development would be theoretically visible across a substantial part of the SLA, particularly along Loch Ness and from elevated ground. The LCW would be the most widely visible component along much of the waters and eastern shores of Loch Ness (and a small section of the western shores), whilst visibility of the headpond is generally restricted to elevated areas in the west, south, east and northeast, and two sections of a total of approximately 10km from the waters and eastern shores of Loch Ness.

7.133 Many receptors that experience the special qualities of the SLA are those using the area for recreation, including tourists, on Loch Ness itself including the Great Glen Canoe Trail and the upland landscapes above both the east and west shore including the South Loch Ness 360 Trail, Great Glen Way and Meall Fuar-mhonaidh. Other well used routes within the SLA include the A82, B862 and the National Cycle Route 78. A key visual characteristic of the SLA are long vistas of grand proportions. The striking, linear landform of the loch creates a dramatic sequence of landscape elements along its length. The water's surface combines with adjacent steep slopes to create a simple and distinctive profile of contrasting planes and edges. The skyline is generally horizontal; however, there are occasional features such as hill peaks, pylons, telecommunications mast and views of wind turbines.

- 7.134 Preconstruction and enabling works would include plant and site clearance, construction of temporary access tracks, material storage and tunnel portal construction near the River Coiltie. Although there would be no works within the SLA, the EIAR concluded that there would be an indirect impact on setting, predominantly in the northern part with construction activity. The EIAR concluded that this would be within the context of forestry plantation works and the disturbance from traffic on the A82. It stated the effect would be Minor Adverse and not significant.
- 7.135 Construction work would include plant and activity for the LCW, headpond, secondary bund and temporary access tracks within the SLA. The headpond works would be in close proximity to the prominent summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh diminishing the unique openness and wildness aspects of the moorland and loss of dwarf birch and montane scrub. The applicant considers the scale of the Great Glen Fault would not be affected. The LCW would introduce human scale and vegetation removal in an otherwise natural view. The construction noise would affect the tranquillity of the SLA in a highly localised area within the context of the A82. The simple and distinctive profile of the loch and typically horizontal skyline would be altered by the construction activity at the loch shore and extending into the water as well as on the moorland plateau which would be seen across a considerable extent of the SLA due to the openness and long vistas. However, the headpond and LCW would rarely be perceived in-combination, and the views of grand proportions diminish the detail of the foreground which lessens the scale of change. The applicant considers the scale of Loch Ness dwarfs boats which also lessens the scale of change. They feel the LCW is unlikely to affect the perception of scale due to views of vehicles on the A82 and local rock stabilisation also within context of forestry plantation, pylons, masts and views of distant wind farms which lessen the wildness aspects of the SLA.
- 7.136 Indirect impacts on the setting of the SLA associated with temporary construction compounds and the access tracks would be seen in small part of the landscape near the River Coiltie and from elevated positions on the moorland plateau. The works would interrupt the experience travelling along the glen and introduce human scale activity including construction noise. The applicant considers this would be within the context of the A82 and forestry plantation works. Lighting would include lighting rigs in remote locations including the headpond, navigational buoys at the LCW, the tower crane at the LCW and from construction barges. The majority of the landform and long vistas would not be perceptible during darkness so would not be affected. They feel that lighting would also be seen within the context of lighting at Foyers and other boats, however, it is considered that this has been understated given lighting required for various elements of the construction period such as worker compounds, tunnelling portals and access tracks. The site and immediate surrounding area have limited light pollution except from moving vehicles and the lighting associated with the construction works would likely have a dramatic effect on the landscape. Given the scale of the proposed development, including the workers' compound and associated construction works, it is likely that skyglow would be generated at this location, with effects extending beyond the area assessed, even with the proposed mitigation measures in place. Therefore, using the assessment criteria above

these elements would impact the SLA for a temporary period during the construction basis.

- 7.137 The EIAR concludes the effect would be localised at the LCW, headpond, secondary bund and access tracks. There would be a wider influence across the SLA which would be less pronounced due to the context of the loch physical interventions, and several key characteristics would remain intact. The EIAR assessed the effect as Moderate Adverse which is Significant.
- 7.138 At Year 1 of operation the LCW, headpond and associated embankments and spillway, secondary bund and permanent access tracks would be located in the SLA. The headpond introduces unnatural straight edges to the moorland plateau and typically horizontal skyline close to the Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit. The applicant considers this is barely perceptible due to landform/forestry and does not compromise the distinctive shape of the hill peak or affecting the scale of the Great Glen Fault. The LCW would interrupt the sequential experience of travelling along the glen, introducing human scale activity and vegetation loss in an otherwise natural view. This would be seen across a considerable extent of the SLA due to the openness and long vistas available. They feel these foreground features and encroachment into the loch would only be barely perceptible from either end of the loch where the angle of view and distance would substantially lessen the scale of change and diminished by the grand proportions of the SLA.
- 7.139 The applicant considers the LCW would not detract from the prominence or setting of Urquhart Castle or affect the perception of scale due to views of movement of vehicles along the A82 in close proximity and rock stabilisation. They feel the retaining wall would be a noticeable feature at Year 1 of operation but within context of forestry plantation, pylons, telecommunications mast, wind farms, the A82 and Foyers Power Station. It is considered this wider context has been overstated by the applicant given that forestry plantation is natural and most of these land uses noted are set back some distance from the proposed development and not in the same views. Additionally, the extensive area of clearance for compounds, laydown area, borrow pits and access tracks will take some time to become established, long beyond Year 1 of operation.
- 7.140 The applicant considers the permanent compounds (including GIS station and tunnel portals) near the River Coiltie would interrupt the sequential experience travelling along the glen and introduce human scale activity in part of the surrounding landscape, albeit within the context of existing forestry plantation activity. Again, it is considered that this mitigation has been overstated. The Loch Ness water level would change more frequently but not materially change the appearance of the shore. Lighting would include motion-sensors at the headpond and LCW along with the requirement for navigational lighting around the smolt screen. They feel these lit elements would be seen in the context of existing lighting at Foyers and on boats on the loch, however, the effects have been understated with impacts more widespread than those assessed.
- 7.141 Overall, there would be a localised direct effect on the SLA associated with the LCW, headpond, secondary bund and part of the permanent access tracks. Due to the long vistas available, there would be a wider influence across the SLA associated with the permanent LCW, however this would be less pronounced due

to the scale of the landscape and nearby loch side context of Foyers and the A82. The majority of the key characteristics of the SLA would remain intact. The duration of change would be long-term. The EIAR concludes there would be a Minor Adverse effect which is not significant.

- 7.142 At Year 15 of operation the applicant considers there will be a localised direct effect on the SLA from the headpond, secondary bund and permanent access tracks. Planting would partially screen and integrate the access tracks and reinstating historic native planting. The applicant considers new planting would partially contain and integrate the LCW within the loch shore, lessening the perception in a relatively undisturbed section of the western side of the loch. Overall, despite the remaining localised direct effect on the SLA associated with the LCW, headpond, secondary bund and permanent access tracks they feel the integrity of the SLA and its component key characteristics and special qualities would remain largely unaffected. The scale of the SLA assists in lessening the perceived scale of change. The EIAR concludes the effect is Minor Adverse and not significant.
- 7.143 The Council's Landscape Officer notes that the LVIA fails to assess each of the Special Qualities (SQ) of the SLA, rather it assesses the SLA as a whole quoting a handful of the citations. Nevertheless, they agree with the LVIA conclusion; that there would be significant effects on the SLA during construction, however, they also anticipate these to be higher from the top of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, and in relation to the headpond embankments (main dam, saddle dams 1 and 2), compounds and access tracks. They disagree with the LVIA which finds that there would be no significant effects on the SLA during operation of the pumped storage hydro scheme.
- 7.144 The SQ of the SLA include The Dramatic Great Glen of which the following elements would be affected by the proposed development to some extent:
- Meall-Fuar-mhonaidh - "Meall Fuar-mhonaid is a good vantage point from which to appreciate the massive scale and alignment of the Great Glen Fault within a backcloth of the Monadhliath massif to the south and the Balmacann and Affric mountains interior to the northwest, both areas which possess wildness qualities."
- 7.145 Whilst the proposed development would not significantly affect views towards Meall Fuar-mhonaidh (albeit that there would be some significant effects during construction), the Landscape Officer considers it would be extremely prominent in views from the landmark hill, as illustrated in VP1, and would detract from its relationship to the setting described in the SQ. This hill is regarded by the Council as a Key Location, being a well visited landmark hill which is relevant to the SQs of this SLA.
- 7.146 During construction and operation, the headpond components of the proposed development would be very prominent in views to the north-west from and around the summit area of this hill. It would introduce large-scale infrastructure into an uninterrupted wide view and would occupy a large horizontal extent of the view, contrasting with the existing landscape. Whilst there are other human developments visible in this direction, such as the existing Bhlaraidh Wind Farm in the distance, the proposed development would be the closest human influence

seen from the summit and would affect the wildness qualities experience in this direction. The engineered cut slopes and straight edges would reduce the naturalness and affect several perceptual qualities from this location. The proposed development would encroach and increase the visual prominence of human development from the summit.

7.147 The Landscape Officer does, however, agree that the views towards Loch Ness to the south-east would not be affected by the proposed development. They regard the effect on this SQ (including the visual effect) during operation to be Major Adverse and Significant, rather than Moderate Adverse assessed by the applicant. The Landscape Officer considers the proposed development would result in a disruption between the hill and its setting, and therefore significantly adversely affect this SQ of the SLA. As such, the Landscape Officer has objected to the application on this basis. However, they are content that there would be no compromise on the overall integrity of the SLA.

7.148 The Landscape Officer notes other key points to draw out from the SLA citation including:

- “This area is dominated by the vast linear feature of Loch Ness and its dramatic landform trench, flanked by steep, towering wooded slopes that leads to undulating moorland ridges and a contrasting remote interior plateau of upland lochs, small woods and rocky knolls.”
- “These slopes are also flanked by a diverse mix of woodland and forests and form an open smooth moorland skyline ridge.”
- “An undulating moorland plateau of rocky knolls flanked by small-scale woods and forests....”

7.149 On review of VP7 – Dores Beach and VP9 - Loch Ness, canoeists and pleasure craft specifically, the ridge near the recognised landform of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh would be altered by the headpond components from one being undulating to a uniform, almost straight edge connecting the rocky knolls. It would be apparent from both viewpoints. Whilst it would be slightly more apparent from VP9, this is a transient view and would be noticeable more in passing. The Landscape Officer agrees with the LVIA that the view would be Significant during construction but also consider it would be Significant (Moderate Adverse) during operation. From VP7 – Dores Beach, located over 17km away from the proposed development, whilst the change to the ridge would be noticeable, the visual effect will not be Significant. This is a static and key view down the loch and the existing undulating ridge in the context of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh is noticeable which would change as a result of the proposed development.

Cumulative Landscape Impact

7.150 The EIAR assessed the cumulative impact of the proposed development at Year 15 of operation. The key visible elements of the scheme at this stage include the headpond, LCW and GIS switchyard. The assessment looked at the cumulative impact with the schemes set out in EIAR Chapter 4: Approach to EIA (Volume 2 – Main Report). The assessment excluded Glen Affric Hydro-electric Scheme, Livishie Hydro-electric Scheme, Stronelairg Wind Farm, Dunmaglass Wind Farm,

Aberarder Wind Farm, Auchterawe Substation extension and the new residential development at Drumnadrochit due to a combination of the type of development, distance, lack of visibility and shared receptors. The assessment looked at two scenarios, Scenario 1 – schemes that have been consented and/or under construction in addition to operational schemes and Scenario 2 – Scenario 1 plus schemes that are at application stage.

- 7.151 The EIAR concluded that for both Scenario 1 and 2, the addition of the proposed development into the cumulative scenario would increase the influence of energy infrastructure, largely limited to the LCW, across the SLA but would be consistent with the existing pattern and scale of energy infrastructure. The addition of the proposed development, due to the scale of the SLA and key characteristics including the landform trench and long vistas, is considered to have a limited effect on the scenic quality of the SLA. For both Scenario 1 and 2, the magnitude of cumulative effect resulting would be low. Taking account of the high sensitivity, the significance of cumulative effect is judged to be Minor Adverse and not significant.
- 7.152 The EIAR assessed the effect on all LCTs as negligible or no change with the exception of LCT 222 - Rocky Moorland Plateau - Inverness and LCT 225 - Broad Steep-Sided. For LCT 222 the addition of the proposed development into the cumulative scenario, for both Scenario 1 and 2, would increase the influence of energy infrastructure within a small part of the large-scale LCT and would be apparent within a limited geographic area due to the landform pattern. The applicant considers the addition of the proposed development would have a limited additional effect on the perceptual elements of the landscape, including remoteness and sense of scale.
- 7.153 For LCT 225 the addition of the proposed development into the cumulative scenario, for both Scenario 1 and 2, would increase the influence of energy infrastructure across the LCT but would be consistent with the existing pattern and scale of energy infrastructure. The applicant considers the addition of the proposed development, due to the scale of the LCT and key characteristics including the landform, is considered to have a limited effect on the scenic quality of the LCT. For both scenarios, the magnitude of cumulative effect resulting would be Low. Taking account of the High sensitivity, the significance of cumulative effect is judged to be Minor Adverse (not significant).
- 7.154 In terms of the SLA, the proposed development adds further energy related development to the existing cluster in the wider outlook, particularly from VP1 at the Meall Fuar-mhonaid summit, but this is limited to upland locations only. Whilst the applicant considers the proposed development would not detract from views across Loch Ness and towards the Great Glen, they concede that the inundated loch and associated infrastructure would draw receptor's attention away from the natural landscape in the western/northwestern sector of the view. The applicant considers this would incrementally increase the cumulative effect which remains as Moderate Adverse (Significant). Whilst it is considered that the applicant has understand their assessment it is agreed there will be a Significant effect on some of the SQs of the SLA.

- 7.155 In summary, having appraised both the LVIA identified Significant effects, and advice provided by the Council Landscape Officer, the Planning Officer concludes that the most pertinent landscape matter to be considered is the development's effect on the SLA, including the cumulative effect of existing, consented and planned renewable energy development from Meall Fuar-mhonaid summit. Having considered several renewable energy developments from this receptor for many years, it must be concluded that from this location the most influential special quality is the vast linear feature of Loch Ness and its dramatic landform trench, flanked by steep, towering wooded slopes which would still be appreciated with the development eroding some of the other SLAs SQs from this landmark. The proposal would be extensively overlooked from this summit and would be seen alongside other consented large scale energy projects which would be present in the northern aspect from this summit. The co-location of such infrastructure brings in-combination Significant adverse landscape effects for VP1 and the immediate upper elevated parts of this SLA, but its integrity of this regionally important designation will not be lost.

Visual Impact

- 7.156 Large scale energy schemes would be expected to result in significant visual impact effects; however, such effects do not automatically translate to unacceptable effects. This is a matter of planning judgement when considering the merits of any given scheme. The applicant's assessment of effects on visual amenity has considered potential effects on visual receptors (people obtaining views) based in buildings, on routes (both roads and recreational) and taking advantage of the views at outdoor locations and defined viewpoints. Following a review of the applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), there are some areas of difference between the assessment of officers and that of the applicant.
- 7.157 Appendix 4 - Viewpoint Assessment Appraisal – Visual Impact provides a summary of the applicant's assessment and officer appraisal of this assessment, which highlights the differences and any concerns with regard to visual impact.
- 7.158 There is broad agreement with the applicant's assessment with regards to significant visual effects during construction works. From the visualisation locations assessed, the applicant considers that only one of these viewpoints will experience significant effects into the operational stage at Year 15, VP1 – Meall Fuar-mhonaidh. Whilst it is agreed that there will be significant effects from this viewpoint it is considered that the applicant has understated various elements of the impacts to receptors. It is considered the applicant has underestimated the visual effect at VP9 – Loch Ness, canoeists and pleasure craft at Year 1 and Year 15 of operation along with VP2A – Settlement of Foyers and VP13 – A82 layby at Year 15 of operation with all considered to have significant effects longer term.
- 7.159 The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) drawings (Figures 6.2A – 2G) provide the predicted extent of bare earth visibility of the proposal. Figure 6.7A shows the ZTV from study area viewpoints, Figure 6.6 shows the ZTV from Core Paths, local walking and recreational routes.

- 7.160 The ZTV and viewpoints indicate that visibility of the upper and lower works would be experienced from different areas in and around Loch Ness. The upper works would be mostly experienced by receptors on higher ground set back above the western shore of Loch Ness on routes such as Meall Fuar-mhonaid summit and portions of the Great Glen Way but with ZTV also extending to between approximately 15km to 18km on upland locations to the southwest, south, east and northeast. The visibility of the headpond will be seen some distance beyond the Study Area to the northeast and northwest. Elements of the upper works will also be seen from smaller portions on Loch Ness on the outskirts of Fort Augustus and Dores.
- 7.161 The lower works would be mostly experienced by those on Loch Ness, portions of the B862, settlements like Foyers and scattered properties set back from the eastern shoreline, with ZTV extending to approximately 17km to Newtown to the southwest and beyond Dores approximately 21km to the northeast.
- 7.162 Construction compounds will be most apparent in the immediate surrounding area, east and northeast with ZTV extending beyond the Study Area. Likewise, access tracks will be most apparent in the immediate surrounding area south, east, northeast with ZTV extending beyond the Study Area.

Impact on Residential Receptors

- 7.163 Residential receptors within the study area are relatively limited in number and are concentrated within the settlements of Drumnadrochit, Foyers, Balnain, Dores and Fort Augustus, together with a number of scattered individual dwellings and farmsteads. The visual amenity experienced by these receptors varies considerably depending on their elevation, orientation, surrounding vegetation and proximity to Loch Ness. In general, residential properties are often positioned to take advantage of views towards Loch Ness and the surrounding upland landscape, although mature woodland, forestry plantation and local landform frequently act to filter or screen views.
- 7.164 Drumnadrochit is located on relatively low-lying ground on the western shore of Loch Ness at the mouth of Glen Urquhart. Many residential properties are orientated towards Loch Ness and the wooded slopes beyond, benefiting from wide-angle views across the loch and surrounding landscape. However, the settlement is substantially contained by established woodland, including Urquhart Bay Wood, Craig Monir Wood and Creag na h-Iolaire, which provides a degree of visual enclosure and screening.
- 7.165 Foyers occupies the eastern shore of Loch Ness where residential development is generally situated on steeply rising slopes above the loch. As a result, many properties enjoy expansive views across Loch Ness towards the western shore and surrounding uplands. While mature vegetation surrounding the settlement provides some screening, elevated properties and upper-storey windows often have extensive and uninterrupted views, represented by VP2A – Settlement of Foyers in the LVIA.
- 7.166 Balnain is a small settlement located north of the River Enrick and is characterised by low-density residential development. Some dwellings overlook the surrounding

rolling landscape and wooded glens, whilst others are set within more heavily vegetated areas where outward views are restricted by mature planting. Consequently, the visual experience of residents varies significantly across the settlement.

- 7.167 Dores is situated on the eastern shore of the northern end of Loch Ness and comprises residential properties largely orientated towards the loch. While mature lochside vegetation often restricts views from lower floors, upper-storey windows typically benefit from more open and panoramic views across Loch Ness and towards the opposite shore. The settlement's position on the loch shore gives many residents a direct visual relationship with the wider landscape setting of the Great Glen.
- 7.168 Fort Augustus lies at the southern end of Loch Ness on relatively low-lying ground. Due to this topography, direct views of Loch Ness are generally more limited than at Dores or Foyers. Nevertheless, most properties have views towards the surrounding valley sides, with upper-storey viewpoints providing broader vistas of the surrounding landscape. Extensive forestry plantation to the north and west also contributes to the visual character experienced by residents.
- 7.169 In addition to the settlements described above, individual residential properties and farmsteads are dispersed throughout the study area, particularly along the A82 and B852 corridors and around the shores of Loch Ness. Views from these properties are commonly filtered by mature vegetation, however, elevated locations and upper-storey windows frequently afford expansive views across Loch Ness, the surrounding wooded glens and the upland landscape, represented by VP4A - Great Glen Way and Bunloit Road near Bunloit. The principal visible feature from scattered settlements at Bunloit would be Saddle Dam 1 on the skyline. Given the distance, intervening vegetation and the limited extent of visibility, the applicant concludes that visual effects would be Minor Adverse and not significant, this is agreed.
- 7.170 Overall, residential visual amenity within the study area is strongly influenced by topography, vegetation cover and building orientation. Properties located on elevated ground or with upper-storey outlooks typically experience the broadest and most extensive views, while lower-lying properties are often more visually contained by landform and woodland. The vast majority of the development would be well screened from settlements, with the more extensively visible element being the LCW which, where visible through woodland, would be most acutely experienced from properties in and around Foyers, located approximately 2.3km directly southeast across Loch Ness, with Significant effects being limited to these locations during the construction and early operational phase. However, the effects will remain localised and diminish once the LCW has become operational longer term.

Impact on Recreational Users of the Outdoors

- 7.171 Recreational receptors within the study area comprise users of long-distance recreational routes, Core Paths, local walking routes, informal tracks, recreational watercraft and visitors to key viewpoints and landmarks. These receptors generally have a high sensitivity to visual change because their appreciation of the

landscape forms an important part of the recreational experience. The quality of views experienced varies according to location, with some routes passing through enclosed woodland landscapes and others providing extensive panoramic views across Loch Ness, surrounding uplands and the Great Glen.

- 7.172 A number of nationally and regionally recognised recreational routes pass through the study area, including the Loch Ness 360 Trail, Great Glen Way, Affric Kintail Way, South Loch Ness Trail, Trail of the Seven Lochs and Monadhliath Trail, together with promoted cycling routes such as the Caledonia Way and National Cycle Network. Although sections of these routes are enclosed by forestry and woodland which limit outward views, many locations provide wide-ranging and elevated panoramas across Loch Ness and the surrounding landscape. Recreational users are therefore able to experience a diverse range of landscape character types, including steep-sided glens, moorland plateaux, woodland, lochs and upland ridges, represented by VP2A – Settlement of Foyers, VP4A - Great Glen Way and Bunloit Road near Bunloit, VP6 – Great Glen Way near Urquhart Castle, VP7 – Dores Beach, VP8 – Suidhe viewpoint off the B862 and VP10 – B862 and Loch Ness 360 Trail near to Fort Augustus. There is general alignment with the applicant's findings, and it is agreed the visual effects are not significant from these viewpoints, outwith VP2A – Settlement of Foyers, which will reduce to not significant longer term once mitigation measures become embedded as noted previously.
- 7.173 The study area also contains an extensive network of Core Paths linking settlements, recreational routes and areas of interest around Loch Ness and Glen Urquhart. The experience of users varies considerably according to local landform and vegetation cover. In some areas, forestry plantations and topography create a more enclosed visual environment, whilst elsewhere users benefit from expansive views across Loch Ness and the wider Great Glen. Representative views from the Core Path network are assessed through Viewpoints VP3 – Foyers campsite, VP6 – Great Glen Way near Urquhart Castle, VP7 – Dores Beach, VP11 – Core Path to the northwest of Fort Augustus and VP12 – Local walking users off the Core Path network and Glen Coliltie Walking Loop. There is general alignment with the applicant's findings and it is agreed the visual effects are not significant from these viewpoints, outwith VP3 – Foyers campsite and VP12 – Local walking users off the Core Path network and Glen Coliltie Walking Loop, which will reduce to not significant longer term once mitigation measures set in.
- 7.174 Local walking routes and informal paths provide access to some of the more remote and upland parts of the study area. These include the Meall Fuar-mhonaidh route, the Loch nam Breac Dearga Trail, the Glen Coiltie Walking Loop and paths associated with the River Coiltie. Visual experiences along these routes range from enclosed woodland and glen environments to open upland landscapes with wide panoramic views. These routes often offer a stronger perception of naturalness, tranquillity and remoteness than routes closer to settlements and roads, represented by VP1 - Meall Fuar-mhonaidh and VP12 – Local walking users off the Core Path network and Glen Coiltie Walking Loop.
- 7.175 The applicant considers Meall Fuar-mhonaidh is the most important recreational receptor, this is agreed. Walkers at the summit would experience direct views of the headpond, main dam, saddle dams, roads, compounds and associated

infrastructure. It is considered the applicant has understated the visual effect as Moderate Adverse and Significant once operational, as opposed to Major Adverse and Significant at both the construction and operational phase, and the construction effect to be Major Adverse Significant. However, there is alignment with the applicant's thoughts that receptors are mainly focussed on panoramic views towards and across Loch Ness and the wider mountain backdrop of the Great Glen to the south will remain unaffected.

- 7.176 The applicant considers there will be significant visual effects from the VP12 – Local walking users off the Core Path network and Glen Coiltie Walking Loop which will reduce to not significant once operational longer term following landscape restoration and woodland planting, this is agreed.
- 7.177 Loch Ness itself is an important recreational resource supporting boating, canoeing, fishing and other water-based activities. Users of recreational watercraft, including those travelling along the Great Glen Canoe Trail, typically experience uninterrupted and expansive views across the loch and surrounding shorelines. From the loch, the dramatic landform of the Great Glen, wooded shorelines, moorland plateaux and upland ridges can be appreciated within a broad panoramic setting, receptors on the loch are represented by VP9 - Loch Ness, canoeists and pleasure craft set back 11.3km from the headpond, looking northeast from a boat travelling on Loch Ness from Fort Augustus.
- 7.178 The applicant concludes that canoeists and other water users would experience Moderate Adverse and Significant visual effects during construction, but these would reduce to not significant once operational. It is considered the applicant has understated the visual effects which are considered Significant longer term with the main dam and LCW seen at various points along the surface of Loch Ness. It is considered that Significant visual effects of the main dam would extend up to approximately 12km with the LCW extending up to approximately 4km.
- 7.179 Visitors to prominent viewpoints and places of interest also form an important recreational receptor group. The summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh provides extensive panoramic views across Loch Ness, the surrounding uplands and the wider Highland landscape, while designated viewpoints such as Dores Beach, the Suidhe Viewpoint and the Loch Ness View scenic viewpoint are valued specifically for their scenic outlooks. These locations are recognised recreational destinations where visual appreciation of the landscape is a primary purpose of the visit, resulting in high sensitivity to changes within the view, represented by VP5 - Beach near to Loch Ness View off the B862, VP7 – Dores Beach and VP8 – Suidhe viewpoint off the B862.
- 7.180 Strathairn Community Council raised concerns regarding the landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development, particularly in relation to Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, the Balmacaan mountain interior, the Loch Ness SLA and the wider Great Glen. They consider the effects on recreational users; visitors and the perceived wildness of the area have not been adequately assessed.
- 7.181 Whilst Mountaineering Scotland consider the proposed development would not interfere with views of Glas-bheinn Mhòr or the distant mountain skyline from Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit, they consider that hill walkers would remain highly aware

of the UCW due to its prominent man-made features in the immediate landscape. They argue that exposed areas of boulders and shingle around the upper reservoir margins during periods of lower water levels would emphasise its artificial appearance. Furthermore, they disagree with the assessment that the headpond would resemble a natural upland loch at full water level, stating that its engineered shape, lack of marginal vegetation and associated infrastructure would make it readily identifiable as a man-made feature. Whilst Mountaineering Scotland's comments are noted, given the lack of setback from VP1 - Meall Fuar-mhonaidh and the headpond of only 263m, mitigation measures may be less apparent given receptors will be overlooking the development, however, it is considered that these will become more effective from further distance.

- 7.182 Overall, recreational receptors throughout the study area experience a diverse range of visual environments, from enclosed woodland landscapes to iconic panoramic views over Loch Ness and the Great Glen. The greatest recreational value is generally associated with elevated viewpoints, lochside locations and long-distance routes where the scenic quality, scale and dramatic landform of the landscape can be most fully appreciated.
- 7.183 For such a large-scale national development it is considered that Significant visual effects are relatively well contained, outwith Meall Fuar-mhonaidh which directly overlooks the headpond. Views of the main dam would be the most extensive feature seen from pleasure craft on Loch Ness with Significant visual effects experienced up to approximately 12km, views of the LCW will be less widespread on the water surface with Significant visual effects experienced up to approximately 4km. Likewise, key walking routes viewpoints in and around Loch Ness will generally not experience Significant visual effects once the PSH has been operational longer term through a combination of mitigation measures employed and distance from the UCW and LCW infrastructure.

Impact on Road Users

- 7.184 Road user receptors within the Study Area comprise users of the A82, A831, B852, B862 and the local road network. The visual experience of these receptors varies considerably depending on the alignment of the road, surrounding topography and the presence of woodland and forestry cover. While some sections provide expansive views across Loch Ness and the Great Glen, others are visually enclosed by steep landform, forestry plantation and mature vegetation.
- 7.185 The A82, which follows the western side of Loch Ness between Inverness and Fort Augustus, is a key transport corridor through the study area. Views from the route are intermittent, with mature woodland and forestry often filtering or screening views towards Loch Ness. However, occasional openings and lay-bys provide expansive views across the loch and towards the opposite shore. Users of the A82 therefore experience a mixture of enclosed roadside views and wider scenic vistas associated with the landscape of Loch Ness, represented by VP13 – A82. The applicant considered that Significant visual effects would dissipate once operational longer term. It is considered that the applicant has understated the effect which will continue to be Significant longer term, particularly for tourists travelling along the A82 where the LCW will be more evident as opposed to those in the local community using the route on a regular basis. However, it is conceded

that the views from road users will be for a relatively short stretch of the Trunk Road with the ZTV showing visibility up to approximately 900m from the northeast and 800m from the southwest. Vegetation and landscaping proposed will further reduce visibility.

- 7.186 The A831 runs east to west through Glen Urquhart, broadly following the River Enrick. The road is generally located on the glen floor and is characterised by a semi-enclosed visual environment created by rising valley sides, woodland and forestry plantation. Long-distance views are often restricted, although some sections provide more open views along the glen corridor. Overall, the visual experience is strongly influenced by the enclosed nature of the surrounding landscape. The applicant's assessment that the visual effects will not be significant is agreed.
- 7.187 The B852 follows much of the eastern shoreline of Loch Ness between Dores and Foyers. Visibility along the route varies, with some sections heavily screened by woodland and forestry plantation, while other stretches provide sweeping views across Loch Ness towards the western shore, including open moorland, woodland and rocky upland landscapes. These alternating enclosed and open views contribute to a varied visual experience for road users, represented by VP2A – Settlement of Foyers and VP5 – Beach near to Loch Ness View off the B862. The applicant's assessment that the visual effects will not be significant once operational longer term is agreed.
- 7.188 The B862 generally runs inland from the eastern shore of Loch Ness, only approaching the loch at locations such as Dores and Fort Augustus. Visual conditions along the route are highly variable. Some sections are enclosed by forestry plantation, while elevated stretches offer extensive views across the surrounding landscape. Road users experience a changing sequence of open and enclosed views, including fields, lochs, woodland and dispersed rural settlements, represented by VP8 – Suidhe viewpoint off the B862 and VP10 – B862 and Loch Ness 360 Trail near to Fort Augustus.
- 7.189 In addition, a network of local roads serves settlements, crofts and farmsteads throughout the study area. These roads generally follow the existing landform and settlement pattern and tend to provide a more intimate visual experience. Views range from open outlooks across moorland and loch landscapes to sections that are heavily enclosed by woodland and forestry, represented by VP4A - Great Glen Way and Bunloit Road near Bunloit.
- 7.190 Overall, road users experience a diverse range of views across the study area. The most scenic and expansive views are generally associated with routes adjacent to Loch Ness, particularly along parts of the A82 and B852, while inland routes such as the A831 and sections of the B862 are often more contained by landform and vegetation. The roadway network therefore provides a continually changing sequence of visual experiences, ranging from enclosed woodland corridors to iconic views of Loch Ness and the Great Glen. It is considered that views from surrounding roads are generally glimpsed, intermittent views, particular of the LCW from across Loch Ness. More sustained views are experienced when

approaching the LCW on the A82 in either direction up to approximately 900m at most.

Further Environmental Information - Landscape and Visual Implications

- 7.191 In terms of the proposed OHL the applicant considers they have provided as much information as possible regarding the intended grid connection, recognising that the connection remains at Gate 1 stage and that the final route, tower design, tower locations, and connection solution have yet been determined. The final OHL design will be developed and progressed by SSEN and will be subject to separate consenting and environmental assessment processes.
- 7.192
- Despite these uncertainties, the applicant has undertaken a conservative indicative visibility assessment based on a previously assessed route corridor and nominal 60m towers which was submitted as FEI on 3 September (AI_4_06 Grid Connection: Further Clarification). This includes: an indicative terrain-based viewshed showing the potential area from which illustrative towers may be visible;
 - a review of existing LVIA viewpoints to identify potential theoretical visibility; and;
 - a detailed assessment from VP1 - Meall Fuar-mhonaidh examining the visibility of individual illustrative towers.
- 7.193 The indicative visibility assessment suggests that visibility of the illustrative grid connection towers would be limited from the established LVIA viewpoints. VP1 - Meall Fuar-mhonaidh is the only assessed viewpoint within the 10km study area from which visibility of more than one tower is theoretically predicted by the applicant, reflecting its elevated position and reduced screening from surrounding landforms.
- 7.194 No theoretical tower visibility is identified from VP2, VP3, VP4, VP5, VP6, VP9 or VP13. VP12 lies at the edge of the visibility envelope and is considered marginal, while VP11 is outside the study area but is not expected to experience visibility based on adjacent mapping. VP7, VP8 and VP10 are located beyond the 10km study area and were not assessed further by the applicant.
- 7.195 Overall, the assessment indicates that potential visibility of the illustrative overhead line infrastructure is largely confined to the higher and more elevated viewpoints, with Meall Fuar-mhonaidh representing the principal viewpoint where notable visibility may occur.
- 7.196 The VP1 assessment indicates that 15 of 49 illustrative towers may be theoretically visible, while 34 would not be visible. Only three towers would be fully visible, with the remainder partially screened by landform. The applicant notes the remaining 12 theoretically visible towers are only partially visible, with the extent above intervening terrain ranging from approximately 40m of the nominal 60m tower to approximately 1m. The closest of these partially visible towers is some 5.3km from VP1.
- 7.197 In terms of the potential cumulative landscape and visual impacts, the applicant reviewed Loch Liath Wind Farm grid connection appraisal (submitted as part of the PLI (WIN-270-26)) in relation to Glen Earrach PSH as it will also connect to

Bingally substation. Both grid connections remain indicative, with final routes and designs yet to be developed through future transmission consenting processes, however, wood pole OHL is proposed for Loch Liath Wind Farm which would be significantly smaller than the intended 400kV connection for Glen Earrach.

- 7.198 The Loch Liath appraisal did not include detailed visualisations or a ZTV for the OHL relying instead on existing viewpoints, desk-based assessment and professional judgement. It concluded that the indicative grid connection would not result in significant landscape or visual effects.
- 7.199 Based on the information currently available, the applicant considers there is no evidence of significant cumulative landscape or visual effects arising from the relationship between the two indicative grid connections. However, they note that any detailed cumulative assessment should be undertaken at a later stage once the respective connection routes and designs are sufficiently defined.
- 7.200 There is potential for the Glen Earrach PSH OHL to lead the eye towards an enlarged wind farm cluster when viewed from Glen Affric NSA approximately 5km to the west of Bingally substation. This will need to be assessed further to conclusively determine if the Glen Earrach PSH OHL may lead to any significantly adverse cumulative effects on the NSA, and to ascertain if this can be effectively mitigated through the exploration of alternative routing or further undergrounding of the connection, as it has been indicatively proposed for the first 2km from the upper reservoir.
- 7.201 It is therefore considered that there remains potential for higher level of effects on the Glen Affric NSA which must be borne out of further assessment, albeit that this can only be based on more known information on the environmental constraints and detailed design for these connections. As a worst case therefore, ECU as decision maker must accept that such cumulative effects may occur.
- 7.202 Following the Raeshaw decision THC considers that if the grid connection is determined to form part of the whole project, a pre-commencement multi-stage consent condition is required to ensure that the grid connection is properly identified, assessed and consented before any part of the development is commenced. However, such an approach poses the risk that investment decisions to progress the development may be at risk. Additionally, if the PSH is consented, there will be anticipation that its grid connection will be consented. Based on the indicative level of detail provided to date, it is uncertain if the project's OHL would not raise a matter of national importance should, for example, NatureScot raise objection at a later stage. Ultimately, this is a risk borne by the development industry, and a consequence of the generating and grid connection regimes not being aligned.
- 7.203 Similarly, the landscape and visual effects of the upgraded weir, particularly during the construction phase, are not yet fully understood as the detailed design of this element still has to be confirmed.
- 7.204 In conclusion to the landscape and visual concerns raised, whilst the Council's Landscape Officer maintains an objection, the Planning Officer considers this objection is focused principally on the assessment of operational effects

experienced from Meall Fuar-mhonaigh and the "Dramatic Great Glen" SQ of the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA. Generally, the Landscape Officer accepts the LVIA is robust, agrees with many of its conclusions, is generally content with other elements of the development and concludes that the overall integrity of the SLA would not be compromised. The principal difference between the applicant and the Landscape Officer is therefore one of professional judgement regarding the magnitude of a significant effect at a limited number of receptors, as opposed to whether significant effects occur, which are expected for national scale development.

- 7.205 Having regard to the relatively contained nature of these effects, alongside the retention of the SLA's overall integrity, when considered in the round it is concluded by the Planning Officer that the landscape and visual impacts do not outweigh the wider benefits of the proposal. Such effects are proportionate to the scale of the development, the sensitivity of the receiving landscape, with the degree of topographical containment ensuring significant adverse landscape and visual effects would be generally well contained to a limited number, distance and geographical extent of receptors. This speaks to the appropriateness of the site selection and to the overall suitability of the design proposed, with the site having the relatively unique technical attributes to develop an efficient PSH.

Noise and Vibration

- 7.206 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 14 sets out the assessment of the potential noise and vibration impacts. No Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSR) are located within the site boundary. NSRs within 300m of the application site boundary were initially considered. This was then extended to include the key receptors beyond 300m as agreed with the Council. The study identified 10 residential NSRs: Balmacaan Estate, Annie's Lodge, Loch Ness Shores Campsite, Primrose Bay, Balnain Old Post Office, Achindaul House, Foyers Lodge, Ancarraig House, Divach Farmstead and Alltsigh Cottage/Lochside Hostel. The closest NSR is NSR10 (Alltsigh Cottage/Lochside Hostel) is located immediately adjacent to the existing southern Alltsigh access track that used for the valve house. NSR5 (Balnain Old Post Office) is the NSR most affected by construction of the northern access route from the A831.
- 7.207 Embedded mitigation would include restricted working hours, use of quiet and low vibration equipment, location of fixed and semi-fixed plant away from NSRs where possible, minimised use of diesel generators, regular maintenance of plant, use of compressors with properly lined and sealed acoustic covers, shutting down machinery when not in use, loading and unloading away from NSRs, use of modern plant, organisation of site operations and vehicle routes to reduce noise and management of noise by employees (such as revving and use of radios).
- 7.208 The assessment concluded that following embedded mitigation there would be either a minor or negligible effect from airborne noise on the NSRs both during the pre-construction/enabling phase and construction phase. This included plant noise and vibration, piling vibration, blasting, construction traffic and construction of access roads. The exception was NSR5 (Balnain Old Post Office) during the construction of the access track off the A831 while the work is within the vicinity of

the property. It concluded that the effect from ground borne noise and vibration would be negligible and not significant.

7.209 Due to the separation distances, topography between the development and receptors, and given the majority of plant machinery and other noise sources would be underground, the Council's Environmental Health Team agreed at the pre-application stage that a detailed operational noise assessment could be scoped out. However, the applicant has submitted an operational airborne noise assessment in line with the scoping report and BS4142 methodology. The assessment explains that operational equipment above ground has the potential to cause annoyance or disturbance at NSRs. The gas insulated switchgear (GIS) switchyard is the only above ground operational equipment. However, modern GIS equipment emits very low noise levels during operation, and the yard would be located approximately 3.3km from the nearest NSR. The assessment concluded the impact would be negligible with no significant effect. Given the depth of the below ground equipment the assessment concluded it is highly unlikely there would be noise disturbance. There is no operational noise associated with the LCW.

7.210 The following noise and vibration limitations have been applied based on recommendations from Environmental Health:

Construction Noise

- Monday to Friday; 8am to 6pm 55 dB LAeq 1 hour;
- Saturdays; 8am to 1pm 55 dB LAeq 1 hour;
- Saturdays; 1pm to 6pm 45 dB LAeq 1 hour; and
- Outwith the above times, noise from construction related activities shall not exceed 35dB LAeq 1 hour

Construction Vibration

- Monday to Friday; 8am to 6pm The peak particle velocity shall not exceed 5 mm·s⁻¹;
- Saturdays; 8am to 1pm The peak particle velocity shall not exceed 5 mm·s⁻¹;
- Outwith the above times, the peak particle velocity shall not exceed 0.3 mm·s⁻¹; and
- The above limits apply to all construction activities other than blasting. For blasting, the applicant would be required to submit a scheme demonstrating that the best practicable means would be employed to minimise the impact of noise and vibration.

Construction Groundbourne Noise

- Monday to Friday; 8am to 6pm 35 dB LASmax;
- Saturdays; 8am to 6pm 35 dB LASmax; and
- Outwith the above times, groundborne noise from construction related activities shall not exceed 30dB LASmax.

- 7.211 Construction noise and vibration would be managed through a finalised Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan which would be formally agreed with the Planning Authority prior to construction work commencing and is controlled by condition.
- 7.212 A number of representations raised concerns regarding noise associated with building works. The Environmental Health Team has reviewed the submitted Noise Impact Assessment and is satisfied that construction noise, vibration and dust can be appropriately managed through best practicable means and the implementation of mitigation measures set out in the Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan. While some short-term exceedances of recommended noise limits may occur during works closest to residential properties, these are expected to be temporary and capable of mitigation. A detailed Blasting Plan is also sought prior to commencement of development and could be controlled by condition.
- 7.213 A condition would require a Community Liaison Group (CLG) be set up. Given the size and duration of the proposed development there may be disturbance over a prolonged period, not only noise but other issues such as increased traffic and accesses used for recreation. As such, the CLG would help to ensure that the Community Council and other stakeholders are kept up to date and consulted before, during and after the construction period.
- 7.214 With regards to operational noise, the Council's Environmental Health Team concludes that noise and vibration effects are unlikely to be significant. The principal above-ground operational noise source, the GIS Switchyard, is located over 3km from the nearest NSR and predicted noise levels are well within accepted limits. Ground-borne noise and vibration from the underground infrastructure are similarly not expected to result in adverse effects due to the separation distances involved.
- 7.215 The applicant has adopted best practice methods and mitigation measures to control noise and vibration for the proposed development which would be managed through CNVMP and controlled by condition. It is generally agreed with the findings in EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 14 Noise and Vibration that the effects are not significant.

Roads, Transport and Access

- 7.216 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 13 assessed the impact of the proposed development on roads, transport and access including movement of Abnormally Indivisible Loads (AIL). The assessment has been carried out in accordance the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) Guidelines: Environmental Assessment of Traffic and Movement (July 2023).
- 7.217 The proposed development would be accessed via the existing Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) track off the A831 near Balnain following the Balmacchan Estate track to the River Coiltie. The track would be upgraded and widened with a new section over the river in agreement with the FLS. New permanent tracks would be constructed from the river to the south and east of the headpond to provide permanent access to the crest of the main dam, saddle dams 1 and 2. A

permanent access would also be provided to the UCW from the A82 Trunk Road but would only be used when the headpond is drawn down to its minimum level (475m AOD). A new section of track would be constructed from the existing Alltsigh track to the base of the main dam to provide access to the valve house. This southern access route from Alltsigh has been revised to be used on an infrequent basis by smaller vehicles such as 4x4s only, with negligible works required to the existing rough track, and requiring a relatively short section of new track at the northern end to reach the headpond, limiting potential impacts on Allt Loch an t-Sionnaich and Allt Saigh. Access to the LCW would be provided directly from the A82 via a single priority junction.

- 7.218 Representations were received raising concern regarding illuminated tracks on the hillside. The applicant has confirmed that the access track network at the site is not proposed to be permanently illuminated. Any lighting associated with the tracks during construction would be temporary, localised and only provided where necessary for safe construction activities or access.
- 7.219 The Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) requires all construction lighting to be directional, low-glare and designed to minimise light spill beyond the immediate working area. Temporary lighting would be switched off when not required, with compound lighting generally controlled through timers and motion sensors.
- 7.220 No permanent lighting is proposed along the operational access tracks. Permanent lighting would be limited to specific operational infrastructure, such as compounds and tunnel portals, and would generally be motion-activated. It is considered the detailed arrangements to be agreed through the CEMP and controlled by planning conditions to minimise impacts on the surrounding environment.
- 7.221 During construction, HGV traffic would approach the site from the east via the A831 with the majority travelling from the north on the A82. No construction traffic would use the A831 west of the Balnain main access, with this to be controlled by condition. Some traffic is also anticipated to travel via the A82 to the south and the A833. AILs would travel to site by road from the Port of Inverness via the A82 and A831 to the Balnain main access. The temporary access tracks would be constructed at 10m width to allow for two-way vehicular construction traffic and reduced to a single-track for operation. Most staff would be accommodated on-site, minimising the use of car/LGV access from the Balnain site access. The secondary access from the A82 at Alltsigh would not be routinely used for construction traffic and would serve as emergency access if required.
- 7.222 The LCW would be a marine construction project and where possible all construction plant and materials would be transported by water via Loch Ness, generating minimal road traffic. A LCW access junction for operational traffic would be provided on the A82. This would be a priority-controlled access junction that would be constructed from the Loch Ness side and only be tied into the A82 at completion of the LCW construction phase.
- 7.223 The EIAR relies heavily on the LCW being delivered as a marine construction project, with plant and materials transported via Loch Ness and the Caledonian

Canal, thereby significantly reducing assessed HGV traffic impacts. However, further details are required as to how these marine operations would be facilitated in practice. No details have been identified regarding barges or vessel numbers, navigation and safety assessments, loading and unloading arrangements, the location of material transfer points, or the provision of associated infrastructure such as jetties, pontoons or landing facilities. Details of the infrastructure required for the LCW works and construction strategy. Scottish Canals requested a Canal Management Plan which can be controlled by condition along with further conditions attached covering the proposed marine logistics strategy.

- 7.224 Main construction works are anticipated to take up to eight years. The assessment used The Department for Transport National Trip End Model to provide forecasted growth and assumed all construction material would be imported to site by road (with the exception of marine works for the LCW). The assessment is divided into pre-construction and enabling works and main construction.

Pre-construction and Enabling Phase

- 7.225 For the pre-construction and enabling phase, the 24h hour average daily HGV traffic flows on the A831 at Milton would increase by 15%. On the A831 at Strathnacro the flow rate would increase by 46%. As both routes are subject to an increase of 10% or more in traffic (shown in Table 13-16), this means they meet the Rule 1 and Rule 2 threshold for assessment (IEMA Guidelines).
- 7.226 The assessment showed that traffic increases across the study area would be under 30% with the A831 Milton and A831 Strathnacro showing increases of 1% and 2% in all vehicles. This would result in a negligible to minor effect for severance, fear and intimidation. This was classified as minor adverse before mitigation which was not significant. The rate and severity of accidents relate to changes in traffic flows. The assessment predicted no material change in accident numbers of severity which resulted in a negligible to minor effect on road user and pedestrian safety which would be minor adverse before mitigation and is not significant. The impact on amenity for pedestrians, cyclists along with other non-motorised users was assessed as negligible to minor and minor adverse before mitigation which was not significant. Delays to road users (both motorised and non-motorised) was also assessed as negligible to minor and minor adverse before mitigation.
- 7.227 Hazardous and large loads would be transported to the site by road (Special Order Movements under the Roads Vehicles (construction and Use) Regulations (1986)). The pre-construction and enabling phase are not anticipated to generate Special Order Movements for vehicles over 150,000kg. All movements would be subject to agreement with the relevant road authorities and Police Scotland. A total of 197 heavy construction plant is forecast for delivery and would be routed via the A82 and A831. These loads would be escorted where necessary. The assessment assumed a rate of one large load per hour. This is based 197 vehicles arriving over 22-working days in the first month, with 9-hours per day available for large load deliveries. The assessment concluded this would have no impact on severance, fear and intimidation, road safety, amenity and delay beyond those set out above.

Construction Phase

- 7.228 For the construction phase the 24-hour average daily HGV traffic flows in Chapter 13 states: A82 Inverness (46% increase), A82 North Drumnadrochit (46% increase), A831 Milton (152% increase), A831 Strathnacro (670% increase) and A833 (393% increase). All locations would be subject to an increase of 10% or more in traffic (shown in Table 13-23). Again, this means they meet the Rule 1 and Rule 2 threshold for assessment (IEMA Guidelines).
- 7.229 The assessment is based on the percentage increase in all vehicles which was calculated as 3% on the A82 (Inverness and North Drumnadrochit) and 5% (A831), 15% (A831 Strathnacro) and 11% (A833). This results in a minor adverse effect for severance, fear and intimidation which was not significant. The assessment predicted no material change in severe accident numbers with a minor adverse effect on road user and pedestrian safety before mitigation. The impact on amenity for pedestrians and cyclists (along with other non-motorised users) were assessed as minor adverse before mitigation which not significant. Delays to road users (both motorised and non-motorised) was assessed as moderate adverse on the A831 and minor adverse or negligible on the other roads before mitigation.
- 7.230 It is anticipated that the large plant and equipment would have been transported during pre-construction. However, the construction phase is expected to generate movement of some AIL vehicles (large loads would be scheduled for delivery outside peak traffic hours). The EIAR predicts 72 AIL arrivals averaging two per month between month 21 and month 60. The assessment concluded this would have no impact on severance, fear and intimidation, road safety, amenity and delay. As noted previously, all movements would be subject to agreement with the relevant road authorities and Police Scotland. These loads would be escorted where necessary. Hazardous loads including Class 1.5 explosives would be transported to site in accordance with the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road regulations (ADR 2017). This includes use of an experienced ADR carrier, pre-approved routes which avoid as far as possible, population areas and avoidance of stopping near tunnels, bridges or crowded areas.
- 7.231 The EIAR recognised construction has the potential to exacerbate access issues for the communities on the west side of Loch Ness where works would be located. The EIAR states that reduction of impacts on the A82 and local roads has been a key project objective with feedback used to inform the access routes. Mitigation includes the main access moving to the A831 from Balmain and shuttle buses for construction workers. Measures to ensure safe and convenient access to school bus pick up and drop off locations are detailed in Chapter 13: Access, Traffic and Transport (Volume 2: Main Report). Accommodating the workforce onsite would help significantly reduce the number of trips on the road network. Along with the CTMP, various abnormal load mitigation works would be achieved through an Abnormal Load Transport Management Plan, Construction Staff Travel Plan and appropriate distribution of public information, along with any cumulative measures if required.
- 7.232 The EIAR assessed the cumulative impact of consented developments in the study area as of December 2024 (Chapter 4: Approach to EIA Table 4-4). The

EIAR assessed cumulative effects on severance, fear and intimidation, road safety, amenity and non-motorised delay as either negligible or minor and not significant. Road vehicle and passenger delay was assessed as not significant, with the exception of the A82 Lewiston, which was assessed as moderate and significant, which was attributed to an increase in congestion.

- 7.233 If the project were to be decommissioned, it is anticipated that the potential effects on transport and access would be equal to or lesser than the construction impacts noted.
- 7.234 The Council's Transport Planning Team have not objected subject to the conditions noted. However, they expressed concerns regarding the proposed transport strategy noting their disappointment that the primary construction and operational access had been moved from the preferred A82 trunk road options to the A831 at Balnain, although it accepted that the A831 between Drumnadrochit and Balnain is capable of accommodating large goods vehicles.
- 7.235 The main concern related to the reliability of the applicant's Traffic Assessment. Transport Planning considered the predicted peak construction traffic figures (178 HGV movements and 34 other vehicle movements per day based on two-way movements (arrival and departure)) to be unrealistically low for a development of this scale. Additionally, they raised concerns regarding assumptions about the use of on-site borrow material, the delivery of the LCW as a marine-based project, workforce accommodation arrangements, and the omission of timber haulage traffic from the assessment. Transport Planning requested a more detailed appraisal of likely construction traffic impacts informed by contractor input.
- 7.236 Following submission of a clarifications regarding the transport and roads issues noted in September 2025), Transport Planning acknowledged that the applicant had provided additional justification for selecting the A831 access route, including engineering, environmental and community considerations aimed at reducing construction traffic through Drumnadrochit and past Urquhart Castle.
- 7.237 However, Transport Planning remain unconvinced that the Traffic Assessment represented a realistic worst-case scenario. They continue to view the traffic assumptions as optimistic and considered that any failure to achieve them could have implications for the safety and capacity of the local road network. Concerns also remain regarding the aforementioned matters and the need to properly assess cumulative impacts with other developments, including the Bingally Substation project. These matters are expected to be addressed through the recommended planning conditions.
- 7.238 The majority of construction traffic approaching from Inverness will travel south on the A82 and turn onto the A831, meaning it will not cross Drumnadrochit Bridge. The Coiltie access route was specifically selected to avoid routing HGV traffic through Drumnadrochit and across the bridge. Nevertheless, Drumnadrochit Bridge across the River Enrick and junction from the A82 on to the A831 are noted as an existing pinch point for pedestrians and additional construction traffic turning at the junction could increase activity in the area. Following discussions between the applicant and a number of Community Councils in October 2025, they formally committed to investigating and progressing pedestrian safety improvements at

Drumnadrochit Bridge. As a result, the applicant supports delivery of a pedestrian footbridge for use by waders, cyclists and wheeling users along with other agreed A831 mitigation measures which can be secured through planning conditions.

- 7.239 Transport Scotland are satisfied that the environmental effects on the trunk road network, including the A82, would be acceptable and concludes that any impacts from construction traffic can be appropriately managed through mitigation measures and the conditions noted. Construction traffic would use the A82, A831, A887, and A833, with HGV movements on parts of the A82 increasing beyond assessment thresholds. However, it agrees with the applicant's conclusion that the resulting effects on road safety, severance, driver delay, non-motorised users and amenity would be Minor and not significant.
- 7.240 They also reviewed arrangements for abnormal load deliveries and acknowledged that some temporary traffic management measures and the removal of roadside furniture may be required to facilitate transport of large components. This can be controlled by condition.
- 7.241 Glen Urquhart Community Council, Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council, and Strathnairn Community Council raised concerns regarding construction traffic, disruption to local communities, tourism businesses and visitor attractions, including the Great Glen Way, Loch Ness 360, Urquhart Castle and other recreational resources. It objects to the scale and duration of construction activity and the associated effects on the local road network and visitor economy.
- 7.242 The applicant has adopted the best practical means and mitigation measures to control roads, transport and access related issues associated with the proposed development through the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures and subject to the conditions attached from Transport Planning and Transport Scotland. It is generally agreed with the findings in EIAR 2 Chapter 13: Access, Traffic and Transport and the mitigation proposed, residual traffic and transport effects are not significant, which for a project of this scale, speaks to the adequacy of the road network in this location but also the appropriateness of the applicant's transport strategy, utilising the marine environment for a substantial number of abnormal loads.
- 7.243 Additionally, the applicant submitted traffic and transport FEI (A1_3_29 Updated Cumulative Traffic and Transport Assessment and A1_3_38 Traffic and Transport) that assessed the proposed 400kV grid connection and concludes that, despite additional construction traffic on the A831 corridor, it would not give rise to any significant additional traffic or transport effects beyond those already assessed for the PSH. The grid connection is forecast to generate relatively low traffic volumes, with impacts remaining minor or negligible and capable of mitigation through the CTMP.
- 7.244 Once operational, the applicant considers the traffic effects of the proposed development are likely to be insignificant. As such, the effects during the operation phase are scoped out of the assessment.

Recreational Access

- 7.245 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 16 Socioeconomics, Tourism and Recreation assesses potential effects, including cumulative effects, of the proposed development on public recreation and access during construction and operation. An outline Access Management Plan (Volume 5 Appendices 16:1) was submitted with the application.
- 7.246 There are four Core Paths (CP) that cross the site: CP 02.02 Forestry Commission carpark to Shenval (low) and CP 02.03 (upper), CP13.01: Drumnadrochit to Balnain and CP13.02: Cnoc a Bhuachaille. There are a number of Core Paths located to the south around Drumnadrochit and also north of the site. The Coiltie Loop follows the FFS access road. The site is intersected by four long distance recreational routes:
- Great Glen Way which runs north/south through the Creag-nan-Eun Forest and through the southeastern part of the site. The route lies parallel to the western shore of Loch Ness and the A82, travelling approximately 10km between Alltsigh and Grottaig within the site;
 - Loch Ness 360 overlaps with the Great Glen Way for approximately 10km between Alltsigh and Grottaig within the site;
 - Affric Kintail Way crosses the site to the south of Balnain following the existing FLS track; and
 - Great Glen Canoe Trail of which approximately 6.7km of this route is within the site.

The Meall Fuar-mhonaigh summit and walking trail is also located 510m south of the headpond within the site.

- 7.247 During construction (including pre-construction and enabling work) access would be affected along the Affric Kintail Way, Core Path 13.02 Cnoc a Bhuachaille, Core Path 13.01 Drumnadrochit to Balnain and the Coiltie Loop Trail. For safety purposes and to maintain recreational access they would be rerouted adjacent to the forestry road, through FLS land. This would ensure users are separated from construction traffic. An Access Management Plan (AMP) would confirm whether any of the re-routed sections would be retained permanently. Recreational users on the Coiltie Loop would be diverted to the existing Core Path 13.02 which extends along commercial forestry land. All diversions would include directional signage.
- 7.248 The applicant notes that a lower-level walking route between Balnain and Drumnadrochit on the same side of the river as the access track could provide an alternative route for the Affric Kintail Way during construction and potentially remain as a recreational path thereafter. The Outline Access Management Plan already provides for temporary rerouting of affected sections of the Affric Kintail Way and Drumnadrochit to Balnain Core Path during construction, with the detailed Access Management Plan determining whether any rerouted sections can be retained permanently.

- 7.249 Given the distance, and in some cases the natural separation caused by topography and waterbodies, of the Great Glen Way, Loch Ness 360 and the other recreation routes outlined in Chapter 16: Socio-economic, Recreation and Tourism (Volume 2: Main Report), the impact on these routes has been assessed as not significant. In the event that construction works, or traffic are required on these routes, the applicant has committed to access management measures which maintains safe access for recreational users.
- 7.250 The public's legal right of access to water would be maintained with Loch Ness remaining largely accessible for recreational activities during construction. In the interest of public safety, access to the immediate area around the LCW would be restricted during construction. The applicant has committed to safety measures including temporary booms and markers to give a safe working zone on Loch Ness, local information boards and signage. Loch nam Breac Dearga would no longer be accessible for fishing and other recreational activities. Clear signage would be provided with details of alternative lochs that could be used following consultation with the Council through the finalisation of the AMP.
- 7.251 The EIAR states that Core Paths to the east of Loch Ness would experience construction impacts from works on site. It explains that the impact on the Loch Ness 360 and Great Glen Way would be negligible with views restricted by topography and tunnelling works located below ground. The Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit is popular with locals and tourists. The rounded shape of the summit and prominent position make it is a distinctive landmark which would be located approximately 510m south of the headpond. The enjoyment would be impacted by proximity to the construction works and view of Loch Nam Breac Dearga altered by the works. This is assessed as negligible by the EIAR, yet it is unclear how the applicant can reach this conclusion as noted in the landscape and visual section previously.
- 7.252 The poor condition of the existing path to the Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit has been acknowledged in the proposed Loch Liath Wind Farm (DPEA reference WIN-270-26) with this application currently at appeal pending determination by Scottish Ministers. The applicant for the windfarm proposed access enhancements to the path which provides access to the summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh. Enhancement works are expected to include the upgrade and improvement of the section of path from the deer stile to the summit which was identified during the survey work as being in a degraded state. The upgrade will include the construction of raised aggregate paths or stone pitched paths, as advised by survey work, with the installation of appropriate drainage including water bars and cross-drains to ensure hydrological connectivity of habitats and protect the integrity of the path. The applicant also proposes the provision of an ecological information board. As this path falls within the same host estate as the proposed PSH, recommended planning conditions can secure this mitigation of the PSH as well as for the wind farm, with the mitigation to be delivered by either development should they be consented and developed.
- 7.253 This is considered reasonable given that significant adverse landscape and visual effects are likely for visitors to this summit for both of these renewable energy projects. Scope for further access path improvements across the estate is also

expected to be explored, including investigation of the scope to enable a degree of public access the UCW, which would add to the recreational interest in this area, and go some way to offsetting the severity of the significant visual effects.

- 7.254 The Council's Access Officer raised no objection to the application subject to the submission of a finalised AMP which could be controlled by condition. They note that further assessment and detail is required including the provision of comprehensive mapping and clarification of proposals relating to the diversion of Core Paths, particularly the temporary diversion (shown on Figure 2.30), where there is potential for the rerouted path to become permanent, subject to agreement with the THC, FLS, and the promotion of a Core Path Diversion Order.
- 7.255 They also seek thorough baseline assessment of access routes, including all Rights of Way identified by ScotWays. Particular concern is raised regarding several routes which may be affected by the proposed development but have not been fully considered within the baseline or assessment, including the recorded Public Right of Way between Grottaig and Loch Ness, routes between Glen Coiltie and Aslaich and between Bhlaraidh and Shewglie, and the HI52 route between Divach, Loch Dubh, Loch nam Breac Dearga and Bhlaraidh.
- 7.256 The Access Officer also noted the potential effects of the proposed development on access to Glas-Bheinn and surrounding promoted recreational routes. They consider that any impacts on public access arising from construction activities or changes to the size of the loch should be assessed with appropriate mitigation incorporated within the detailed AMP.
- 7.257 Additionally, the proposed works at Dochfour Weir could affect recreational use of the River Ness and the Great Glen Canoe Trail. Therefore, it is recommended that the River Ness should form part of the baseline assessment and that any impacts on navigation and recreational use should be assessed and mitigated. Cumulative effects on outdoor access of multiple developments along the Great Glen is also expected to be assessed through the EIAR for the Dochfour Weir proposal and addressed through appropriate mitigation measures as part of that forthcoming application. Similarly, the OHL proposals require to be informed by the recreational access routes taken across the hills towards Bingally substation which will be assessed further as part of that application.

Hydrology, Flooding and Water Environment

- 7.258 The proposed development is located within the catchment of Loch Ness, a large glacially eroded freshwater loch covering approximately 55.33km². It is connected to Loch Dochfour to the northeast via the Bona Narrows, together they form 56km² of open water. The site lies partly within the catchment of the Allt Saigh watercourse, fed by several smaller streams (including Allt Loch an t-Sionnaich) which flows into Loch Ness at Alltsigh. The site also lies within the catchment of the River Coiltie which flows into Loch Ness at Drumnadrochit. There are three existing large-scale hydro-electric schemes in operation on Loch Ness, two located at the southeastern end of the loch nearer to Fort Augustus – Foyers and Glendoe, and Glenmoriston on the western bank.

- 7.259 Water levels in Loch Ness and Loch Dochfour are driven by a combination of catchment inflows (a large proportion of which are modified by reservoirs and hydro schemes), operation of Foyers PSH, and spill over Dochfour Weir and Dochgarroch Lock. Levels are controlled within Loch Ness to maintain water supply to the Caledonian Canal for navigability and ensure minimum flows in the River Ness. Downstream of Loch Dochfour, the watercourse splits with the Caledonian Canal continuing northeast towards Dochgarroch and the River Ness passing over the Dochfour Weir and flowing parallel to the canal towards Inverness. The weir controls the level of Loch Dochfour and subsequently Loch Ness.
- 7.260 The Loch Ness catchment feeds flood water into a Potentially Vulnerable Area – PVA 01/21 Inverness. PVAs are areas identified by SEPA where the highest flood risk exists now or is likely to occur in the future. The River Ness Flood Protection Scheme reduces risk of flooding to Inverness increasing protection from tidal flooding from the River Ness downstream of Ness Bridge. Areas between Ness Bridge and Ness Islands are not defended and remain at risk during extreme fluvial flood events. SEPA Flood Maps identify several properties at risk during extreme flood events. River Ness Scheme modelling shows that these areas have a standard of protection of between 1 in 10 and 1 in 25 years.

Proposed Water Management

- 7.261 Unlike conventional PSH schemes, water would be abstracted from Loch Ness not the catchment in which the headpond is located with no flow from upstream into the headpond. Instead, the upper reaches of the Allt Loch an t-Sionnaich would be intercepted by the main dam, a permanent barrier to downstream flows. Compensation flows would be managed to maintain flows down this watercourse to minimise impacts on ecology and the PSH scheme. The secondary bund is designed to protect the downstream watercourses during scour release (the controlled discharge of water) at the valve house every six months.
- 7.262 The LCW would comprise four discreet intake-outlet structures, the final detailed design could be controlled by condition. Operation is dependent on water levels in Loch Ness. The balance of water levels in Loch Ness is not only critical to PSH operation but also flood risk, ecology and use of the loch for recreation, fishing and other activities. The flows into the River Ness are critical to maintaining the balance across the Loch Ness catchment. The applicant was not able to obtain data to build a model of the catchment and based the EIAR on estimated flows/calculations over a specified period compared to observed water levels. The EIAR assessed the impact on water levels and pass-forward flows in the River Ness and the impact on flows from the catchment of the headpond at Allt Loch an t-Sionnaich. It considered two scenarios:
- “Hands off” where levels are managed through the PSH operations when key water levels are reached; and
 - An upgrade to the Dochfour Weir to create a variable weir which adjusts in height to manage water flow operating from April to September. This would be developed in collaboration with Scottish Canals, and in anticipated partnership with the existing PSH operator and future operators.

- 7.263 The “hands off” system would be based on “stop pumping” and “stop generating” levels which would be set when water levels at the LCW and at the SEPA level gauge at Foyers fall below 15.42m AOD or exceed 17.6m AOD. The spillway would be set accordingly, releasing water onto moorland prior to draining to the northeast via Allt Coire an Ruighe, and ultimately Loch Ness in the event of a potential flood risk. The EIAR showed that there would be variations in the water levels in Loch Ness both on an annual and seasonal basis. However, extreme events, both flood and drought would not be impacted. This “hands off” mitigation would be implemented through the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations 2018 (EASR) process.

Cumulative Impact

- 7.264 The EIAR concludes that cumulative effect of the proposed development and Loch na Cathrach with “hands off” mitigation increased fluctuation in water level in Loch Ness because of the generation and pumping cycles, although still within the operational regimes set. Extreme events, both flood and drought would be unaffected. The conclusion is the same when the proposed Loch Kemp PSH is included. However, the change in water level from the baseline is significantly greater (shown in 5.2.5 and 5.2.6 Appendix 11.1). Given this predicted change, the applicant proposes the construction of the Dochfour Weir upgrade (covered in Volume 5: Appendix 2.1 Dochfour Weir Upgrade Description). This would introduce a variable weir which would isolate the fluctuations in water levels in Loch Ness from the pass-forward flows in the River Ness, removing fluctuations in flows on the River Ness. It would be restricted to summer operation only (April to September) to avoid the potential to increase flood risk if operated all year.
- 7.265 The applicant advises that there would be negligible winter generation curtailment, both for Glen Earrach alone and when assessed cumulatively with other Loch Ness pumped storage schemes. Consequently, the proposed variable weir is not required for environmental management during winter and the scheme's maximum generating capacity remains up to 1.8 GW.
- 7.266 The water conservation function of the weir is primarily required during summer periods, when inflows to Loch Ness are lower and water could otherwise be lost downstream following PSH operations that raise loch levels. During winter, significantly greater natural inflows mean this conservation function is not required, and hydrological modelling has assessed operations on that basis.
- 7.267 Regardless of whether the variable weir is operating, year-round Loch Ness hands-off levels would continue to apply through the Environmental Authorisation (Scotland) Regulations (EASR) licence, ensuring operations are constrained during extreme loch level conditions.
- 7.268 The proposal is not to change the existing Dochfour Weir but rather to install a new variable weir along the full length of the existing weir, immediately upstream of it. The weir would be controlled through telemetry on the proposed, and existing, pump storage hydro schemes so that the weir is raised when generating and loch levels are rising and lowering when pumping and loch levels are lowering. The aim

of this is to ensure that flows downstream on the River Ness are maintained at “natural” levels and not influenced by the hydro scheme operation.

- 7.269 The purpose of the variable weir is to prevent pumped storage operations from artificially altering flows in the River Ness. Under existing conditions, higher Loch Ness levels increase downstream river flows and lower loch levels reduce flows. The variable weir would allow River Ness flows to remain broadly consistent with natural conditions despite PSH-induced changes in Loch Ness water levels.
- 7.270 Separate to this proposal, another Dochfour Weir project has also been put forward by Statera Energy, the developer behind Loch Kemp PSH scheme, with a Scoping application submitted (25/03507/SCOP) and a Scoping response issued on 16 February 2026. The Statera Energy proposal is being designed to specifically serve Loch Kemp PSH and not Glen Earrach PSH, with both progressing their own alternative design. Whilst both developers have stated they consider only one PSH is likely to progress and not both, if both are consented, their finalised weir design(s) and weir planning application(s) will be required to consider any potential cumulative effects.
- 7.271 All compounds associated with Glen Earrach PSH would include sustainable drainage and / or proprietary drainage measures to intercept and treat surface water run-off from the site. During operation, surface water runoff would be treated using sustainable drainage systems (e.g. ditches, swales, ponds etc.) where possible and/or proprietary treatment (e.g. filter drains, vortex flow separators). Access tracks would have adjacent swales or other suitable sustainable drainage measures to capture and treat runoff.
- 7.272 Direct risk of fluvial flooding was predicted as low and scoped out of the EIAR. The risk of existing reservoir flooding of the site was also predicted to be low and acceptable. The EIAR assessed the potential pluvial flooding using SEPA flood maps. The maps showed the same areas that are at risk to fluvial flooding are also at risk of pluvial flooding with further ponded areas of high likelihood flooding along the A82 around Drumnadrochit. The EIAR states that there is a potential of surface water flooding in these areas during construction and includes mitigation measures to eliminate the risk of contaminated surface water released into the natural environment. Due to the steeply graded and semi-impermeable nature of the site the EIAR anticipates rapid surface water run-off during storm events. It recognises the hardstanding areas and new tracks have the potential to change natural flow paths and increase surface water run-off from these areas and that during the winter, surface water run-off could be increased by melting snow.
- 7.273 The EIAR states that during construction there is a risk to flooding for offsite properties, onsite users and the development infrastructure. This is a result of runoff from increased hardstanding, compacted ground (due to site clearance and access tracks/compounds) and temporary water storage in attenuation points and drainage systems. The EIAR assesses this as a moderate adverse effect and significant without mitigation. With mitigation through the CEMP and suitable design of surface water drainage through the Drainage Strategy this is reduced to negligible and not significant.

- 7.274 Following clarification from the Energy Consents Unit regarding the status of the proposed Dochfour Weir, SEPA confirmed in their latest consultation response that they understand that the Section 36 application does not seek consent for the weir works which will be dealt with by a separate planning application and assessed on its own merits. On this basis, SEPA is satisfied that sufficient information has been provided for them to raise no objection subject to a stop generating/curtailment level condition. The final level is to be agreed by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA and the THC's Flood Risk Management Team. The condition would ensure that the operation of the scheme does not increase flood risk to people or property and that there is no increase in either the frequency or magnitude of flooding.
- 7.275 SEPA notes that any future works to Dochfour Weir remains a matter for the developer and would be undertaken at the developer's own commercial risk. Should the developer wish to pursue those works, it would need to address the outstanding flood risk issues, secure the necessary consents and establish an appropriate legal mechanism for managing water levels within the Loch Ness catchment. A clear mechanism for consenting and managing any future weir works will need to be identified and progressed appropriately.
- 7.276 As indicated above, whilst the works to the Dochfour Weir are not covered by this Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 application and will be consented under a separate Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) application, the PSH scheme is dependent on the works to the weir and cannot be undertaken without them. Therefore, a condition is proposed to be attached noting that no development (other than site enabling works) can proceed to Glen Earrach PSH, until planning permission has been obtained for the proposed upgrade of Dochfour Weir. The pumped storage scheme cannot become operational until the approved weir upgrades have been completed.
- 7.277 Whilst a condition regarding the upgraded Dochfour Weir is proposed for Glen Earrach PSH, for the avoidance of doubt, this was not required for Loch Kemp PSH as the lower capacity of 600MW generation and 9GWh storage capacity applied for as part of their planning application did not require any changes to the weir and would operate under the existing water regime at Loch Ness.
- 7.278 THC's Flood Risk Management Team (FRMT) initially raised no objection to the pumped storage scheme itself, subject to conditions, while reserving its position on the proposed Dochfour Weir works pending a separate assessment. Following further correspondence from ECU noting the Dochfour Weir proposals were to be incorporated into the Glen Earrach PSH assessment as an integral part of the development, FRMT then objected due to concerns over flood modelling, winter operation of the weir and the lack of clarity regarding governance and long-term operational responsibilities. Following further discussion with FRMT they have confirmed that they have no objection subject to the proposed Dochfour Weir works being controlled by condition along with an Operational Management Plan that ensures the weir is overseen by an appropriate management body/bodies.
- 7.279 Whilst the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) notes that operation would be in summer only and most flood events in the Ness catchment occur in the winter months, the

significant flood of 1829 was in August and demonstrates that flooding can also occur in summer months. Therefore, consideration will need to be given to the impacts of flood events with the weir in operation. These details will be required to progress the Dochfour Weir upgrade proposal under a separate application.

- 7.280 FRMT, along with SEPA, also requested a condition requiring consultation on the final Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations 2018 (EASR) operational limits, including evidence that the proposed curtailment levels would not adversely affect flood risk.
- 7.281 In terms of potential flood risk within the site, FRMT highlighted the need for appropriate design of new and upgraded watercourse crossings associated with the access tracks. These crossings should be capable of conveying a 1 in 200-year plus climate change flood event without increasing flood risk elsewhere. A condition is attached requiring the submission of detailed crossing designs and drainage proposals, including SuDS measures for tracks, roads and hardstanding areas.
- 7.282 More generally, safety and flood management are integral to the project design. All the new dams at the upper reservoir will be constructed and regulated under the Reservoirs (Scotland) Act 2011, separate to the planning process, with spillways designed to pass the Probable Maximum Flood (PMF) while maintaining adequate freeboard.
- 7.283 Jacobite Cruises objected to the proposed development on the basis that the EIA does not adequately assess the risks that artificially manipulated Loch Ness water levels could pose to navigation, tourism and local businesses. They also expressed concern that its previous engagement in the consultation process had not been accurately recorded within the applicant's consultation documents, despite participating in meetings, providing written submissions and seeking further dialogue.
- 7.284 A principal concern relates to potential fluctuations in Loch Ness water levels arising from PSH operations. Jacobite Cruises argues that the assessment fails to properly consider the frequency, rate and cumulative effect of water level changes, particularly during periods of drought or low rainfall. The company considers these matters critical to the safe operation of its vessels and infrastructure at Dochgarroch, Clansman Harbour and Urquhart Castle, where both high and low water levels can affect berthing, passenger access and sailing schedules.
- 7.285 Jacobite Cruises also considers the socio-economic assessment is flawed because it adopts an overly narrow study area focused on the immediate vicinity of the development rather than the entirety of Loch Ness. In its view, the whole loch functions as a connected tourism asset and any changes to water levels could have consequences for tourism operators, visitor attractions and the wider local economy. They believe impacts on tourism have therefore been understated.
- 7.286 Further concerns were raised regarding cumulative impacts from other existing and proposed PSH schemes, as well as future water abstractions from Loch Ness and the effects of climate change. Jacobite considers that the EIA has not

demonstrated how these combined pressures would be managed or regulated to avoid adverse effects on businesses dependent upon the loch.

- 7.287 Additionally, they are concerned by the applicant's reliance on the Dochfour Weir upgrade given this has yet to be consented with insufficient evidence provided to demonstrate that the weir could successfully manage both River Ness flows and Loch Ness water levels simultaneously.
- 7.288 The applicant responded to the concerns raised by Jacobite Cruises that water level impacts on Loch Ness can be managed effectively through the proposed Dochfour Weir upgrade, regulatory controls and stakeholder governance arrangements. They note that the principal mitigation measure that the proposed development cannot be built and operational without the weir upgrade being delivered in the first instance. The applicant made reference to further commitments including participation in an Operational Management Plan and funding harbour infrastructure improvements aimed at protecting Jacobite Cruises' operations. Additionally, a condition to mitigate the potential impact for recreational and tourism users of Loch Ness has been attached should existing infrastructure, such as the private pier/jetty at Urquhart Castle for example, require improvement or replacement.
- 7.289 Scottish Canals confirms its support for future works to upgrade Dochfour Weir as noted in their letter from 31 March 2025. The works would modernise the longstanding infrastructure to facilitate this scheme and future-proof the weir for any future PSH on Loch Ness, improve climate change resilience and provide enhanced fish passage arrangements. Scottish Canals notes they will work in collaboration with the applicant and other stakeholders to progress the future weir application.

Marine Construction and Navigation

- 7.290 The LCW will be constructed primarily as a marine project, with heavy plant and materials transported via Loch Ness and the Caledonian Canal to minimise HGV traffic impacts on the A82 and surrounding road network. Scottish Canals supports the principle of waterborne freight and has requested that operations be managed through a Canal Management Plan which can be controlled by condition in their letter from 31 March 2025.
- 7.291 Additionally, a submission outlining the LCW Marine Construction Strategy will also be required before any works commence and can be controlled by condition. This would set out the marine construction methodology, vessel types, loading and unloading arrangements, any temporary marine infrastructure (such as jetties or pontoons), navigational safety measures and arrangements to manage interactions with recreational and commercial users of Loch Ness and the Caledonian Canal.
- 7.292 No standalone Navigation Risk Assessment has been provided and the applicant confirmed this has yet to be prepared. They advise that navigational risk management will be developed at the detailed design stage once the construction contractor, vessel fleet and logistics arrangements have been confirmed. These

matters would be addressed through the Canal Management Plan and Marine Construction Strategy and can be controlled by condition.

- 7.293 The LCW construction methodology may involve water-based cranes, jack-up barges, tug vessels and potentially temporary jetties or pontoons. Approximately 240,000m³ of bulked excavated material could require removal from the site, which on current assumptions could equate to around 400 barge loads, although the final number of vessels and movements has not yet been determined. A marine staging point is expected to be located somewhere along the A82 between Drumnadrochit and Invermoriston, but its precise location and operational arrangements remain unknown. Existing jetties around Loch Ness are expected to be utilised for personnel movements where possible.
- 7.294 The 400 barge loads assumes the movement of approximately 900 tonnes per barge (as noted in A1_3_14 Removal of Soil). The final number of barge loads will depend on the vessels used, their permitted payload and the eventual destination of the material. The 900-tonne barge limit is the current estimate provided by Scottish Canals to the Scottish Canals Task and Finish group which has been formed to develop the arrangements needed for use of the canal for the purposes of freight transport.
- 7.295 The LCW material would be transported off-site by water either as a commercial product, subject to specification and processing, or as waste. Potential beneficial reuse opportunities have also been identified by the applicant within the wider region, including land reclamation and construction demand associated with major infrastructure and port-related works. The applicant notes the detailed arrangements, including marine logistics, handling, processing and destination, would be secured through the proposed LCW Marine Construction/Materials Logistics Strategy and associated conditions before LCW works commence.
- 7.296 Scottish Canals confirms its support for exploring greater use of the Caledonian Canal as a freight transport route during both the construction and operational phases of the Glen Earrach PSH scheme in their letter from 31 March 2025. They note that increasing the use of waterborne transport could help reduce impacts on the Great Glen road network and aligns with Scottish Government objectives for sustainable freight movement.
- 7.297 Scottish Canals advises that it wishes to continue working with the applicant, other PSH developers and relevant stakeholders to ensure that any future changes to canal operations or infrastructure are properly coordinated and provide long-term benefits for canal users, local communities, businesses, tourism, heritage and the environment.

Water, Drainage and Peat

- 7.298 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 10 assessed the impact of the proposed development on the water quality environment. The defined study area extended to 1km around the site boundary. This also included downstream water features beyond the study area determined by nature of risk. The length and volume of Loch Ness meant significant adverse impacts on water quality were not considered further downstream from the application site.

- 7.299 Designated sites with a potential hydrological connection and GWDTE were identified including the Lower Old Red Sandstone (LORS) aquifer area which has some overlying areas of wet heath, wet heath with flush with rushes/sedges along with areas of localised habitat on the west side of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh and at Urquhart Bay Woods SAC. The EIAR stated that with standard good practice mitigation measures there are no likely pathways for pollution of surface water, groundwater, soils or vegetation. It concluded there would be a potential minor adverse impact on Urquhart Bay Woods during operation from changes in Loch Ness water levels but this would not be significant.
- 7.300 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 7 Terrestrial Ecology assesses the impact on peat. It states that during preconstruction and enabling works there would be a permanent loss of 0.24ha of degraded blanket bog. An additional 3.39ha of blanket bog would be permanently modified through proximity to built infrastructure. During construction this increases substantially to a permanent loss of 81.3ha with 33.9ha of blanket bog subject to potential permanent indirect modification through proximity to works.
- 7.301 The loss of blanket bog during the construction works is identified as a permanent adverse effect of regional significance. Blanket bog compensation is set out in EIAR Volume 5: Appendix 7.6: outline Peatland Restoration Plan. The applicant proposes to follow the 1:10 + 10% NatureScot loss: compensation ratio or as may be otherwise approved by NatureScot. Off-site areas have been identified in the Flow Country, (within the same general region as the proposed development, 5km south of Bettyhill, on land owned by Forestry Land Scotland) to carry out peatland restoration, with the expectation of combining standard open peatland restoration and forest-to-bog conversion (the latter returning plantation on deep peat back to open blanket bog, increasing the extent of open blanket bog). This restoration is proposed a considerable distance from the site, with this restoration being of an extensive area, this aspect to be secured by condition and through Section 75 legal agreement to secure implementation, including in the event of project decommissioning / non-operation of the PHS.
- 7.302 A Preliminary Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment (PLHRA) has been submitted with the application (Volume 5 Appendix 15.3) along with more recent FEI submissions on 3 September 2026. This states identifies 12 of 32 assessed development elements (37.5%) as having a Moderate pre-mitigation hazard ranking, with the remaining 20 elements assessed as Low or Negligible. The assessment concludes that, following the application of site-specific mitigation measures, all Moderate risk locations can be reduced to a Low residual risk rating. The applicant proposes further GI work to inform this preliminary PLHRA with the aim of reducing the extent of impact through design and targeted mitigation applied. SEPA had no concerns subject to the submission of a revised and finalised Peat Management Plan which will take due consideration of the PLHRA.
- 7.303 The entire site is a Ground Drinking Water Protected Area (DWPA) and the eastern area is a Surface Drinking Water Protected Area. The applicant has submitted a Private Water Supply (PWS) risk assessment (EIAR Appendix 10.2) which identified 30 PWS within a 1km study area from the red line boundary. This comprises two at Allt Saigh, one at Primrose Bay, 17 at Grottaig Burn, seven at

Divach Burn and three at River Enrick. SEPA guidance recommends prevention of abstraction within a 100m radius of excavations and less than 1m deep and ground water abstractions within 250m of any excavations and deeper than 1m with a 10m buffer of all other activities. The surface water PWS at Allt Saigh would be located 5m from an access track. The EIAR concludes that there would be no risk to the PWS during construction or operation with mitigation measures in place, including regular sampling and implementation of construction practices to avoid pollution. The borehole PWS at Allt Saigh would be located 95m from an existing track. The EIAR concluded that impacts would be temporary and localised and would not impact other PWS. It concludes that during operation as a precautionary measure, groundwater level monitoring should be carried out.

- 7.304 THC's Environmental Health Team are satisfied the proposed water management, monitoring and mitigation measures are appropriate. Ongoing monitoring and emergency response procedures are proposed to protect affected supplies during construction and operation.
- 7.305 Whilst Scottish Water do not object to the proposed development, they clarify that they have not confirmed that sufficient water or wastewater infrastructure capacity is available to service the development, which would need to be assessed through the normal connection application separate to the planning process.
- 7.306 The site is within the Loch Ness Drinking Water Protected Area, which supplies the Invermoriston Water Treatment Works. It advises that water quality and water quantity must be protected throughout construction and operation, with appropriate pollution prevention measures in place.
- 7.307 Loch Ness has a very large catchment of 1,781km². The outflow/intake would be located between Drumnadrochit and Invermoriston on the northern side of Loch Ness. The proposed development has a lower approximate rate of change per GWh on Loch Ness than other commissioned and consented PSH schemes (including Foyers and Red John/Loch na Cathrach) although the storage capacity is greater than surrounding PSH schemes. The operation of the proposed development must not reduce loch levels such that forward flow over Dochfour Weir is impeded or that the head of water over the Invermoriston Raw Water Intake (RWI) is negatively impacted. Assuming the above is followed, Scottish Water consider the proposed development will have a low impact on the yield of the Loch Ness catchment (which is in surplus) and would therefore be rated as a low-impact development with regards to water resources (quantity).
- 7.308 The proposed development could present a risk to water quality, therefore, the appropriate mitigations for pollution prevention must be in place and Scottish Water have produced a list of precautions for a range of activities. This details protection measures to be taken within a DWPA, the wider drinking water catchment and if there are assets in the area, they will need to assess the site-specific risks and mitigation measures proposed.
- 7.309 Scottish Water requests ongoing consultation as the project progresses, particularly given the presence of other developments within the catchment, and

advises that the drinking water catchment status should be reflected in future project documentation and site management procedures.

- 7.310 The applicant has made a commitment to deploy Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) to manage surface water runoff from new hardstanding areas. The final drainage design would be approved by FRMT and should demonstrate all surface water would be managed in accordance with THC's Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment Supplementary Guidance. This could be controlled by condition.
- 7.311 Notwithstanding the safeguards noted, a programme of baseline and construction phase water quality monitoring is proposed which would be used to confirm no significant effect on the water environment. The monitoring programme would also ensure PWS and water dependent designated sites are safeguarded. Ground stability and safeguarding of peat would also be monitored. These details could be controlled by condition.
- 7.312 There would be 33 water course crossings including five crossings over the Allt Saigh and tributaries, six over the Allt Saigh and t-Sionnaich and tributaries, and one over the River Coiltie (Figure 10.4). Two of these crossings would be temporary and the rest would be permanent. Five would require bridges. The EIAR states the access tracks have been designed to minimise watercourse crossings whilst balancing peat, topography, buildability, ornithological and hydro-geomorphological constraints. All crossings would adhere to the Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations 2018 (EASR). Where crossings cannot be constructed to a size to allow bank and riparian habitat to remain under a new crossing to facilitate crossing for mammals, a mammal ledge or alternative tunnel near the water crossing should be incorporated into the design.
- 7.313 Any construction activity relating to, or undertaken in, the vicinity of watercourses would be carried out in general accordance with relevant SEPA Pollution Prevention Guidelines, The Water Framework Directive (WFD), The Water Environment and Water Services (Scotland) Act 2003 (WEWS), and the CAR licence.
- 7.314 SEPA are generally content with the pollution prevention and environmental management proposals outlined and brought together into the Mitigation Register (Appendix 19.1), Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (Appendix 3.1) and Outline Water Management Plan (Appendix 10.4). Due to the scale of the development, SEPA will directly control pollution prevention measures relating to surface water run off via a water runoff permit. Peat and waste management issues will be covered via requested spoil and peat management plans.
- 7.315 Subject to the adoption of best practice construction techniques and a project specific Construction Environmental Management Document (CEMD) no significant adverse effects on the soils, geology and the water environment have been identified. This is agreed. A CEMP would be in place to ensure that potential sources of pollution on site can be effectively managed throughout construction and in turn during operation. A Water Quality Management Plan including an Emergency Response Plan, a Sediment Management Plan and Water Crossing

Detailed Assessment could be conditioned. The applicant would also be required to submit a Water Features Restoration Plan on decommissioning which would cover watercourses, drainage infrastructure and altered aquatic habitats altered by the development.

Natural Heritage and Protected Species (Including Ornithology)

Designations

7.316 The proposed development could affect a number of designated European sites including:

- A) River Moriston SAC;
- B) Urquhart Bay Woods SAC;
- C) North Inverness Lochs SPA plus a number of other SPAs with ornithological connectivity that are protected for Slavonian Grebe.
- D) Ness Woods SAC; and
- E) Moray Firth SAC;

As such, the site's status means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, and c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the 'Habitats Regulations') apply or, for reserved matters, The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Consequently, Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit is required to consider the effect of the proposal on these before it can be consented (commonly known as Habitats Regulations Appraisal).

7.317 There have been multiple submissions of FEI whilst the application has been pending consideration. The applicant has now carried out an assessment of impacts on: A) River Moriston SAC; B) Urquhart Bay Woods SAC; and C) North Inverness Lochs SPA, with the applicant having provided shadow Habitats Regulations Assessments (HRAs) for these affected designations. The applicant's Statement to Inform Habitats Regulation (EIAR Volume 5: Appendix 7.2) concludes that construction and operation of the proposed development would not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any European site, either alone or in combination with other projects or plans.

7.318 In relation to A) River Moriston SAC and B) Urquhart Bay Woods SAC, NatureScot initially objected given the proposal could have a detrimental effect on these designations. A substantial amount of further information was subsequently provided by the applicant who have been engaging with NatureScot throughout the application's preparation and determination process. Whilst NatureScot have informally noted to the Council's Planning Case Officer that the FEI submitted clarified matters and allowed NatureScot to update their position, their latest formal consultation response submitted to ECU on 19 January 2026 notes their outstanding objection.

7.319 NatureScot's further formal updated consultation response on these matters is anticipated to be provided ahead of the 7 October 2026 SPAC meeting and is requested to be read by Members alongside this Committee report, with the Planning Officers findings to be reported verbally at Committee as part of the Officer's presentation of the application for Members' consideration.

A) River Moriston SAC

- 7.320 The SAC is designated for Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussel and lies some 8km south-west of the proposed outfall / intake. NatureScot initially considered the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on the Atlantic salmon and freshwater pearl mussel qualifying interests of the River Moriston SAC. The concerns related to the potential effects of the proposed Dochfour Weir and operational changes to Loch Ness and the River Ness. NatureScot identified a number of unresolved impact pathways including disruption to salmon migration during construction of the weir, changes to Loch Ness water levels, alterations to winter flow regimes in the River Ness (including hydropeaking effects), operation of the proposed acoustic fish barrier and potential impacts on salmon spawning habitat in the lower River Moriston.
- 7.321 NatureScot requested further information to demonstrate:
- how fish passage will be maintained during construction of the weir;
 - that the proposed weir and fish pass design will allow effective salmon migration;
 - that changes in water levels and flows will not adversely affect migration routes or increase losses via the Caledonian Canal;
 - the effects of altered River Ness flows and hydropeaking on salmon;
 - that the proposed acoustic fish barrier will not impede migration; and
 - that salmon spawning habitat will not be adversely affected.
- 7.322 Additionally, NatureScot recommended additional mitigation and conditions relating to construction environmental management, pollution control, fish protection measures, curtailment of operation during smolt migration periods and reductions in intake screen mesh size.
- 7.323 Ness District Salmon Fishery Board raised an objection with regards to the potential impacts of the proposed development on Atlantic salmon, River Ness flows and Loch Ness ecology. Their original objection argued that the proposal would fundamentally alter natural hydrology, harm salmon populations and damage shoreline habitats. Following the submission of FEI, they are sceptical regarding the assessments and mitigation proposed, concluding that the revised evidence reinforced, rather than resolved, concerns raised initially. Overall, NDSFB concluded that the FEI strengthened its view that the scheme would cause significant ecological harm to Loch Ness and the River Ness.

B) Urquhart Bay Woods SAC

- 7.324 The SAC is designated for alder woodland on floodplains and lies approximately 10km downstream from the tailrace. NatureScot initially considered the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on Alder woodland feature of Urquhart Bay Woods SAC. The concerns related to the potential effects of changes to water level regimes in Loch Ness which could result in loss of woodland area and / or changes in vegetation composition.
- 7.325 NatureScot requested further details of how much woodland will be inundated and for how long each inundation event will last above the current median summer

level. This should be accompanied a detailed fine scale map which clearly shows the areas of woodland likely to be inundated, together with current NVC type, colour coded to show the areas with the highest impacts.

C) North Inverness Lochs SPA

- 7.326 In terms of ornithological interest, part of the application site forms part of the North Inverness Lochs SPA which is designated for breeding Slavonian Grebe. The designation includes Loch Dubh and a second unnamed waterbody, which extends approximately 25m into the northern application site boundary and within 750m of an access track and crossing point of the River Coiltie. Three lochans within the SPA are also located some 2.4km north of the application site boundary.
- 7.327 NatureScot's consultation response of 19 January 2026 noted that whilst there are natural heritage interests of international importance at C) North Inverness Lochs SPA, their advice is that these will not be adversely affected by the proposal. However, this response predated the Raeshaw decision where the implications of the OHL grid connection were not assessed as the whole EIA Project. When reviewing the more recent FEI submissions covering the grid connection, NatureScot raised concern regarding Slavonian Grebe, a qualifying interest of North Inverness Lochs SPA, and requested further information given a lack of clarity as to what the environmental effects of the OHL would be. Although NatureScot's final response on this matter also remains outstanding, it is again anticipated to be provided ahead of the 7 October 2026 SPAC meeting. Nevertheless, the intended grid connection routing and form is expected to be the subject of a multi-stage consent condition, meaning further assessment work for the OHL can be undertaken once the design parameters for the OHL are fully known, with this assessment work informing the acceptability of the connection and mitigation to be deployed, such as re-routing, sections of line marking, or further undergrounding.

D) Ness Woods SAC and E) Moray Firth SAC

- 7.328 NatureScot noted that whilst there are natural heritage interests of international importance at D) Ness Woods SAC and E) Moray Firth SAC their advice is that they will not be adversely affected, (NatureScot consultation response on 11 November 2025). Based on this advice, the applicant's findings for these designations are accepted.

Other Designations

- 7.329 Designated sites for ecology and ornithology within 10km of the site boundary include:
- Loch Knockie SPA (4.6km);
 - Easter Ness SSSI/Inverfarigaig SSSI (0.7km);
 - Dubh Lochs SSSI (2km);
 - Balnagrantach SSSI (2.4km);
 - Knockie Lochs SSS (4.6km);
 - Glen Affric to Strathconan SPA (9.5km); and
 - Loch Ruthven SPA/SAC and Ramsar (9.9km).

- 7.330 Again, the applicant's Statement to Inform Habitats Regulation (EIAR Volume 5: Appendix 7.2) concludes that construction and operation of the proposed development would not result in adverse effects on the integrity of any European site, either alone or in-combination with other projects or plans. This is not disputed for any of the sites bulleted above, subject to sight of NatureScot's updated consultation response.
- 7.331 To conclude, given NatureScot's finalised formal consultation response remains outstanding, it is recommended that the Council aligns its position on the application with NatureScot as the Scottish Government's technical environmental advisor. As such, it is recommended that the Council raise no objection to the application, subject to NatureScot's objection being removed, and all of NatureScot's recommended mitigation measures being incorporated within the conditions forming part of any forthcoming consent.

Other Habitat Impacts

- 7.332 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 3: Evolution of Design and Alternatives explains that the development components have been sited to minimise the loss of habitats, woodland, peat and disturbance to protected and notable flora and fauna. There are no locally designated nature conservation sites within 1km of the site. However, the site is located partly within the East Inverness-Shire Buglife Important Invertebrate Area (IIA). The site also contains areas of priority peatland.
- 7.333 Mitigation measures during the construction phase would include the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), Pollution Prevention Plan (PPP), Dust Mitigation Plan and Surface Water Quality Monitoring Programme (SWQMP) implemented by the Principal Contractor and overseen by an ACoW (Aquatic Clerk of Works) or suitably experienced ECoW and water quality sampling suite. Aquatic elements would be incorporated into the Construction Noise and Vibration Management Plan (CNVMP) and recording of all sightings of protected and/or important species (including INNS) within the site during the construction period would be recorded. A Fisheries Management Plan can also be conditioned.
- 7.334 Mitigation includes planting and habitat measures to integrate the development into the existing environment. Implementation of ecological reinstatement and enhancement would be secured through the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan; an outline plan has been submitted with the application (EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 6.4). Mitigation measures such as protection of ornithological features would be set out in the CEMP and the Environmental Clerk of Works (EnvCoW) would monitor mitigation and working practice. Sightings of protected and/or important species during construction would be recorded with works undertaken (as far as possible) outside the nesting season.

Aquatic / Terrestrial Ecology

- 7.335 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 9 Aquatic and Marine Ecology assessed the effects on aquatic ecological receptors (aquatic habitats and species: fish, macroinvertebrates, macrophytes) that are likely to arise from pre-construction/enabling, construction, and operational phases of the proposed development. Field surveys were carried out including habitats, macroinvertebrate

surveys, macrophyte surveys, water quality monitoring, fish habitat surveys and fish ecology surveys.

- 7.336 Preconstruction, enabling and construction could result in significant negative effects on aquatic ecology including noise and vibration during construction, dust and surface run-off from construction work, construction lighting, loss of spawning substrate and loss of access to watercourse spawning substrate. The assessment concluded that following mitigation outlined above, potential significant residual effects would be limited to noise impacts on Atlantic Salmon from piling and on brown trout as a result of the construction of the headpond at Loch nam Breac Dearga. However, with additional mitigation including a soft piling start, restriction of blasting periods, observation of migration seasons, preconstruction surveys and monitoring these effects would be reduced to not significant.
- 7.337 During operation, impacts could include loss of spawning substrate, fish attraction to intake, fluctuations in water levels, habitat fragmentation, noise and vibration, light, temperature variation and water quality. These were assessed as not significant with mitigation. Mitigation includes a 100m buffer for permanent access tracks to allow for micro-siting for local ground conditions, topography, forestry, and watercourses; a smolt screen at the LCW; and 50m buffer for water features except the valve house and main works such as the headpond. The assessment concluded there could be a potential significant residual effect on fish passage due to the fluctuation of water levels in Loch Ness. Additional mitigation has been proposed which includes installation of fish passages on the Dochfour Weir and a non-physical deterrent at the entrance of the Caledonian Canal adjacent to the weir to prevent the diversion of smolts.
- 7.338 As noted, the Dochfour Weir upgrade is not included in this application but is proposed as further mitigation, to be dealt with through a separate planning application, which would result in a more natural flow of the River Ness. The EIAR concludes that through the proposed upgrade works, it is considered there would be a beneficial effect on fish passage at Dochfour Weir, including due to the prevention of the loss of smolts down the Caledonian Canal, and a corresponding beneficial effect on bottlenose dolphins in the Moray Firth SAC due to the improved prey resource resulting from increased migratory success of Atlantic salmon.
- 7.339 The cumulative assessment includes Foyers PSH, Loch na Cathrach PSH and Loch Kemp PSH. The assessment states that the adjustable weir would be designed to control flows in the River Ness and would be finalised at detailed design with a submission of a separate planning application.
- 7.340 Chapter 7 assessed the impact of the proposed development on terrestrial ecology during construction and operation which has been informed by desk based and field survey data. Field surveys were carried out including a Phase 1 habitat survey, National Vegetation Classification (NVC) Survey and protected mammal surveys. The EIAR states the area surveyed was considered of limited value to foraging or commuting bats with one main group of trees with potential to support roosting bats. Terrestrial site surveys detected evidence of protected species including otter, water vole, pine marten, red squirrel, badger. The surveys also recorded mountain hare, deer, feral pig, common lizard, adder, slow worm, newts and a range of terrestrial invertebrates including important dragonfly and fritillary

species. Some suitable wildcat habitat was identified. Targeted surveys were not carried out for bat activity, great crested newt, beaver, red squirrel, mountain hare, hedgehog, common amphibians and reptiles and invertebrates which had been agreed previously with relevant consultees.

- 7.341 The EIAR identifies temporary and permanent local significant adverse effects after mitigation on pine marten, otter, terrestrial invertebrates and water vole. These effects would be mitigated using compensation and/or enhancement through habitat works and species-specific habitat features delivered via the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan. Once embedded and best practice mitigation has been applied, including protected species licensing where required, no significant residual adverse effects are predicted for all protected species. No significant adverse effects were identified during operation.
- 7.342 THC's Ecology Officer notes that the site contains a range of important habitats, including priority peatland communities, and the proposed development would result in the permanent loss of some 250ha of habitat, including around 85ha of peatland habitat. Significant effects are identified for certain botanical interests, including whortle-leaved willow and dwarf birch. Further site investigations are expected to reduce the final restoration extent by approximately 150ha to account for unsuitable landforms, open water and other physical constraints.
- 7.343 As a result of the development, around 100ha of the 250ha area of land disturbed is required to build the development and would not be capable of restoration with this being the footprint of the PSH infrastructure. The decision to provide restoration outwith the application site, beyond the estates used to accommodate the PHS is sub-optimal as explained in the Council's Biodiversity SG. This issue was still to be resolved with the Ecology Officer with further advice expected in their updated consultation response following the latest round of FEI. However, the areas of restoration required are vast and it is acknowledged these estates are targeting the development of other renewable schemes (such as Loch Liath WF and Chrathaich WF), therefore, there is strategic benefit in targeting a part of Highland which is unlikely to be subject to further development pressure, and within the Flow Country.
- 7.344 In relation to onsite impacts, protected mammal surveys recorded evidence of otter, water vole, pine marten and red squirrel, although no significant residual effects were predicted. The Council's Ecology Officer was generally satisfied with the species surveys but recommended that all ecological mitigation and species protection measures identified in the EIAR should be secured through planning conditions and Species Protection Plans (SPPs).
- 7.345 In terms of aquatic ecology, the Ecology Officer initially raised concerns regarding the assessment of Atlantic salmon as they considered that the available evidence on salmon movements and migration within Loch Ness was limited and that the proposed mitigation measures may therefore be based on an incomplete understanding of potential effects. In particular, they referenced the smolt tracking survey and whether the operation of the existing Foyers PSH had been adequately represented during the monitoring period. As a result, the conclusion that residual effects on Atlantic salmon would be negligible was queried, and a more robust assessment of cumulative impacts from proposed pumped storage developments

on Loch Ness was considered necessary. This has since been clarified with the submission of previous FEI addressing these points. Owing to this species being a qualifying species for the River Morriston SAC, NatureScot are expected to advise further regarding likely impacts for this species and the SAC in their pending updated consultation response.

- 7.346 The Ecology Officer acknowledges species-specific measures for water vole, dragonfly, diver and grebe habitats. A range of conditions covering habitat management, species protection, bird protection, invertebrate surveys, biosecurity measures, ecological clerk of works provision, construction environmental management and water quality and fish monitoring are attached to safeguard ecological interests.
- 7.347 Buglife objects to the proposed development as they consider that impacts on terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates have been inadequately assessed and that the scheme could result in a net loss of biodiversity. More generally, they consider the scheme is not in compliance with NPF4 Policy 3, which requires developments to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity. Following previous submissions of FEI they remain concerned that increased water level fluctuations could reduce invertebrate diversity and abundance, leading to wider biodiversity impacts, and concludes that these risks have not been adequately assessed or mitigated.
- 7.348 It is considered the continued best practice and appropriate mitigation measures noted would minimise the impact of the proposed development on terrestrial ecology and can be controlled by appropriate conditions.

Ornithology

- 7.349 EIAR Volume 2 EIAR Chapter 8 assesses the impact of the proposed development on ornithology which has been informed by desk based and field survey data. Site surveys recorded 18 important breeding moorland bird species (including wader, grouse and perching birds), a breeding site for one raptor and also sites for divers and Slavonian grebe.
- 7.350 The ornithological surveys were undertaken in accordance with NatureScot guidance and recorded a range of important breeding bird species, including Schedule 1, Annex 1 and Scottish Biodiversity List species. Site surveys recorded 18 important breeding moorland bird species (including wader, grouse and perching birds), a breeding site for one raptor and also sites for divers and Slavonian grebe. Whilst most effects were assessed as not significant following mitigation, some species were identified as requiring additional safeguards.
- 7.351 The assessment of Slavonian grebe, red throated diver, black grouse, greenshank, golden plover and dunlin determined that all species would be subjected to minor displacement and disturbance throughout the construction period. This included a temporary adverse effect of international significance on SPAs and of national significance on SSSIs. These were assessed by the applicant as not significant with mitigation.
- 7.352 Once the mitigation measures (detailed in Appendix 10.1) are successfully implemented there would be no residual effect from the construction or operational

activity of the proposed development on these species with the exception of golden eagle. The golden eagle would experience a temporary significant adverse effect due to disturbance and displacement which is unlikely to be mitigated.

- 7.353 Once standard mitigation measures are successfully implemented, including the provision of an Environmental Clerk of Works (EnvCoW), pre-construction monitoring of nesting birds, creating no-go zones around any sensitive nesting areas, there would be no residual effect from the construction or operational activity of the proposed development on ornithological receptors within the area with the exception of a significant temporary adverse effect on golden eagle of regional significance due to disturbance and displacement of foraging birds during the construction phase.
- 7.354 Additionally, the Ecology Officer recommended a Bird Protection Plan informed by pre-construction surveys and incorporating species-specific mitigation measures.
- 7.355 RSPB have objected to the proposed development due to concerns over potential impacts on the nationally important Slavonian grebe population and associated SPAs. They note the highly vulnerable conservation status of Slavonian grebes, with only 23 breeding pairs recorded in the UK in 2024. While recognising the importance of renewable energy development and welcoming measures taken to reduce impacts, they consider that the applicant has not demonstrated with sufficient certainty that adverse effects on the integrity of these protected sites can be avoided.
- 7.356 RSPB consider the scale and duration of construction activities, as along with potential operational impacts, are significant. Whilst they note the proposed mitigation measures, including exclusion zones, they consider that significant effects cannot be ruled out.
- 7.357 Additionally, RSPB identified shortcomings in the ornithological survey work and assessment, including concerns over survey coverage and the need for additional monitoring information. Whilst AI submissions were noted, they maintain their objection pending further information that can demonstrate no adverse effects on the species or the integrity of the relevant European sites.
- 7.358 The applicant acknowledges the concerns regarding the potential collision risk to Slavonian grebe from the indicative grid connection, particularly as the species may fly at night and collision risk may not be fully addressed by simply avoiding breeding lochs or using line marking.
- 7.359 In response, the applicant notes that the indicative connection route has already been designed to avoid sensitive ornithological areas, including the use of approximately 2km of underground cable before transitioning to overhead line infrastructure. The applicant further states that the ornithology assessment identifies collision risk as a potential impact and envisages future project-specific surveys and route refinement to avoid breeding sites and flight paths wherever possible. They also highlight that a Slavonian Grebe Management Plan has already been prepared for the main development and includes enhanced mitigation measures developed in consultation with RSPB.

- 7.360 Overall, the applicant considers that the current information provides a proportionate assessment of the potential risk at this stage. Detailed assessment of flight paths, collision risk and any required mitigation is proposed to be undertaken later, once SSEN Transmission has developed and surveyed the final grid connection route.
- 7.361 Whilst these concerns raised by RSPB are noted NatureScot is the statutory adviser to the Scottish Government and the public body responsible for advising on Scotland's natural heritage, including the designation and management of protected areas and species.
- 7.362 As noted, although NatureScot's final response on ornithology remains outstanding, it is anticipated to be provided ahead of the 7 October 2026 SPAC meeting with the intended grid connection routing and form covered by the multi-stage consent condition attached.

Habitat Loss

- 7.363 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 7: Terrestrial Ecology states that with the application of embedded and best practice mitigation to minimise impacts where possible and adherence to relevant legislation, significant adverse residual effects from habitat loss have been identified during construction including permanent loss of blanket bog, montane scrub, wet and dry heaths, montane heaths, basic flush, notable flora and species rich grassland (noted in EIAR Table 7-9 and 7-10). The EIAR states that with additional compensation and/or enhancement through the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan these effects would not be significant.
- 7.364 Glen Urquhart Community Council, Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council, and Strathnairn Community Council raised concerns regarding habitat loss, impacts on peatland, ancient woodland, Atlantic salmon, golden eagle, lichens and other ecological interests. They consider that some environmental losses cannot be fully mitigated or compensated for and that the cumulative effects of multiple pumped storage and energy projects around Loch Ness have not been adequately assessed.

Biodiversity Enhancement

- 7.365 The applicant has used the SSER Biodiversity Net Gain Toolkit, a habitat-based metric used to calculate the change in biodiversity value between the existing (baseline) site and the proposed post-development scenario. It produces a percentage net gain or loss in biodiversity units. In total, the baseline biodiversity value of area-based habitats is 8,251 biodiversity units with the biggest contributor the natural water of Loch nam Breac Dearga which would be replaced by artificial reservoir habitat that does offer some biodiversity habitat but considerably less. There is a total of 276 linear baseline units from approximately 14km of watercourses.
- 7.366 Ecological and habitat losses would be compensated through the Landscape and Ecological Management Plan which includes extensive bog restoration, native woodland restoration / creation, montane would scrub and other montane habitat

restoration, heathland restoration and management, aquatic and riparian enhancement, and other habitat restoration and management measures. With mitigation, the applicant aims to achieve an approximate 19% biodiversity net gain; achieving 10,010 habitat units for areas-based habitats and some 302.89 habitat units for linear based habitats (10% net gain). The proposed enhancement of a substantial area of Upland birchwood ASNW does not, however, contribute to this net gain score, because it is irreplaceable habitat, which has since been clarified in recent FEI submissions (A1_4_04 Ecology Response and A1_4_05 Upland Heathland BNG Review Technical Note). Further review of these details by the Ecology Officer is expected imminently and any updated consultation response will be verbally reported at Committee.

- 7.367 THC's Ecology Officer initially raised an objection as they considered there was a lack of clarity regarding the biodiversity enhancement units (BU) being delivered and peatland restoration proposals that are considered insufficient to meet expected offsetting requirements. Additionally, they note the applicant has used the SSER biodiversity metric rather than the DEFRA metric referenced in THC guidance as part of their proposed biodiversity compensation and enhancement strategy.
- 7.368 Following an earlier submission of FEI the Ecology Officer noted that the applicant treated the planting of native woodland on upland heath as an enhancement of heathland rather than the creation of woodland habitat. They cannot agree with this approach given that standard heathland management would normally seek to remove trees and scrub rather than introduce them. As a result, woodland planting cannot reasonably be regarded as an improvement in the condition of existing heathland and should instead be recorded as woodland creation. As such, the Ecology Officer concluded that the biodiversity metric used appears to overstate the biodiversity units being delivered. As noted, a more recent FEI submission has been received with further review of these details by the Ecology Officer awaited and any updated consultation response will be verbally reported at Committee.
- 7.369 The applicant confirms that habitat restoration and biodiversity measures for Glen Earrach PSH would not duplicate mitigation, compensation or enhancement land already committed to other developments. The Loch Liath Wind Farm and Glen Earrach schemes are focused on different parts of the Balmacaan Estate, with Loch Liath measures centred on and around its development site and Glen Earrach PSH measures focused on its own development area and wider estate land. As a result, significant overlap is not anticipated.
- 7.370 Additionally, the applicant states that should any overlap be identified during detailed design, land already relied upon by another development would be excluded from Glen Earrach's mitigation, enhancement or restoration calculations. This can be secured by condition, with the Habitat Management Plan and peatland restoration proposals demonstrating that Glen Earrach's commitments are additional to, and separate from, measures already allocated to other developments.
- 7.371 The Ecology Officer also reviewed the applicant's peatland restoration proposals, including information on the proposed off-site restoration areas. The submitted information identifies a loss of 125-127ha nationally important, high-quality priority

peatland habitat which is in good condition. As the majority of the site at the headpond is classed as blanket bog, the applicant has been unable to avoid impacts on peatland here. Elsewhere, infrastructure has avoided areas of high value peatland.

- 7.372 Whilst the applicant proposes restoration of approximately 1,140ha of peatland through a combination of on-site and off-site measures, this falls short of the expected compensation ratio and therefore does not provide biodiversity enhancement at an appropriate level. In order to offset the losses, the Ecology Officer would seek a minimum level of enhancement at a ratio of 1:11 at a minimum, a 1:10 ratio is to offset the loss and an extra 10% is to provide enhancement. This is due to the peatland restoration site being located a significant distance from the site located in the Flow Country, therefore, a higher level of compensation would be expected in line with the Council's Biodiversity Guidance and NatureScot's Developing with Nature Guidance. Applying the 1:11 ratio to the proposed loss of 127ha of priority peatland would require 1397ha of compensation. Whilst their objection is noted on this point, further peatland restoration to an expected appropriate metric can be controlled by condition following NatureScot's and the Ecology Officer's updated consultation responses which will be verbally reported at Committee and be used to finalise the relevant habitat/peat management condition and Section 75 legal agreement to secure implementation.
- 7.373 In relation to the proposed grid connection, the Ecology Officer advises that there is currently insufficient information available to properly assess its potential ecological effects. Consequently, no detailed ecological assessment of the grid connection can be undertaken at this stage. As noted, no development will be allowed to commence until consent has been granted for the associated grid connection and this is controlled by condition.

Forestry

- 7.374 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 18 Forestry evaluates the potential effects on trees and woodland across all areas where tree removal is required for the construction and operation of the proposed development). 10.89ha of woodland would be removed from the study area to facilitate the proposed development. This will comprise 8.32ha of commercial woodland, 1.78ha of native broadleaf and semi-natural woodland and 0.78ha of native broadleaf woodland and Ancient Woodland which are recorded on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI). This is reported in Appendix 18.1 Woodland Report – Loch Ness and 18.2 Woodland Report – Glen Urquhart Wood and shown on Figures 18.1 and 18.2. The vast majority of woodland loss is associated with the upgraded forestry access track between Balnain and the main site area and UCW (9.62ha) with the LCW and associated access arrangements at Loch Ness (1.27ha). Due to extensive commercial forestry, there are no remnant features of Ancient Woodland in Glen Urquhart Woods along the shore of Loch Ness at the site of the LCW.
- 7.375 Effects have been mitigated where possible through design as embedded mitigation. The temporary workers accommodation was relocated to avoid existing woodland. The applicant has committed to implementing standard good practice working methods. The mitigation measures include the development of a forest

landscape design following good practice as defined by the Forestry Commission (now Scottish Forestry) Guidance (2014).

- 7.376 The Council's Forestry Officer acknowledges the applicant's statement that woodland impacts have informed the site selection and project design process and accepts that efforts have been made to avoid and minimise woodland loss, where reasonably possible. In particular, it is recognised that the layout of the LCW has sought to avoid more extensive encroachment into Ancient Woodland areas. Similarly, woodland removal associated with the upgrading of existing forestry tracks has largely been constrained to the minimum necessary to facilitate access while avoiding excessive creation of vulnerable forest edges.
- 7.377 Notwithstanding these measures, the Forestry Officer notes that the proposed development would result in the loss of areas of Ancient Woodland and native woodland and therefore conflicts with NPF4 Policy 6(b)(i) and 6(b)(ii), which seek to prevent the loss of Ancient Woodland and adverse impacts on native woodland habitats.
- 7.378 The EIAR proposes compensatory planting at a ratio of 1:1. The 8.32ha of commercial plantation would be replanted on site, ensuring continuity of woodland cover. The Forestry Officer raises concern regarding the proposed compensatory planting strategy. Whilst the applicant has proposed replacement planting on a like for like basis for woodland removal, the consultee advises that this approach is not consistent with the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy where ancient woodland or PAWS are affected. In such circumstances, compensatory planting should exceed the area lost in recognition of the higher environmental value of these woodland types.
- 7.379 Nevertheless, the Forestry Officer welcomes the wider woodland creation and enhancement proposals associated with the project. In particular, the proposal includes approximately 674ha of native woodland creation and enhancement, together with the enhancement of approximately 55ha of ancient semi-natural woodland through deer management and regeneration measures (set out in the Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan). These proposals are considered to represent a significant positive contribution to woodland expansion and habitat enhancement. By implementing a diverse range of native species, ensuring long-term management and monitoring, and collaborating with stakeholders, the applicant aims to create a sustainable, resilient woodland that would provide a wide range of environmental, ecological, and community benefits.
- 7.380 The Forestry Officer advises that a clear distinction should be made between woodland creation proposed as Compensatory Planting under NPF4 Policy 6 and measures proposed as Biodiversity Net Gain under NPF4 Policy 3. They recommend that compensatory planting be secured through a standalone Compensatory Planting Plan rather than solely through the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan. This can be conditioned.
- 7.381 It is considered the proposed development accords with NPF4 Policy 6(a) through its significant woodland creation and enhancement proposals, accords with Policy 6(b)(iii) through the provision of mitigation for woodland fragmentation, and accords with Policy 6(c) due to the significant public benefits associated with

renewable energy generation and the delivery of compensatory planting. However, it does not accord with Policies 6(b)(i) and 6(b)(ii) due to the unavoidable loss of areas of Ancient Woodland and impacts on native woodland.

- 7.382 On balance, the Forestry Officer considers that the proposed development may be accepted, recognising that woodland loss has been minimised through the design process and that substantial compensatory planting, woodland enhancement and regeneration measures are proposed. Conditions are also advised requiring tree protection measures, detailed planting proposals around the LCW, and the preparation and implementation of a comprehensive Compensatory Planting Plan, all of which can be conditioned.
- 7.383 The Woodland Trust objected to the application due to the loss of Ancient Woodland, woodland habitats and veteran trees. The applicant responded noting that the proposed development would result in only minor woodland losses, while delivering substantial environmental compensation and habitat enhancement. These measures, alongside the role in providing a nationally significant renewable energy scheme, mean the public benefits outweigh the residual impacts on woodland, consistent with NPF4 Policy 6.

Built and Cultural Heritage

- 7.384 EIAR Volume 2 Chapter 12 Cultural Heritage assessed the potential for both direct and indirect impacts on archaeological sites and sites of historic or cultural heritage interest. The applicant has undertaken targeted survey work across the site following a detailed desk-based evaluation. The assessment adopted a 1km study area with a further 3km area for changes to the setting. A total of 17 designated assets and 124 non-designated assets were identified within the 1km study area. A further 11 assets were identified through a review of historic mapping, documentary sources, and walkover survey leading to a total of 152 assets.
- 7.385 The EIAR identified one Scheduled Monument and one Listed building within the development site. This comprised the prehistoric Dun Scriben Fort (SM6220) 3.3km east of the headpond and the Category B listed Alltsigh House (LB15016) 2.7km south of the headpond.
- 7.386 The EIAR also identified one additional Scheduled Monument Craig Mony Fort (SM5808) and 14 further Listed buildings within the 1km study area. This includes one Category A Listed building, 9 Category B and four Category C Listed buildings. A further 9 Scheduled Monuments and 31 Listed buildings were identified within the 3km wider study area. No Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Registered Battlefields, World Heritage Sites, or Conservation Areas were recorded within the study area.
- 7.387 A total of 124 non-designated heritage assets were identified within the study area. They represent various phases of land use and development from the prehistoric period onwards. These included assets linked to prehistoric land improvement, agriculture and settlement, as well as post medieval agriculture. A non-designated asset was recorded near the Lower Control Works, a former inn near Creag nan Euan Wood (MHG63056) which survives as a ruin on the western side of the A82.

- 7.388 Construction work would be limited to the eastern side of the A82 or tunnelled below the remains. As a result, no impacts were identified. A worst-case scenario was adopted for previously unrecorded assets that might be identified during construction; however, the assessment noted the potential for previously unrecorded assets was low. The former inn near Creag nan Euan Wood (MHG63056) was identified as at potential risk from accidental damage. The EIAR proposes additional mitigation with preservation in situ to be agreed with stakeholders. Mitigation proposed includes an initial detailed landscape survey and a range of embedded mitigation measures which can be controlled by condition.
- 7.389 Operational impacts would comprise an effect on setting or changes to environmental conditions such as water levels in Loch Ness when the proposed development is operating alongside a “seasonal variable weir” at Dochfour Weir.
- 7.400 The EIAR concluded only a limited number of assets would have views of the headpond embankments with most views being of the tailpond works or access tracks. Views of the LCW would be limited to assets along the eastern side of Loch Ness, however, the extensive areas of woodland that exist along the shore of Loch Ness would restrict views to a limited number of shore edge properties. These include the Category B Listed Jane Fraser Memorial within Foyers Cemetery (LB1852) and Inverfarigaig Pier (LB1871). Whilst the Category B Listed Boleskin House complex (LB1849), as well as the adjacent church and cemetery (LB1847) fall within the ZTV, views of the Tailpond works would be limited due to tree cover, as well as the distance between Boleskin House and the proposed development.
- 7.401 The EIAR stated there could be physical impacts on Urquhart Castle (SM90309) and Cherry Island Crannog (SM9762) from water level changes in Loch Ness. The assessment concluded that there would be no risk of erosion to Urquhart Castle from changing water levels because where the Scheduled Monument meets Loch Ness is made of bedrock and where this is not the case, it has been stabilised using methods such as gabion baskets. The risk to Cherry Island is of dewatering waterlogged remains and temporary waterlogging of remains above the current loch height which would lead to decomposition. The assessment concluded water levels would not exceed the current lowest levels or current maximum levels and only go above 16.5m (the asunder upper level of erosion) for an additional 5.9 days per year.
- 7.402 HES has raised no objection and generally agrees with the applicant's assessment. They note that the proposed Dochfour Weir upgrade, which forms part of the mitigation strategy underpinning the water level modelling, would affect the Scheduled Monument Caledonian Canal, Loch Ness – Dochgarroch Lock and would likely require separate Scheduled Monument Consent. HES emphasises that its decision not to object to this application should not be taken as support for any associated future application which will be assessed on its own merits.
- 7.403 In terms of archaeology, THC's Archaeology Officer agrees with the conclusions of the EIAR that the potential for archaeological remains across the site is low and the mitigation measures recommended in Section 12.9 are welcomed which include the marking out of any identified sensitive areas and the implementation

of a protocol in the event of the discovery of previously unrecorded assets. An archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) will be required and is controlled by condition.

- 7.404 The findings within Chapter 12 Cultural Heritage are agreed with no built heritage concerns being raised by HET or HES subject to the conditions noted. Owing to the weir upgrade proposal's design not being suitably advance, its cultural heritage effects require separate assessment as part of that application and a multistage consent condition.

Other Material Considerations

Consenting Process – EIA Project

- 7.405 Representations raise concerns that the associated grid connection and weir were not included as part of the pumped storage hydro application. Whilst it is correct that a grid connection from the powerhouse to Bingally substation would be required to connect the proposed development to the national electricity grid, this will be subject to a separate consenting process, with SSEN Transmission as the applicant, for regulatory reasons. Likewise, the upgrade works to Dochfour Weir, at the point where the Caledonian Canal at Loch Dochfour and the River Ness come together, will also require separate planning application along with a Scheduled Monument Consent and Environmental Authorisations (Scotland) Regulations 2018 (EASR).
- 7.406 When Glen Earrach PSH is operational, and in combination with other PSH schemes around Loch Ness, the development will have an impact on water levels. In order to mitigate the effects of this, with particular regard to migratory salmon, the intention of works to the weir are to improve fish passage, to prevent salmon smolts passing down the Caledonian Canal, to regularise fluctuations in Loch Ness water levels and to improve control of water volumes flowing into the River Ness. Whilst the works to the weir do not form part of this application, the applicant has identified them as being essential to the operation of the proposed PSH scheme. They are subject to collaboration with Scottish Canals and other interested parties. A pre-commencement condition is attached noting that Glen Earrach PSH scheme can only start works if consent has been granted for the upgrade works to Dochfour Weir. Whilst the upgrade works to the weir will be considered on their own merits against all relevant policy and guidance and in consultation with interested stakeholders, the PSH scheme cannot become operational without the upgraded infrastructure.
- 7.407 Additionally, a Water Management Board is to be agreed and controlled by condition which will facilitate the operation of the Dochfour Weir, how it will be managed with the roles and responsibilities of the management body and stakeholders outlined. Given the concerns raised by various consultees and representations regarding the weir and its importance to Glen Earrach PSH functioning, it is imperative that conditions are applied to control its construction and management. These conditions are expected to also be attached by the Energy Consents Unit and Scottish Ministers in their role as decision maker. If not

attached, the Council's consultation response on the application must be treated as an objection.

- 7.408 The associated grid connection for this scheme, along with other renewable energy developments, was previously considered by the Planning Authority as a separate application, to be assessed on its own merits and was not a material planning consideration. This previous position has been challenged by the decision on *Raeshaw Wind Farms Ltd v Scottish Ministers* [2026] CSIH 2010. In that case, the Court held that the Reporter erred in law by failing to undertake the necessary fact-specific evaluative exercise as to whether the wind farm and its required grid connection formed a single EIA "project", and by proceeding on the basis that it was sufficient that the grid connection did not form part of the application and could be considered later through a separate consenting process. The Court also made clear that the question is not dependent on any intention to avoid EIA, but on whether, in substance, what is proposed should be treated as a single project for environmental assessment purposes. Relevant considerations include the non-exhaustive factors identified in *R (Wingfield) v Canterbury City Council* [2020] JPL 154, including functional interdependence and whether the deferred works are properly to be regarded as a stand-alone project, alongside consideration of the true nature and scope of the project and the degree of connection between its component parts.
- 7.409 The EIAR recognised that a grid connection would be required for Glen Earrach scheme and included a limited assessment based on the information available at the time of submission. As the route, design and connection solution had not been defined, the applicant assessed a worst-case overhead line connection to the indicative Bingally Substation connection point, focusing primarily on potential landscape and visual effects. Following the *Raeshaw* judgment, FEI was submitted (*Raeshaw ECU Response Paper (AI_3_33)*, *Grid Connection Assessment: Context Document (AI_3_34)* and *Grid Connection: Further Clarification (AI_4_06)*) to provide a more detailed indicative assessment of a potential grid connection route, although the applicant continues to maintain that the grid connection and the generating station are separate projects for EIA purposes.
- 7.410 The applicant identifies the proposed upgrades to Dochfour Weir as mitigation associated with the operation of the PSH and states that these measures were considered during the EIA process. However, unlike the grid connection, they do not present the weir upgrades as forming part of the development application itself and argue that any future modification of the weir would constitute a separate project requiring its own planning application, EIA and consenting process. Whilst the applicant asserts that the environmental effects associated with the proposed mitigation have been identified and assessed, the submitted documents do not clearly demonstrate a standalone assessment of the Dochfour Weir works equivalent to that undertaken for the grid connection. The applicant's position is therefore that the weir modifications are related mitigation measures but remain a distinct project for EIA purposes.
- 7.411 Further advice from THC's Legal Team noted that whilst there was some agreement with a few factual points under the *Wingfield* criteria, they considered that the applicant has placed undue weight on factors such as separate ownership

and separate consenting processes, while underplaying functional interdependence. Although there is no common ownership of the generating station and the proposed grid connection, and the two elements are not subject to simultaneous determination, these factors are not considered decisive. It is noted that separate ownership and separate consenting processes are common characteristics of major energy infrastructure projects and therefore carry limited weight when determining whether developments comprise a single project for EIA purposes.

- 7.412 The principal point of disagreement relates to the issue of functional interdependence. The Council's Legal Team consider that Glen Earrach PSH cannot operate without a grid connection and that the proposed connection between the GIS switchyard and the Bingally Substation exists solely to facilitate the operation of the development. On this basis, there is considered to be a clear functional relationship between the generating station and the grid connection. Additionally, they do not accept that the absence of a fixed route or final design precludes the two elements from being regarded as part of the same project. It is noted that established planning practice allows for the assessment of a reasonable worst-case scenario, with detailed design matters being addressed through subsequent approval processes and appropriately worded suspensive conditions.
- 7.413 Overall, the Legal Team consider that there is a strong argument that the generating station and grid connection should be regarded as a single project for EIA purposes. However, it is also recognised that the applicant has assessed a reasonable worst-case grid connection route. The key consideration is therefore whether that assessment is sufficient to identify and assess the likely significant environmental effects associated with the grid connection. The Planning case officer considered the assessment is adequate and can be controlled by an appropriately worded multi-stage condition requiring the submission and approval of final grid connection details prior to commencement or operation of the development.
- 7.414 In terms of Dochfour Weir, there is no common ownership between Glen Earrach PSH and the weir, nor are any future weir modifications subject to simultaneous determination with the Section 36 application. However, the Council's Legal Team does not agree that these factors alone are sufficient to conclude that the weir upgrades comprise a separate project for EIA purposes.
- 7.415 The principal area of disagreement relates to functional interdependence. The Legal Team note that the proposed modifications to the weir are relied upon by the applicant as mitigation for the operation of the PSH and, as such, this relationship points towards a functional link between the two elements. Whilst it is acknowledged that other parties may also be pursuing improvements to the weir and that such works may have wider benefits, the modifications currently under consideration have been advanced specifically in connection with the Glen Earrach PSH and are presented as mitigation integral to the development being assessed.
- 7.416 There are concerns relating to the adequacy of the environmental assessment of the proposed weir works. Unlike the grid connection, for which the applicant has assessed a reasonable worst-case scenario, it is not clear where a comparable

assessment of the Dochfour Weir modifications has been undertaken. As such, the Council's Legal Team considers that there remains uncertainty regarding whether the environmental implications of the proposed weir modifications have been assessed to a sufficient level of detail. In its view, a similar approach to that adopted for the grid connection, namely the assessment of a reasonable worst-case scenario supported by appropriate environmental information, would have provided a more robust basis for considering the implications of the proposed weir upgrades in the context of the development.

- 7.417 Whilst the concerns raised by the Legal Team are noted, the Planning Case Officer considered the assessment provided to date is adequate given the proposed development's current stage in the planning process. In this respect, it would seem appropriate to firstly establish any prospect of obtaining a consent for the PSH itself, ahead of advancing a full detailed design for the weir which forms part of a complicated waterway system. Whilst it would be optimal to determine both the PSH and the weir upgrade in parallel, there is equally an opportunity to control this aspect through imposing an appropriately worded condition requiring the upgrade works to the weir to be consented through a further planning application prior to commencement of development, or operation of the PSH development. In opting to condition this element, consideration has been given to the climate change emergency and the need to progress renewable energy developments at pace. This comes with logistical challenges, but ultimately, there are adequate control measures in place to ensure that the environmental effects of the weir and the PSH/s it serves, are cumulatively assessed before development commencement, which is judged to be the appropriate trigger point in this case.

Renewable Energy

- 7.418 Representations questioned whether PHS development can be considered to produce renewable energy. The proposed development would operate in two modes. In the "generating" mode the proposed development would produce electricity by releasing water from the upper reservoir through the reversible pump turbines and into the lower reservoir. In the "pumping" mode electricity would be imported from the grid to pump water through the reversible pump turbines from the lower reservoir up to the upper reservoir. Pumped hydro storage schemes are essentially large-scale batteries. In the "generating" mode they can be considered to produce renewable energy as the electricity generated by releasing water from the upper reservoir to the lower reservoir drives turbines in tunnels. Power is required to pump water from the lower reservoir to the upper reservoir in the "pumping mode" and in that sense the proposed development is not a renewable energy scheme in the same way as a wind farm, for example. It is however, described as "a reliable source of renewable electricity" in the Scottish Government's Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023) along with the strong support in principle from NPF4. It is noted this technology would play an increasingly important role in the transition to net zero, providing flexibility to the grid and helping to secure a resilient and secure energy supply.

Aviation

- 7.419 There are no objections regarding aviation interests with consultation response from HIAL, MOD DIO and NATS all confirming they have no concerns regarding the proposed development.

Decommissioning

- 7.420 In terms of the design life of the facility, whilst the applicant notes that the proposal could feasibly remain operational indefinitely if maintained appropriately, safeguards need to be put in place to cover the proposed development ceasing operation with the usual decommissioning and restoration requirements secured. If the decision is made to decommission the pumped hydro storage scheme, moveable infrastructure would be removed, underground tunnels would be sealed, generation plant machinery would be removed. Where removal of infrastructure would result in more damage than leaving in place, it would be left in-situ, for example the dams, with disturbed ground reinstated, unless otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority. It is important to ensure that any approval of this project secures by condition a requirement to deliver a draft Decommissioning and Restoration Plan (DRP) for approval prior to the commencement of any development and ensure an appropriate financial bond is put in place to secure these works. The finalised DRP would be expected to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA and NatureScot no later than 12 months prior to the final decommissioning of the site. The detailed DRP would then be implemented within 18 months of the final decommissioning of the development, unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Planning Authority.

Planning Monitoring Officer

- 7.421 Given the complexity of national developments, and to assist in discharge of conditions, the Planning Authority usually seeks that the developer employs a Planning Monitoring Officer (PMO). The role of the PMO, amongst other things, would include the monitoring of, and enforcement of compliance with, all conditions, agreements and obligations related to this permission (or any superseding or related permissions) and shall include the provision of a bi-monthly compliance report to the Planning Authority.
- 7.422 There are no other material considerations.

Non-Material Considerations

- 7.423 Representations raise concerns that there is an over-provision of renewable energy development within the wider Highland region. Whilst there are various renewable projects in the wider surrounding area, all such proposals require assessment on their own merits and are rightly subject of individual applications. NPF4 makes clear that grid capacity should also not constrain renewable development.
- 7.424 In response to other non-material considerations raised: community benefit is voluntary and holds no weight in the planning determination process as explained

in the Socio-economics section of this report; financial risk to the developer is not material to the planning merits of the scheme; who the applicant is and their corporate structure is not relevant to the Council's consideration of the proposal with the named operator of the scheme potentially changing in future.

8. MATTERS TO BE SECURED BY LEGAL AGREEMENT

Habitat Restoration

- 8.1 Where compensatory habitat restoration and enhancement measures take place on land located outside the planning application boundary and / or is not under the ownership of the applicant, a legal agreement must first be secured between the applicant, the landowner and the Planning Authority. This is required for the 1397ha, at a minimum, peatland restoration in the Flow Country.

Wear and Tear 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.

Developer Contributions

- 8.3 The Developer Contributions Supplementary Guidance (DCSG) was adopted in November 2018. This guidance sets out the Council's approach to mitigating the impacts of development on services and infrastructure by seeking fair and realistic developer contributions to the delivery of such facilities. Energy developments are treated as industrial developments within the DCSG. Although The Highland Council is only a consultee in this case, the DCSG forms part of the approved Development Plan and therefore Scottish Ministers should apply its terms. In relation to public art, physical direct provision on, or in close proximity to the site would be appropriate, or elsewhere across the estate with provision of resting / sheltered areas at vantage points along affected walking routes, with consideration given to the select provision of interpretation boards. Scope for public art provision is therefore expected to be secured by condition, with scope for alternative form of public art to be explored further in consultation with interested parties, including the Community Liaison Group.

Financial Guarantee

- 8.4 A decommissioning and restoration financial guarantee can be secured by condition. Therefore, no further legal agreements are required should consent be granted.

Public Art

- 8.5 In relation to public art, physical direct provision on, or in close proximity to the site would be appropriate, or elsewhere across the estate with provision of resting / sheltered areas at vantage points along affected walking routes, with

consideration given to the select provision of interpretation boards if deemed appropriate. Scope for public art provision is therefore secured by condition, with scope for alternative form of public art to be explored further in consultation with interested parties, including the Community Liaison Group.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 The Scottish Government provides strong policy support for renewable energy infrastructure and specifically identifies pumped storage hydro as a National Development within NPF4. The proposed Glen Earrach Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme would provide approximately 1,800MW of generating capacity and approximately 34,000MWh of storage, making a significant contribution towards national energy security, grid balancing and Scotland's transition to net zero. The proposal would also generate substantial socio-economic benefits, including significant construction employment, expenditure within the Highland economy, long-term operational jobs, and the potential for wider community wealth building initiatives.
- 9.2 As with all major development proposals, these benefits must be balanced against the environmental effects of the development, taking account of the Development Plan, the Electricity Act 1989, Schedule 9 duties, national planning policy and all other material considerations. The proposed development would result in significant environmental effects, particularly during construction, including significant landscape and visual effects, habitat loss, impacts on peatland, temporary disruption to recreation and public access, construction traffic impacts and changes to the character of parts of the Loch Ness landscape.
- 9.3 Landscape and visual effects have been a key consideration throughout the assessment. Significant effects would occur during construction and would persist into operation at a limited number of receptors, most notably from Meall Fuar-mhonaidh and certain recreational receptors associated with Loch Ness. The PHS operational visual effects are expected to adversely effect the "Dramatic Great Glen" Special Quality of the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig Special Landscape Area. However, it is also recognised that the overall integrity of the SLA would not be compromised with the development once operational being generally out of sight from the more populated areas and routes in this more accessible part of Highland. The project is also expected to be well served in terms of access to the transport network with good access onto the A82 Trunk Road and is expected to also make use of Loch Ness for marine based transportation. Similarly, the site is well served from a grid infrastructure perspective, located relatively close to the recently consented Bingally substation on the Beaully to Denny 400kV transmission line. Of greater importance is the topographical characteristics of the site itself; with the elevation change down to Loch Ness providing a somewhat unique opportunity to develop an PHS of this vast scale with limited dam infrastructure compared to other recent proposals considered in Highland.
- 9.4 Equally, any development of this scale poses environmental challenges, and it has taken a considerable period time and rounds of Further Environmental Information to seek to address NatureScot's information requirements for potentially affected surrounding designations. At the time of writing, NatureScot maintain an objection to the application relating to potential impacts on the integrity of the River Moriston

SAC and Urquhart Bay Woods SAC, including uncertain effects on Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussels, river flows, Loch Ness water levels and the hydrological conditions supporting alder woodland habitats. Additionally, NatureScot had previously sought further information regarding fish passage, fish deterrent measures, spawning habitat and woodland inundation. It is understood that this position is to be updated with a further consultation response from NatureScot anticipated to be published imminently and that response be read alongside this Committee Report. Should NatureScot's objections be resolvable, the recommendation is for the Council to align their stance on the application with NatureScot in relation to their natural heritage interests, subject to Planning Officer's further consideration of the evidence presented which will be verbally reported at Committee.

- 9.5 In addition to effects on designated sites, the proposal would also result in unavoidable losses of peatland habitat, woodland and a portion of designated Ancient Woodland. Whilst concerns remain regarding BNG calculations, peatland compensation/restoration measures and the potential impact of the associated grid connection impacts, these elements can be mitigated and are resolvable by conditions. Subject to the implementation of these measures, it is considered that ecological, forestry and biodiversity effects can be appropriately managed with the proposal being capable of delivering biodiversity enhancement, through a combination of onsite and offsite measures, including an extensive area of peatland restoration in the Flow Country, to be secured by legal agreement.
- 9.6 Particular attention has been given to the potential effects of the proposal on Loch Ness water levels, flood risk, Atlantic salmon and designated sites. The proposed upgrade works to Dochfour Weir remain fundamental to the environmental mitigation strategy relied upon by the applicant, and accordingly, specific conditions are required to secure delivery of the weir upgrade and the associated Water Management Board prior to operation of the scheme. Following submission of further environmental information, SEPA has withdrawn its objection subject to conditions controlling the construction of Dochfour Weir, management of waterways, and stop generating/curtailment level. Whilst there remains a lack of absolute clarity regarding the Dochfour Weir modifications as mitigation, specifically the implications for flood risk, water level management, governance and operational responsibility, it is considered that conditions attached will give further oversight and control on these issues, which must be addressed. As noted, no development shall commence to the PSH unless and until the proposed upgrade works to Dochfour Weir and Water Management Board are agreed and progressed through the relevant consenting process. An exception to this is PSH site enabling works, which are deemed critical to establishing the design parameters for the PHS and in turn the design of the intended upgraded weir.
- 9.7 The scale of the construction programme, including the proposed worker accommodation village, extensive road and track network, tunnelling operations and marine construction works at Loch Ness, would result in notable temporary impacts on local communities, recreation and the environment. However, consultees generally agree that these impacts can be appropriately controlled through detailed management plans, mitigation measures and planning conditions, including the Construction Environmental Management Document,

Construction Traffic Management Plan, operational management controls and ongoing monitoring.

- 9.8 A significant number of objections have been received from members of the public, the host Glen Urquhart Community Council along with neighbouring Stratherrick and Foyers Community Council, Strathnairn Community Council and non-statutory consultees. These concerns principally relate to landscape and visual effects, impacts on Loch Ness, ecology, fisheries, recreation, tourism, traffic and cumulative effects associated with other energy developments within the Great Glen. These concerns have been carefully considered and have informed the assessment and recommended mitigation. Whilst a number of consultees continue to object, including those noted along with Buglife, Jacobite Loch Ness Cruises, NDSFB, RSPB and Woodland Trust, the majority of statutory consultees, including SEPA and Transport Scotland raise no objection subject to conditions.
- 9.9 Having considered the proposal in the round, it is recognised that the development would give rise to significant adverse effects in certain respects, particularly in relation to landscape and visual impact and temporary construction effects. Nevertheless, the proposal represents a National Development which would make a substantial contribution towards renewable energy storage, energy security and climate change objectives. Subject to the recommended planning conditions, including those relating to the grid connection and Dochfour Weir which will be controlled through separate future applications, water management, ecological mitigation, restoration and monitoring, it is considered that the benefits of the proposal outweigh the residual adverse impacts identified.
- 9.10 All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. Subject to the application of the recommended conditions, it is considered that the proposal accords overall with the principles and policies of the Development Plan and is acceptable in terms of all other applicable material considerations. Should these conditions not be applied by ECU as the determining authority then the Council's response is to be treated as an objection. Accordingly, it is recommended that The Highland Council **RAISE NO OBJECTION** to the proposed development subject to finalised conditions.

10. IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Resource: There are significant staffing and financial resource implications if the application is to be subject to a Public Local Inquiry.
- 10.2 Legal: If an objection is raised to the proposal, the application may be subject to a Public Local Inquiry.
- 10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Not applicable
- 10.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: The proposal has the ability to make a meaningful contribution toward the production of renewable energy.
- 10.5 Risk: Not applicable
- 10.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

11. RECOMMENDATION

Action required before consultation response issued to Scottish Ministers:
Finalise conditions and reasons.

11.1 It is recommended to **RAISE NO OBJECTION** to the application subject to:

- A. The Committee granting delegated authority to the Area Planning Manager - South to respond to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit regarding any future Further / Supplementary Environmental Information, where that does not:
 - i) materially increase the scale of the proposed development; and
 - ii) result in any additional significant adverse environmental effects; and
 - iii) does not undermine or remove mitigation which was secured within the Council's previous consultation response on the application;
- B. The conclusion of a legal agreement, or an alternative suitable mechanism to secure an appropriate level of off-site enhancement and restoration measures;
- C. Confirmation from NatureScot that they have removed their outstanding objection; and
- D. The Committee granting delegated authority to the Area Planning Manager - South to agree the finished condition wording, with any substantive amendments to be subject to prior consultation with the Chair of the South Planning Applications Committee.

Conditions and Reasons to be attached to any Section 36 consent which may be approved

1. Notification of Date of First Commissioning

Written confirmation of the Date of First Commissioning and the Date of Final Commissioning shall be provided to the Planning Authority and the Scottish Ministers no later than one calendar month after those dates.

Reason: To allow the Planning Authority and Scottish Ministers to calculate the date of expiry of the consent.

2. Commencement of Development

(1) The Commencement of development shall be no later than 7 years from the date on which this consent is granted, or in substitution, such other period as the Scottish Ministers may hereafter direct in writing.

(2) Written confirmation of the intended date of Commencement of development shall be provided to the Planning Authority and the Scottish Ministers no later than one calendar month before that date.

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

3. **Non-assignment**

(1) This consent shall not be assigned without the prior written authorisation of the Scottish Ministers. The Scottish Ministers may authorise the assignment, with or without conditions.

(2) The Company shall notify the Planning Authority and the Scottish Ministers in writing of the name of the assignee; principal named contact and contact details within fourteen days of the consent being assigned.

Reason: To safeguard the obligations of the consent if transferred to another company.

4. **Serious Incident Reporting**

In the event of any breach of health and safety or environmental obligations relating to the Development during the period of this consent, the Company would provide written notification of the nature and timing of the incident to the Planning Authority and the Scottish Ministers, including confirmation of remedial measures taken and/or to be taken to rectify the breach, within 24 hours of the incident occurring.

Reason: To keep the Scottish Ministers informed of any such incidents which may be in the public interest.

Conditions to be attached to any deemed planning permission

5. **Implementation in Accordance with Approved Plans**

(1) Except as otherwise required by the terms of the section 36 consent and deemed planning permission, the Development shall be undertaken in accordance with the application:

(a) including the approved drawings;

(b) the Environmental Impact Assessment Report ("the EIAR"); and

(c) other documentation lodged in support of the application.

Reason: To ensure that the Development is carried out in accordance with the approved details.

6. **Site Investigation Works**

The site investigation works shall not commence until a detailed scheme of all site investigation works (including off-site and on-site works) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. This shall include a timetable for all investigation works and enabling works and shall be submitted a minimum of 3 months in advance of the proposed date of commencement of any site investigation works

Reason: To ensure the final details of the enabling works and site investigation works have regard for rural setting of the Development Site and the potential impact of such works on the infrastructure of the area.

7. **Site Enabling Works**

The Site Enabling Works shall not commence until a detailed scheme of all Site Enabling Works (including off-site, on-site works and peat management information) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. This shall include a timetable for all enabling works and shall be submitted a minimum of 1 month in advance of the proposed date of commencement of any Site Enabling Works.

Reason: To ensure the final details of the Site Enabling Works have regard for the rural setting of the Development Site and the potential impact of such works on the infrastructure of the area.

8. **Finalised Design**

No development shall commence until the final design details for that specific element of the development have been submitted to, and agreed in writing by, the Planning Authority, in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA:

- Loch nam Breac Dearga headpond upper reservoir, main dam, saddle dam 1, saddle dam 2, spillway, Upper Control Works (UCW) and any associated landscaping and/or planting;
- Lower Control Works (LCW) including the structures on Loch Ness, bulkhead gates, smolt, trash rack screens and any associated landscaping and/or planting;
- Powerhouse, including gate shafts, Gas Insulated Switchyard (GIS) switchyard, tailrace inlet and outlet structures, isolation gates, welfare facilities and any associated landscaping and/or planting;
- Headrace tunnels, tailrace tunnels, surge tanks and chambers and underground power cavern;
- All above ground facilities including site compounds, worker accommodation, administration buildings, recreational facilities, any other associated external infrastructure, parking areas and any associated landscaping and/or planting;
- All roads, access tracks, water-crossings and footpaths to serve each phase of the Development;
- Borrow pits;
- Site establishment areas to serve each phase of the Development;
- All site boundary treatments and external lighting provisions;
- All mitigation measures to be implemented in association with the project as set out in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, or as amended by the above plans or agreed with statutory consultees prior to determination and not specified in this consent; All work shall thereafter be carried out in accordance with the approved design details.

Reason: To ensure the final design details of the Development have regard for the rural setting of the Development Site within a Special Landscape Area and the commitment to high-quality design as set out in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and the Further Environmental Information Report.

9. **Elevations and Site Formation Levels**

a) No development shall commence on each phase noted for Condition 8 Finalised Design, until elevation, and cross section drawings of the proposed above

ground infrastructure, have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. These details shall include:

- i) The external materials, colours and finishes of all external structures and site fencing with a non-reflective finish to be specified throughout;
- ii) any raised areas of hardstanding to support all onsite infrastructure; and
- b) No element of the development shall have any text, sign or logo displayed on any external surface of the facility, save those required by the applicant's safety systems and law under other legislation; and

Thereafter, the development shall be built out in accordance with these approved details and, with reference to part (a) above, the site shall be maintained in the approved colour, free from rust, staining or discolouration until such time as the development is decommissioned

Reason: In the interest of visual amenity.

10. **Grid Connection**

No development shall commence until:

- (i) details of the grid connection for the development hereby permitted, together with any further environmental information assessing whether the grid connection is likely to give rise to any significant environmental effects, whether individually or cumulatively with the development hereby permitted, have been submitted to and approved by the Highland Council or Scottish Ministers; and
- (ii) any necessary planning permission, deemed planning permission and consent required for the grid connection has been granted under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and/or the Electricity Act 1989.

No part of the development hereby permitted shall be connected to the grid connection unless works on the grid connection are carried out in accordance with any necessary consents and the approved details.

Reason: Since the development hereby permitted and its grid connection have been found to comprise a single project, this condition ensures that likely significant effects of the grid connection itself and in combination with the development hereby permitted are identified, assessed and taken into account before the Highland Council or Scottish Ministers gives consent for any part of the project to proceed.

11. **Lower Control Works Associated Infrastructure**

No development shall commence until:

- i) details of the provision of associated infrastructure to facilitate the construction of the Lower Control Works (LCW) such as jetties, pontoons or landing facilities for the development hereby permitted, together with any further environmental information assessing whether these works are likely to give rise to any significant environmental effects, whether individually or cumulatively with the development hereby permitted, have been submitted to and approved by the Highland Council or Scottish Ministers; and

- ii) any necessary planning permission, deemed planning permission and consent required for the grid connection has been granted under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and/or the Electricity Act 1989.

No part of the development is hereby permitted unless works to facilitate the construction of the LCW are carried out in accordance with any necessary consents and the approved details.

Reason: Since the development hereby permitted and its associated infrastructure to facilitate the construction of the LCW have been found to comprise a single project, this condition ensures that likely significant effects of the grid connection itself and in combination with the development hereby permitted are identified, assessed and taken into account before the Highland Council or Scottish Ministers gives consent for any part of the project to proceed.

12. **Lower Control Works Marine Construction Strategy**

No development, other than site enabling works, shall commence until a Lower Control Works Marine Construction Strategy (LCWMCS) has been submitted to manage all construction to the LCW and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, in consultation SEPA, NatureScot and any other consultees as appropriate. Thereafter, only the approved details set out in the LCWMCS shall be implemented or as otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority.

Reason: to mitigate the impact of the development on flooding, cultural heritage and designated sites.

13. **Dochfour Weir and Operational Management Plan**

- A. No development shall commence until:
 - i. a solution for controlling water levels within Loch Ness and discharge rates over Dochfour Weir into the River Ness has been established and agreed with the Planning Authority and any significant environmental impacts of that solution have been identified and assessed, individually and cumulatively, with the development hereby approved; and
 - ii. those works required to Dochfour Weir have been granted planning permission by the Planning Authority under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) 1997.
- B. The development shall not become operational until:
 - i. the works consented under A (ii) above are carried out in accordance with any necessary consents and the approved details; and
 - ii. an Operational Management Plan (OMP) for the control of the water in Loch Ness and at Dochfour Weir, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, in consultation with Scottish Canals, SEPA, NatureScot, Historic Environment Scotland, SSEN, Highland Council's Flood Risk Management Team and any other consultees as appropriate.

Unless otherwise agreed by the Planning Authority, the OMP shall seek to mitigate and avoid adverse effects for all water sensitive receptors including but not limited to: environmental designated sites, protected species, residential properties, recreational and tourism infrastructure affected by the upgraded Dochfour Weir. Thereafter, the OMP shall be implemented in

accordance with the approved details from first commissioning of the development until the cessation of the use of the development, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: To mitigate the impact of the development on flooding, cultural heritage and designated site whilst adequate water management and flood mitigation measures are provided and overseen by an appropriate management body

14. Canal Management Plan

No development shall commence until a Canal Management Plan (CMP) to manage all water-based construction traffic and movement of materials, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, in consultation with Scottish Canals, any affected local Community Councils and any other consultees as appropriate. The CMP shall include:

- a) Scheduling and timing of movements;
- b) Water-based traffic management measures on the routes to site for construction traffic and movement of materials;
- c) Appropriate steps to effectively coordinate water-based traffic movements with other developments on the same water-based access route as this proposal along with pleasure craft using the same waterways;
- d) A procedure for the regular monitoring of canals and waterways conditions and the implementation of any remedial works required during the construction period;
- e) Measures to ensure that all affected canals and waterways are kept free of mud and debris arising from the development;
- f) A timetable for implementation of the measures detailed in the CMP;
- g) Estimate of volume of and type of materials that must be imported to and exported for the site;
- h) Estimate of load size for each type of material;
- i) Estimate of the number and type of barge/water-based craft required for each stage of construction;
- j) Clarification of barge/water-based craft routes to and from the site, any loading and unloading points and port of entry if applicable;
- k) Dates for key activities within construction programmes for the proposed works and consideration of other developments on the same water-based access route as this proposal;
- l) Full details of mitigation measures for existing recreational and tourism infrastructure on Loch Ness that would require improvement or replacement as part of the water regime associated with Glen Earrach PSH and upgraded Dochfour Weir;
- m) Identification of a nominated person to whom any water-based safety issues can be referred and measures for keeping the Community Council and Community Liaison Group informed and dealing with queries and any complaints regarding water-based traffic ensuring effective lines of communication with existing residents, businesses and appropriate local representation in the area so that two-way information sharing can happen about the implications of water-based construction traffic and movement of materials impacts and the development of solution driven improvements to the CMP.

Reason: In the interests of water-based safety and to ensure measures are in place to minimise conflict between other developments on the same water-based access route as this proposal along with pleasure craft using the same waterways and to mitigate any adverse impact.

15. Construction Environment Management Document

No later than three months prior to the Commencement of the Development, a Construction Environment Management Document (CEMD) shall be submitted for the writing approval of the Planning Authority, in consultation with SEPA, NatureScot, Environmental Health and any other consultees as appropriate. The development shall then proceed in accordance with the approved CEMD unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

The CEMD shall include details of an updated Schedule of Mitigation (SM) as it relates to construction, highlighting mitigation set out within each chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), within the EIAR Supplementary Environmental Information (SEI), and the conditions of this consent; Processes to control / action changes from the agreed SM; Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMPs) for the construction phase, covering:

- i. Habitat and Species Protection;
- ii. Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)
- iii. Mitigation measures to protect the ecological resources on site, including biodiversity protection zones, location and timing of works;
- iv. Construction Method Statements;
- v. Pollution Prevention and Control
- vi. Dust Management, covering demolition and construction activity, including vehicle movements;
- vii. Construction Noise and Vibration (refer to Condition 38);
- viii. Construction Method Statements;
- ix. Temporary Site Lighting;
- x. Site Waste Management;
- xi. Surface and Ground Water Management, including drainage and sediment management measures from all construction areas including access tracks; drainage by SUDS to accommodate the 1 in 200 plus an allowance for climate change; mechanisms to ensure that construction would not take place during periods of high flow or high rainfall; and a programme of water quality monitoring;
- xii. Surface Water Quality Monitoring Programme implemented by the Principal Contractor and overseen by an ACoW (Aquatic Clerk of Works) or suitably experienced ECoW;
- xiii. Water Crossing Assessment;
- xiv. Peat Management Plan (refer to Condition 40);
- xv. Soil Management, with details of soil placement and measures to utilise the soils' existing seed base in the finalised landscaping plan;
- xvi. Public and Private Water Supply Protection Measures, including a programme of water quality monitoring;
- xvii. Emergency Response Plans;
- xviii. Timetable for post construction restoration/reinstatement of the temporary working areas and construction compound;

- xix. Phasing plans for the construction;
- xx. Other relevant environmental management as may be relevant to the development.
- xxi. A statement of responsibility to 'stop the job/activity' if a breach or potential breach of mitigation or legislation occurs; and
- xxii. Methods for monitoring, auditing, reporting, and the communication of environmental management on site and with client, Planning Authority and other relevant parties.

Reason: To ensure protection of surrounding environmental interests and general amenity.

16. **Blasting Plan**

Prior to the commencement of the development the applicant shall submit, for the approval of the Planning Authority, details of the following:

- Proposed mitigation measures demonstrating how best practical measures (BPM) will be implemented for the control of construction noise and vibration.
- Proposed mitigation measures demonstrating how BPM will be implemented for the control of dust during construction.
- A Blasting Plan demonstrating how BPM will be implemented for the control of noise and vibration during blasting activities.
- Proposed water monitoring and mitigation measures for the protection of private water supplies during construction and operation.

The development shall thereafter be undertaken in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: In the interest of safeguarding community and residential amenity.

17. **Construction Traffic Routing**

All construction vehicles associated with the development shall only access the site via the A82 and the A831 through Milton and Strathnacro, turning off at the proposed access east of Balnain.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of road safety.

18. **Public Road Improvements**

Prior to construction of any part of the development, full details of all public road improvements required to support the construction and ongoing operational access needs of this development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. Thereafter, the public road improvements agreed shall be constructed and implemented to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland.

Reason: In the interests of residential amenity and road safety.

19. **Site Access and Visibility Splays**

No development shall commence until a plan detailing the design of the new access junction from the A831 public road, including visibility splays, swept path and its

drainage design, is submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, in consultation with the Local Roads Authority. The design of the new access shall demonstrate adherence with Highland Council's Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments Supplementary Guidance.

Reason: To ensure the new access junction can safely accommodate the increased traffic arising from the construction traffic associated with this development and existing road users.

20. **Bingally Substation**

No development, other than site enabling works, shall commence concurrently with the main construction works to Bingally substation to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, in consultation with the Roads Authority.

For the avoidance of doubt, construction traffic trip rates should conform with those outlined in EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 13.1 Transport Assessment and A1_3_29 Updated Cumulative Traffic and Transport Assessment, unless otherwise agreed by the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland and the Local Roads Authority.

Reason: To ensure that traffic generation is minimised in the interests of residential amenity and road safety.

21. **Construction Traffic Management Plan**

No development shall commence until a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) to manage all construction traffic with the exception of abnormal indivisible loads (AIL), has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority, in consultation with the Roads Authority. The CTMP shall be carried out as approved in accordance with the timetable specified within the approved CTMP. The CTMP shall include:

- a) Heavy goods vehicle traffic hours shall be restricted to Monday to Friday 08:00 to 19:00 and Saturday 08:00 to 13:00 with no deliveries proposed on Sunday or recognised bank holidays in Scotland with compliance monitoring measures and reports of any breaches to the Community Liaison Group.
- b) Predicted traffic types, numbers and profile of movements throughout the construction period. This shall be justified through clarifying the anticipated quantum of plant, workforce and bulk materials needed and shall include any assumptions made in support of those figures.
- c) The intended routing of such construction traffic from the proposed origins of materials, ports and workforce accommodation.
- d) The management measures that will be required to mitigate the impacts of such construction traffic on neighbours to and wider users of the routes impacted. This includes measures required when mitigation works are being delivered to existing local public roads. For the avoidance of doubt, there shall be no conveying of commercial goods vehicles to or from the site.
- e) The measures that will be taken to deal with any rerouting of bus and school transport services during any periods when public roads will not be available for use; and when use of existing local public roads will not be available when required physical mitigation works are being delivered.
- f) Clarifications on the steps that will be taken to avoid conflicts with other high

traffic-generating events in the local area that will also be requiring use of the routes covered by this CTMP.

- g) The measures that will be taken for managing points of conflict between construction traffic routes where they interact with local public roads and wider users of them.
- h) The measures proposed for keeping local public roads free from mud and other construction-related debris.
- i) Justifications on the adequacy of the management measures proposed, alongside any physical works required to the public roads impacted.
- j) Traffic management measures on the routes to site for construction traffic. Measures such as temporary speed limits, suitable temporary signage, road markings and the use of speed activated signs and banksman / escort details shall be considered. During the delivery period of construction materials any additional signing or temporary traffic control measures deemed necessary due to the size or length of any loads being delivered or removed shall be undertaken by a recognised Quality Assured traffic management consultant, to be approved by Transport Scotland and the Roads Authority before delivery commences.
- k) Staff travel plan;
- l) Ensure that effective access can be provided to all existing properties and businesses who are also reliant on the roads impacted by this development;
- m) Provisions for emergency vehicle access;
- n) A timetable for implementation of the measures detailed in the CTMP;
- o) The provision of a wear and tear agreement under Section 96 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 under which the developer shall be responsible for the repair of any damage to the local road network attributable to construction related traffic. As part of the agreement, pre-start and post construction road condition surveys shall be carried out by the developer to the satisfaction of the Roads Authority;
- p) Identification of a nominated person to whom any road safety issues can be referred and measures for keeping any affected Community Councils informed and dealing with queries and any complaints regarding construction traffic ensuring effective lines of communication with existing residents, businesses and appropriate local representation groups in the area so that two-way information sharing can happen about the implications of construction traffic impacts and the development of solution driven improvements to the CTMP.

Reason: In the interests of road safety and to ensure adequate road safety measures are in place to minimise conflict with other road users and to mitigate the adverse impact of construction traffic on the safe and efficient operation of the local and trunk road network.

22. Roads Mitigation and Active Travel Works

No development shall commence until a Road Mitigation Works Plan, including physical road mitigation and active travel works such as the active new bridge provision across the River Enrick at the A82 junction with the A831 adjacent to Drumnadrochit Bridge, proposed new surfaced areas for school bus pick and drop off along the A831 and replacement of the existing layby used to access the LCW on the A82 Trunk Road, has been submitted to, and agreed in writing by, the Planning

Authority in consultation with the Local Roads Authority and Transport Scotland as trunk road authority.

The agreed road mitigation works shall be implemented and operational prior to any construction works or development commencing on the development site or as otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority in consultation with the local Roads Authority.

Reason: In order to secure a proportionate level of road mitigation works to safeguard the local road network and local communities due to the increased numbers of HGV and workers traffic which will be generated.

23. **Trunk Road Access to Lower Control Works**

The proposed means of access to the Lower Control Works from the A82 trunk road shall be submitted for the approval of the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland as trunk road authority.

Reason: To minimise interference with the safety and free flow of the traffic on the trunk road.

24. **Abnormal Loads**

Prior to commencement of deliveries to site, the proposed route for any abnormal loads on the trunk road network shall be submitted to and approved by the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland and the Local Roads Authority. The development shall be undertaken in accordance with the agreed details.

For the avoidance of doubt, construction traffic trip rates shall conform with those outlined in EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 13.1 Transport Assessment and A1_3_29 Updated Cumulative Traffic and Transport Assessment, unless otherwise agreed by the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland and the Local Roads Authority.

Reason: To minimise interference and maintain the safety and free flow of traffic on the Trunk Road as a result of the traffic moving to and from the development.

25. **Accommodation of Abnormal Loads**

Prior to the movement of any abnormal load, any accommodation measures required on the trunk road network, including the removal of street furniture, junction widening and traffic management shall be approved and implemented to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland and the Local Roads Authority.

For the avoidance of doubt, construction traffic trip rates shall conform with those outlined in EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 13.1 Transport Assessment and A1_3_29 Updated Cumulative Traffic and Transport Assessment, unless otherwise agreed by the Planning Authority, in consultation with Transport Scotland and the Local Roads Authority.

Reason: To minimise interference and maintain the safety and free flow of traffic on the Trunk Road as a result of the traffic moving to and from the development.

26. **Temporary Traffic Measures**

Prior to the movement of any components and/or construction materials, any additional signing or temporary traffic control measures deemed necessary on the trunk road network due to the size or length of any loads being transported, shall be undertaken by a recognised QA traffic management consultant, to be approved by Transport Scotland and the Local Roads Authority.

Reason: To ensure that the transportation of any components/materials would not have any detrimental effect on the road and structures along the route.

27. **Wheel Cleaning**

The development shall not become operational until vehicle wheel cleansing facilities shall have been installed and brought into operation on the site, the design and siting of which shall be subject to the prior approval of the Planning Authority in consultation with Transport Scotland and the Local Roads Authority.

Reason: To ensure that material from the site is not deposited on the trunk road to the detriment of road safety.

28. **Watercourse Crossings**

Watercourse crossings shall be designed following the proposals outlined in EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 10.3: Geomorphic Baseline and Watercourse Crossings, to accommodate the 1 in 200-year flood event, including an allowance for climate change, unless otherwise agreed by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA.

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

29. **Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems**

No development shall commence until full details of all surface water drainage provision within the application site (which shall accord with the principles of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) and be designed to the standards outlined in Sewers for Scotland Fourth Edition, or any superseding guidance prevailing at the time) have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. Thereafter, only the approved details shall be implemented, and all surface water drainage provision shall be completed prior to the first occupation of any of the development.

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

30. **Stop Generating/Curtailment**

Prior to the site becoming operational, details of the finalised stop generating/curtailment level shall be submitted to and confirmed by the Planning Authority, in consultation with SEPA and Flood Risk Management Team. This shall include information that demonstrates that the level is appropriate to prevent an

increase in flood risk to others from Loch Ness or the River Ness. The development shall thereafter be ceased in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: To ensure that flood mitigation measures are provided.

31. Materials Management Appraisal

Prior to the commencement of development, the developer shall submit a Materials Management Appraisal following the proposals outlined in EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 15.1 to be agreed in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA. The Materials Management Plan shall draw upon the findings of any approved Environmental Impact Assessment and the findings of any additional ground investigations carried out prior to development commencing. An updated mass balance shall be provided identifying the outcome for all excavated materials. For the avoidance of doubt there shall be no long-term storage of material on site and material shall only be temporarily stored within the identified construction areas unless agreed with the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA.

Reason: To ensure that the management of excavated materials from the site is carried out in a manner that minimises the impact.

32. Borrow Pits

All borrow pits shall be worked and restored in line with the details outlined in the Materials Management Appraisal, following the proposals outlined in EIAR Volume 5 Appendix 15.1, EIAR Volume 3 Figure 2.12 Headpond and Borrowpit Plan and Section and EIAR Volume 3 Figure 2.3 Above Ground Infrastructure.

Reason: To ensure that excavation of materials from the borrow pit(s) is carried out in a manner that minimises the impact and to secure the restoration of borrow pit(s) at the end of the construction period.

33. Excavated Material

Should there be a requirement to excavate additional material on site not already outlined in the Materials Management Appraisal, further details shall be provided and information on the volume of material to be used, the manner it is to be used and a justification for the need for the works shall be agreed in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA. For the avoidance of doubt, there shall be no long-term storage of material on site and material shall only be temporarily stored within the identified construction areas unless otherwise agreed with the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA.

Reason: To ensure that excavation of materials from the borrow pit(s) is carried out in an appropriate manner.

34. Archaeology

No works in connection with the development hereby approved shall commence unless an archaeological Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority and a programme of archaeological works has been carried out in accordance with the approved WSI. The WSI shall include details of how the recording and recovery of archaeological

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

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

35. Outdoor Access Plan

No development shall commence until a detailed Outdoor Access Plan of public access across the site (as existing, during construction and following completion) has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The plan shall include details showing:

- i. All existing access points, paths, Core Paths, tracks, Rights of Way and other routes (whether on land or inland water), and any areas currently outwith or excluded from statutory access rights under Part One of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, within and adjacent to the application site;
- ii. Any areas proposed for exclusion from statutory access rights, for reasons of privacy, disturbance or effect on curtilage related to proposed buildings or structures;
- iii. All proposed paths, tracks and other routes for use by walkers, riders, cyclists, canoeists, all-abilities users, etc. and any other relevant outdoor access enhancement (including construction specifications, signage, information leaflets, proposals for on-going maintenance etc.);
- iv. Any diversion of paths, tracks or other routes (whether on land or inland water), temporary or permanent, proposed as part of the development (including details of mitigation measures, diversion works, duration and signage)
- v. Details of path improvements to serve recreational users of Meall Fuar-mhonaigh, together with a programme for such works has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority;
- vi. Details of signage is to be provided noting alternative lochs available for fishing and other recreational activities once Loch nam Breac Dearga is no longer accessible.

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

Reason: In order to safeguard public access both during and after the construction phase of the development.

36. **Public Art**

No development shall commence on site until a scheme for the inclusion of public art within the development and/or outwith the development, including types and locations of artworks and the management, maintenance thereof, and a timescale for implementation has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The approved scheme shall be implemented in accordance with the timescales contained in the approved scheme and maintained in perpetuity.

Reason: In the interests of amenity.

37. **Operational Management Plan**

Prior to the energisation of the development, a site Operational Management Plan shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with SEPA, Environmental Health and any other consultees as appropriate. This plan shall detail:

- a) An updated Schedule of Mitigation (SM) as it relates to the operational phase of the development highlighting mitigation set out within each chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), within the EIAR Supplementary Environmental Information (SEI), and the conditions of this consent; processes to control / action changes from the agreed SM;
- b) Landscape management and drainage maintenance.

Thereafter, the OMP shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details from first commissioning of the development until the cessation of the use of the development, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interest of environmental amenity, pollution prevention, maintaining water quality, and provision of adequate parking and charging facilities.

38. **Noise**

The following limits shall be applied during the construction phase unless otherwise agreed by the Planning Authority:

Noise

- Monday to Friday; 8am to 6pm 55dB LAeq 1 hour.
- Saturdays; 8am to 1pm 55dB LAeq 1 hour.
- Saturdays; 1pm to 6pm 45dB LAeq 1 hour.
- Outwith the above times, noise from construction related activities shall not exceed 35dB LAeq 1 hour.

It is understood there may be some short-term exceedances of the above limits during works carried out closest to houses. Levels of up to 65dB LAeq 1 hour may be permitted Monday to Friday and Saturday morning for a period not exceeding 4 weeks at any one property.

Vibration

- Monday to Friday; 8am to 6pm The peak particle velocity shall not exceed 5 mm·s⁻¹.
- Saturdays; 8am to 1pm The peak particle velocity shall not exceed 5 mms⁻¹.

- Outwith the above times, the peak particle velocity shall not exceed 0.3 mms-1.
- The above limits apply to all construction activities other than blasting.

Groundborne Noise

- Monday to Friday; 8am to 6pm 35dB LASmax.
- Saturdays; 8am to 6pm 35dB LASmax.
- Outwith the above times, groundborne noise from construction related activities shall not exceed 30dB LASmax.

Reason: In the interest of safeguarding community and residential amenity.

39. Private Water Supplies

Prior to the commencement of the development the developer shall submit, for the approval of the Planning Authority, details of the proposed private water supply serving the temporary accommodation and other infrastructure. This shall include a completed PWS Planning Questionnaire (Form PWS 1) and a written report from a competent person (qualified engineer, hydrogeologist, or other similarly qualified suitable person), that confirms the development will be served by a sufficient piped supply of wholesome water. For the avoidance of doubt, the report shall include the following: -

- a) Information to demonstrate that there will be sufficient water to meet the demands of all properties and activities on the supply. If other properties are already using the same water source, the report shall clearly show that these will not be adversely affected by the proposed development. Calculations shall be based on 200 litres per person per day based on the maximum potential occupancy;
- b) Sufficient information to demonstrate that the water can meet the water quality standard requirements of The Private Water Supplies (Scotland) Regulations 2006 or The Water Intended for Human Consumption (Private Supplies) (Scotland) Regulations 2017. The report shall include a risk assessment which identifies potential sources of contamination and the measures which will be taken to minimise the risks to anyone using the supply;
- c) A description of any proposed treatment systems. The choice and design of any treatment system shall take into account any foreseeable variability in raw water quality. Details of any power supply and back up arrangements shall be included.
- d) A plan showing the distribution arrangements for the supply including details of proposed storage.

Thereafter the development shall proceed in accordance with the submitted information.

Reason: In the interest of environmental amenity, pollution prevention and maintaining water quality.

40. Peat Management Plan

The Plan shall be developed in consultation with SEPA and shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by, the Planning Authority. The Peat Management Plan shall draw upon the findings of any approved Environmental Impact Assessment, Peat Slide

Risk Assessment, consider the findings of any additional ground investigations carried out prior to development commencing and include a management/reinstatement scheme for all peat areas within the application site, including:

- i. Details and plans for all peat and soil stripping and excavation and the storage and proposed use and replacement of peat, topsoil and subsoil; and
- ii. A method statement setting out the measures to protect peat during excavation, storage, handling and reuse.

The Peat Management Plan (PMP) shall take due consideration of the mineral and slope stability of the site identified in the peat landslide risk assessment and shall have regard to the drainage implications of soil movement and storage.

The Plan shall be implemented as approved.

Reason: To ensure that a plan is in place to deal with the storage and reuse of peat within the application site, including peat stability and slide risk.

41. **Habitat Management Plan**

No development shall commence until a Habitat Management Plan (HMP), taking account of the Outline HMP, has been submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The HMP shall set out proposed habitat management of the site during the period of construction, operation, and decommissioning, restoration and aftercare, and shall provide for the maintenance, monitoring and reporting of site-specific details or particular species, habitats or wetlands on site

The HMP shall include information on how and where any disturbed peat that cannot be used in site reinstatement shall be used for peat restoration. This shall include (a) location plan of the proposed peatland re-use/restoration area, clearly showing size of individual areas where peat re-use is proposed and total area to be restored, with this including the delivery of improvement to good quality of at least 1397ha of peatland (b) evidence, in the form of photographs, aerial imagery, or surveys to demonstrate that the area identified is appropriate for peat re-use and is capable of supporting carbon sequestration and (c) basic calculations which demonstrate that the proposal will make use of all excavated material (this information could alternatively be included in the Peat Management Plan).

For the avoidance of doubt, peatland restoration proposals demonstrating biodiversity net gain for Glen Earrach PSH are additional to, and separate from, measures already allocated to other developments.

The HMP shall provide provision and details for regular monitoring and review to be undertaken against the HMP objectives and reasonable measures for securing amendments or additions to the HMP in the event that the HMP objectives are not being met. Until otherwise approved in advance in writing by the Planning Authority, the approved HMP (as amended from time to time with written approval of the Planning Authority) shall be implemented in full in line with the timescales set out in the approved plan.

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

42. **Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Plan**

There shall be no Commencement of Development unless and until a final Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Plan (BEMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority.

The BEMP shall set out proposed habitat management of the site including all mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures, during the period of construction and operation, and shall detail the long-term management regimes of the compensation and enhancement measures required of the site. The compensation and enhancement measures must be managed in perpetuity.

The BEMP shall include provision for regular monitoring and review to be undertaken against the BEMP objectives and measures for securing amendments or additions to the BEMP in the event that the BEMP objectives are not being met.

Unless and until otherwise agreed in advance in writing with the Planning Authority, the approved BEMP (as amended from time to time with written approval of the Planning Authority) shall be implemented in full.

Reason: In the interests of protecting ecological features and to ensure that the development secures positive effects for biodiversity.

43. **Environmental Clerk of Works (EnvCoW)**

There shall be no Commencement of Development until the terms of appointment of an independent Environmental Clerk of Works ("EnvCoW") by the Company shall have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The terms of appointment shall:

- a) impose a duty to monitor compliance with the ecological and environmental commitments provided in the: EIA Report, including any micro-siting; the Construction and Environmental Management Plan; the Habitat Management Plan, and Species and Habitat Protection Plans;
- b) require the EnvCoW to report to the nominated construction project manager any incidences of non-compliance with the EnvCoW works at the earliest practical opportunity;
- c) require the EnvCoW to submit a monthly report to the construction project manager, developer and Planning Authority summarising works undertaken on site.

Prior to the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development or the expiration of the operational period of the consent (whichever is the earlier), details of the terms of appointment of a suitably qualified, experienced, and independent EnvCoW by the Company throughout the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development, shall be submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The EnvCoW shall be appointed on the terms approved under part (2) throughout the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases of the Development.

Reason: To secure effective monitoring of and compliance with the environmental mitigation and management measures associated with the Development during the construction phase.

44. **Species Protection Plans**

There shall be no commencement of works unless and until all required Species Protection Plans have been submitted to and agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: to ensure the protection of species present on site during construction and operation of the development.

45. **Biosecurity Plan**

A biosecurity plan shall be submitted for the approval in writing of the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works. The development shall thereafter be undertaken in accordance with the approved plan.

Reason: To prevent the introduction of invasive species within the site and prevent the spread of invasive species within the site.

46. **Bird Protection Plan**

No development shall commence until a Bird Protection Plan shall have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot. The Bird Protection Plan shall be informed by pre-commencement bird surveys and set out measures to protect any breeding birds. Thereafter, the approved Bird Protection Plan shall be implemented in full within the timescales contained therein.

Reason: In the interests of protecting ornithological interests through the construction, operational and decommissioning phases.

47. **Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan**

- 1) There shall be no Commencement of development and Site Enabling Works until an integrated Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (WQFMP) including for, but not limited to, Atlantic salmon, brown trout, European eel, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with local District Fishery Board.
- 2) The WQFMP shall take account of Marine Scotland Science's guidance and shall include:
 - a) provision that water quality sampling shall be carried out for 12 months (or as agreed with the Planning Authority) prior to commencement of development, during construction and for 12 months after construction is complete;
 - b) key hydrochemical parameters (including turbidity and flow data), the identification of sampling locations (including control sites), frequency of sampling, sampling methodology, data analysis and reporting;
 - c) fully quantitative electrofishing surveys at sites potentially impacted and at control sites to be undertaken at an appropriate time of year for a 12-month period (or as agreed with the Planning Authority) prior to the commencement of development, during construction and for 12 months after construction is completed, to detect any changes in fish populations; and
 - d) appropriate site-specific mitigation measures.

- 3) Thereafter, the WQFMP shall be implemented in full within the timescales set out in the WQFMP.

Reason: To protect the aquatic environment during construction.

48. **Fence Marking**

No development shall commence until the developer shall have marked out the deer exclusion zone fence for the approval in writing of the Planning Authority. Thereafter, the developer shall undertake 3-monthly fence perimeter searches for bird strikes; and if any are recorded then mitigation measures, such as fence marking, shall be undertaken by the developer to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot. Thereafter, this shall be reported to the Planning Authority within monitoring reports.

Reason: to reduce potential impacts to black grouse.

49. **Data**

GIS Shapefiles shall be supplied of the compensation and enhancement areas to the Planning Authority prior to the commencement of works.

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

50. **Arboricultural Consultant**

No development, site excavation or groundwork shall commence until a suitably qualified Arboricultural consultant has been employed by the applicant to undertake a tree survey to BS 5837:2012, and produce a Tree Constraints Plan, that feeds into Tree Protection Plan (TPP) and Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS), which details how the retained trees adjacent to construction areas are to be protected, all for the approval in writing by the Planning Authority. The consultant shall also be employed by the applicant to ensure that the approved AMS and TPP are implemented to the agreed standard. Stages requiring supervision shall be set out in the AMS for the written agreement of the Planning Authority and certificates of compliance for each stage shall be submitted for approval

Reason: To ensure the protection of retained trees throughout the construction period.

51. **Tree Protection Plan**

No development, site excavation or groundwork shall commence until all retained trees have been protected against construction damage using protective barriers located as per the Tree Protection Plan and in accordance with BS 5837:2012 Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition & Construction, or any superseding guidance prevailing at that time). These barriers shall remain in place throughout the construction period and shall not be moved or removed during the construction period without the prior written approval of the Planning Authority.

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

52. Planting Plan

No development shall commence until a detailed Planting Plan (incorporating scrub, native woodland and understorey native planting) and maintenance programme for the area around the Lower Control Works has been submitted to and approved by the Planning Authority. The plan shall be implemented in full during the first planting season following commencement of development or as otherwise agreed in writing by the Planning Authority.

Reason: In the interests of landscape and amenity.

53. Compensatory Planting Plan

No development, including tree felling, shall commence until a detailed Compensatory Planting Plan (including future maintenance) has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority, following consultation with Scottish Forestry and any other relevant stakeholders. For the avoidance of doubt:

- a) The areas of planting shall be no less than 674 hectares in size, consisting of native species, and all planting shall be located within the Highlands.
- b) The areas identified for compensatory planting may also need to be considered under The Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, where this exceeds the current thresholds.
- c) The Compensatory Planting Plan shall follow the same process as required for preparing a woodland creation proposal, as set out in the Scottish Forestry publication: Woodland Creation Application Guidance.
- d) The Compensatory Planting Plan shall be prepared by and then implemented under the supervision of a suitably qualified forestry consultant, approved by the Planning Authority.
- e) The appointed forestry consultant shall provide a detailed schedule of supervision, with compliance monitoring reports to be issued at agreed stages.
- f) The approved Compensatory Planting Plan shall be implemented in full, prior to first commissioning of the development. The compensatory planting shall be maintained thereafter in accordance with the approved scheme, until established to the full satisfaction of the Planning Authority and then shall remain as woodland in perpetuity.
- g) To comply with the Felling Permission exemptions, woodland removal shall not begin until the developer shall have demonstrated that construction work is imminent. In the event that development fails to commence within 3 years of the initial felling, then the land use shall revert back to woodland and the area shall be replanted within 12 months, to a specification approved by the Planning Authority.
- h) Where compensatory planting takes place on land located outside the Planning Application boundary and/or is not under the ownership of the applicant, a Section 75 legal agreement shall first be secured between the applicant, the landowner and the Planning Authority.

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

54. **Lighting**

Prior to the first commissioning of the development, details of any external lighting, or any externally visible internal building lighting, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The lighting shall thereafter be constructed and maintained in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity, to minimise light pollution and to ensure the development does not have an adverse impact on nocturnal animals.

55. **Socio-Economic Benefit**

No later than 15 months after the date of final commissioning of the development, a report demonstrating the project has met the minimum socio-economic benefit assumptions provided within the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, received 24 April 2025, for both the development's construction period and initial 12-month operational period, for both Highland and Scotland, shall be submitted for the written approval of the Planning Authority.

The Scheme shall include the following:

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

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

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

56. Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare Strategy

No development shall commence unless and until a Decommissioning, Restoration, and Aftercare Strategy has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. The strategy shall outline measures for the decommissioning of the development along with the restoration and aftercare of the site, and shall include proposals for the removal of individual components of the development as well as the treatment of ground surfaces, and the management and timing of the works and environmental management provisions which shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a) site waste management plan (dealing with all aspects of waste produced during the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases);
- b) details of measures to be taken to prevent loose or deleterious material being deposited on the road network, including wheel cleaning and lorry sheeting facilities, and measures to clean the site entrances and the adjacent local road network;
- c) a pollution prevention and control method statement, including arrangements for the storage and management of oil and fuel on the site;
- d) details of measures for soil storage and management;
- e) a surface water and groundwater management and treatment plan, including details of the separation of clean and dirty water drains, and location of settlement lagoons for silt laden water;
- f) temporary site illumination;
- g) management and timing of the works; and
- h) a traffic management plan to address any traffic impact issues during the decommissioning period.

Reason: To ensure the decommissioning and removal of the development, along with the site's restoration in an appropriate and environmentally responsible manner in the interests of safety, amenity, and environmental protection.

57. Financial Restoration Guarantee

No development shall commence until:

- (1) Full details of a guarantee, bond or other financial provision to be put in place to cover all of the decommissioning and site restoration measures outlined in the Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare Strategy approved under Condition 57 of this permission have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Planning Authority. For the avoidance of doubt the bond shall be able to be called upon by The Highland Council and be enforceable against the operator and landowner and/ or leaseholder;
- (2) Confirmation in writing by a suitably qualified independent professional that the amount of financial provision proposed under part (1) above is sufficient to meet the full estimated costs of all decommissioning, dismantling, removal, disposal / recycling, site restoration, remediation and incidental work, as well as associated professional costs, has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the

Planning Authority; and

- (3) Documentary evidence that the guarantee, bond or other financial provision approved under parts (1) and (2) above is in place has been submitted to, and confirmation in writing that the financial provision is satisfactory has been issued by, the Planning Authority.
- (4) Thereafter, the Operator, and Leaseholder and/or Landowner, shall:
 - a) Ensure that the guarantee, bond or other financial provision is maintained throughout the duration of this permission; and
 - b) Pay for the guarantee, bond or other financial provision to be subject to a review five years after the commencement of development and every five years thereafter until such time as the development is decommissioned and the site restored.
- (5) Each review shall be:
 - a) conducted by a suitably qualified independent professional; and
 - b) published within three months of each five-year period ending, with a copy submitted upon its publication to both the landowner(s) and the Planning Authority; and
 - c) approved in writing by the Planning Authority without amendment or, as the case may be, approved in writing by the Planning Authority following amendment to their reasonable satisfaction.

Where a review approved under part (c) above recommends that the amount of the guarantee, bond or other financial provision should be altered (be that an increase or decrease) or the framework governing the bond or other financial provision requires to be amended, the Operator, and Leaseholder and/or Landowner shall do so within one month of receiving that written approval, or another timescale as may be agreed in writing by the Planning Authority, and in accordance with the recommendations contained therein.

Reason: To ensure that there are sufficient funds to secure the implementation of the Decommissioning, Restoration, and Aftercare Strategy at the time of the development's decommissioning.

58. **Community Liaison Group**

No development shall commence until a community liaison group shall have been established by the applicant, in collaboration with the Planning Authority and affected local Community Councils.

The group shall act as a forum for the community to be kept informed of project progress and, in particular, shall allow advanced dialogue on the provision of all transport related mitigation measures and to keep under review the timing of the delivery of abnormal loads and performance of the Construction Traffic Management Plan.

This shall also ensure that local events and tourist seasons are considered and appropriate measures to co-ordinate deliveries and work with these and any other major / national projects in the area to ensure no conflict between construction traffic and the increased traffic generated by such events / seasons / developments.

The liaison group, or element of any combined liaison group relating to this development, shall be maintained until the construction of the development and all site infrastructure becomes fully operational.

Reason: To assist project implementation, ensuring community dialogue and the delivery of appropriate mitigation measures for example to minimise potential hazards to road users, including pedestrians, travelling on the road networks.

59. **Planning Monitoring Officer**

No development shall commence until the Planning Authority shall have approved in writing the terms of appointment by the applicant of a suitably qualified environmental specialist to assist the Planning Authority in monitoring compliance with the planning permission and conditions attached to this consent. The terms of Planning Monitoring Officer (PMO) appointment shall:

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

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

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

Informatives

Environmental Health

The proposed temporary worker accommodation and ancillary activities such as catering and retail premises will fall under various legislation governing caravan site licensing, food safety and general health and safety at work. The applicant is advised to liaise with Highland Council's Environmental Health at an early stage on these matters.

Transport Planning

No works should be undertaken on or directly adjacent to the local public road network until a Road Opening Permit has been sought from and accepted by the Highland Council acting as the Local Roads Authority.

Transport Scotland

- I. The applicant should be informed that the granting of planning consent does not carry with it the right to carry out works within the trunk round boundary and that permission must be granted by Transport Scotland Roads Directorate.
- II. Trunk road modification works shall, in all respects, comply with the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and the Specification for Highway Works

published by HMSO. The developer shall issue a certificate to that effect, signed by the design organisation.

- III. Trunk road modifications shall, in all respects, be designed and constructed to arrangements that comply with the Disability Discrimination Act: Good Practice Guide for Roads published by Transport Scotland. The developer shall provide written confirmation of this, signed by the design organisation.
- IV. The road works which are required due to the above Conditions will require a Road Safety Audit as specified by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.
- V. Any trunk road works will necessitate a Minute of Agreement with the Trunk Roads Authority prior to commencement.
- VI. To obtain permission to work within the trunk road boundary the developer should contact the Area Manager through the general contact number 0141 272 7100.
- VII. The Operating Company has responsibility for co-ordination and supervision of works and after permission has been granted it is the developer's contractor's responsibility to liaise with the Operating Company during the construction period to ensure all necessary permissions are obtained.

Network Rail

Network Rail's Abnormal Loads Team shall be contacted given the route to site would pass over Railway Overbridge 302/001 Longman Road A82 Trunk Road, Inverness if the proposed development was approved.

Signature: Bob Robertson

Designation: Acting Area Planning Manager – South

Author: Roddy Dowell – Principal Planner (Case Officer)

Rohan Sinha – Principal Landscape Officer (Section 7 Landscape and Visual Appraisal, plus appendices, excluding conclusions drawn and reported by Case Officer)

Background Papers: Documents referred to in report and in case file.

Relevant Plans:

- Plan 1 – Site Location Plan Figure 1.1
- Plan 2 – Above Ground Infrastructure Figure 2.3
- Plan 3 – Below Ground Infrastructure Figure 2.4
- Plan 4 – Site Design - Construction Phase Plan Figure 2.6
- Plan 5 – Site Design - Operational Phase Plan Figure 2.7
- Plan 6 – Development Cross Section Figure 2.8
- Plan 7 - Headpond Arrangement Plan Figure 2.9
- Plan 8 - Headpond Embankments Typical Detail Figure 2.11
- Plan 9 - Headpond Borrow Pit Plan and Section Figure 2.12
- Plan 10 - Upper Control Works Plan Figure 2.13
- Plan 11 - Upper Control Works Section Figure 2.14

Plan 12 - Lower Control Works Plan Figure 2.16

Plan 13 - Lower Control Works Section Figure 2.17

Plan 14 - Indicative Construction Compound Plan Figure 2.26

Plan 15 - GIS Switchyard Plan Figure 2.27

Plan 16 - Temporary Workers Accommodation Plan Figure 2.28

Plan 17 - Temporary Workers Accommodation Section Figure 2.29

Relevant Appendices: Appendix 1 – Cumulative Developments

Appendix 2 – Development Plan and Other Material Policy Considerations

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

Appendix 4 – Viewpoint Assessment Appraisal – Visual Impact

Appendix 1 – Cumulative Developments

Development	Approx. distance to Headpond (km)	Approx. distance to Lower Control Works (km)	Status
Loch Na Cathrach PSH	19.2	17.5	Consented
Loch Kemp PSH	6.1	5.2	Application (pending consideration following PLI)
Glen Affric Hydro-electric	15.2	17.9	Operational
Foyers PSH	5.1	2.3	Operational
Glenmoriston Hydroelectric power station	11.6	13.5	Operational
Livishie Hydroelectric Power station	11.7	13.7	Operational
Glendoe Hydroelectric Power Station	18.8	18.1	Operational
Shenval Hydro	8.6	10.9	Operational
Coiltie Hydro	6.5	6.5	Operational
Alt Luaidhe Hydro-scheme	7.9	8.1	Operational
Gartally Micro-hydro	9.9	9.9	Consented
Loch Liath Wind farm	9.4	12.2	Application (pending consideration following PLI)
Bhlaraidh Wind Farm	6.1	8.7	Operational
Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension	6.1	8.7	Consented
Chrathaich Wind Farm	8.9	8.7	Application
Fiodhag Wind Farm (formerly known as Fasnakyle Wind Farm)	13.7	16.5	Pre-app (Scoping)
Corrimony Wind Farm	10.9	13.7	Operational
Stronelaig Wind Farm	20.4	18.9	Operational
Cloiche Wind Farm (formed of two clusters, eastern and western cluster)	22.7 (eastern cluster) 19.9 (western cluster)	18.9 (eastern cluster); 20.7 (Western cluster)	Approved
Corriegarth Wind Farm	12.9	10.4	Operational
Corriegarth 2 Wind Farm	12.9	10.4	Approved
Dunmaglass Wind Farm	17.4	14.7	Operational
Aberarder Wind Farm	17.4	14.7	Under Construction
New 33kV Overhead Line Spur for connection to New	6.1	4.6	Consented

Communications Mast at Bunloit, Drumnadrochit			
New Residential Development, Drumnadrochit	9.2	8.6	Under construction
Erection of a 70m High Meteorological mast	22.9	7.2	Consented
Corriegarth 2 Windfarm Grid Connection	13.3	10.8	Consented
Auchterawe Substation extension	17.0	27.2	Under Consideration
Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm Grid Connection Works	8.2 (closest point to wood pole line)	10.5 (to wood pole line); 8. (to on-site substation - undergrounded at this point)	Application (non-EIA)
Fanellan 400kV Substation Comprising New Buildings, Platform, Plant and Machinery, Access, Laydown/Work Compound Area(S), Drainage, Landscaping, And Other Ancillary Works (National Development)	15.1	24.2	Application (pending consideration with DPEA)
Bingally 400kV Substation OHL tie-in	15.2	24.3	Consented
Foyers Power Station extension	5.6	6.7	Application
Dell 2 Wind Farm	17.1	23.3	Application (pending consideration following PLI)
Millennium East Wind Farm	21.3	31.9	Application
Cnoc Farasd Wind Farm	10	11.9	Application

Appendix 2 – Development Plan and Other Material Policy Considerations

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023)

- A3.1 The NPF4 policies of most relevance to this proposal include
- National Development 2 (NAD2) – Pumped Hydro Storage
 - National Development 3 (NAD3) - Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure
 - 1 - Tackling the climate and nature crisis.
 - 2 - Climate mitigation and adaptation
 - 3 - Biodiversity
 - 4 - Natural places
 - 5 - Soils
 - 6 - Forestry, Woodland and Trees
 - 7 - Historic assets and places
 - 11 - Energy
 - 12 - Zero waste
 - 13 - Sustainable transport
 - 18 - Infrastructure first
 - 20 - Blue and green infrastructure
 - 22 - Flood risk and water management
 - 23 - Health and safety
 - 25 - Community wealth benefits
 - 26 - Business and industry
 - 29 - Rural development
 - 33 - Minerals

Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (2012)

- A3.2
- 28 - Sustainable Design
 - 29 - Design Quality and Place-making
 - 30 - Physical Constraints
 - 31 - Developer Contributions
 - 36 - Wider Countryside
 - 51 - Trees and Development
 - 52 - Principle of Development in Woodland

53 - Minerals
55 - Peat and Soils
56 - Travel
57 - Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
58 - Protected Species
59 - Other important Species
60 - Other Importance Habitats
61 - Landscape
62 - Geodiversity
63 - Water Environment
64 - Flood Risk
65 – Waste Water Treatment
66 - Surface Water Drainage
67 - Renewable Energy Developments
69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure
72 - Pollution
73 - Air Quality
74 - Green Networks
77 - Public Access
78 - Long Distance Routes

Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (2024)

- A3.3 1 – Low and Zero Carbon Development
 2 – Nature Protection, Restoration and Enhancement
 9 – Delivering Development and Infrastructure

The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (2024) sets out Highland Council's vision for how the area should develop over the next 10 years and beyond. The Plan supports established tourism destinations such as Loch Ness.

Other Highland Council Supplementary Guidance

- A3.4
 - Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance (May 2024)
 - Developer Contributions (Mar 2018)
 - Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment (Jan 2013)
 - Green Networks (Jan 2013)
 - Highland Historic Environment Strategy (Jan 2013)
 - Highland's Statutorily Protected Species (Mar 2013)

- Physical Constraints (Mar 2013)
- Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments (May 2013)
- Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)
- Trees, Woodland and Development (Jan 2013)
- Special Landscape Area Citations (Jun 2011)
- Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines (May 2006)

OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Emerging Highland Council Development Plan Documents and Planning Guidance

- A3.6 The Highland-wide Local Development Plan is currently under review and is at Main Issues Report Stage. It is anticipated the Proposed Plan would be published following publication of secondary legislation post National Planning Framework 4.
- A3.7 In addition, the Council has further advice on delivery of major developments in a number of documents. This includes Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects (August 2010) and The Highland Council Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments (July 2016).

Other National Guidance

- A3.8
- Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 – interim and annual targets replaced by Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Bill in November 2024
 - Climate Change Committee Report to UK Parliament (July 2024)
 - UK Government Clean Power Action Plan (Dec 2024)
 - Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)
 - Draft Scottish Biodiversity strategy to 2045: tackling the nature emergency (2023)
 - Scottish Energy Strategy (2017)
 - 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy (2011)
 - Energy Efficient Scotland Route Map, Scottish Government (2018)
 - Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape, SNH (2017)
 - Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas, Technical Guidance, NatureScot (2020)
 - Wind Farm Developments on Peat Lands, Scottish Government (2011)
 - Historic Environment Policy for Scotland, HES (2019)
 - PAN 1/2011 - Planning and Noise (2011)
 - PAN 60 – Planning for Natural Heritage (2008)

- Circular 1/2017: Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (2017)

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

National Policy

- A4.1 NPF4 forms part of the Development Plan and was adopted in February 2023. It comprises three parts:
- Part 1 – sets out an overarching spatial strategy for Scotland in the future. This includes spatial principles, national and regional spatial priorities, and action areas;
 - Part 2 – sets out policies for the development and use of land to be applied in the preparation of local development plans; local place plans; masterplans and briefs; and for determining the range of planning consents. This part of the document should be taken as a whole in that all relevant policies should be applied to each application; and
 - Part 3 – provides a series of annexes that give the rationale for the strategies and policies of NPF4, it outlines how the document should be used and sets out how the Scottish Government would implement the strategies and policies.
- A4.2 **Part 1 - the Spatial Strategy** explains the unprecedented national challenges and need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to future impacts of climate change. It sets out that Scotland's environment is a national asset which supports the nation's economy, identity, health and wellbeing and explains that choices need to be made on sustainable use of natural assets in a way which benefits communities. The spatial strategy reflects legislation in setting out decisions required in the long-term public interest. However, in doing so it is clear that the right choices about where development should be located need to be made to ensure clarity over the types of infrastructure provided and the assets that should be protected to ensure they continue to benefit future generations. The Spatial Priorities support the planning and delivery of sustainable places to reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity; liveable places for better and healthier lives; and productive places where there is a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy.
- A4.3 At the national level, NPF4 considers that pumped hydro storage along with strategic renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure would 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 would clearly require a balancing exercise to be undertaken, which is reflected throughout NPF4.
- A4.4 The proposed development is of national importance for the delivery of the national Spatial Strategy, whereby in principle support for this type of development is established. The proposed development constitutes NPF4 National Development 2 - Pumped Hydro Storage. Additionally, as the proposed development would be capable of generating over 50MW, it is of a type and scale

that constitutes NPF4 National Development 3 - Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure.

- A4.5 **Part 2 – Policies: NPF4 Policies 1, 2, and 3** now apply to all development proposals Scotland-wide, which means that significant weight must be given to the global climate and nature crises when considering all development proposals, as required by NPF4 Policy 1. To that end, development proposals must be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as is practicably possible in accordance with NPF4 Policy 2, while contributing to the enhancement of biodiversity, as required by NPF4 Policy 3.
- A4.6 NPF4 Policy 3 Biodiversity intends to protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects and strengthen nature networks. Under NPF4's policy emphasis on biodiversity, all forms of development are required to include appropriate measures to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity proportionate to the nature and scale of development. The requirement to deliver biodiversity enhancement is a new duty.
- A4.7 Highland Council's Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance was adopted in 2024 and is a material consideration. It is aimed at developers, agents, architects and their consultants. The guidance explains the approach that is required by the Highland Council to deliver biodiversity conservation, restoration and enhancement through the planning system. This guidance has been prepared to support the application of the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and is intended to be used in conjunction with relevant national and local policy and planning guidance. Scottish Government has published draft biodiversity planning guidance setting out the Scottish Ministers' expectations for implementing NPF4 policies which support the cross-cutting NPF4 outcome "improving biodiversity".
- A4.8 In September 2023, the Scottish Government released independent research conducted by SRUC on "Approaches to Measuring Biodiversity in Scotland". The report's findings and recommendations propose practical steps for achieving a consistent, cross-government approach to measuring biodiversity at the site level. Specifically targeting the planning sector, NatureScot has initiated efforts to create an adapted Page 4 of 9 biodiversity metric tailored for supporting the implementation of Policy 3b in National Planning Framework 4. This new tool aims to assist developers and planning authorities in evaluating the biodiversity enhancements resulting from developments. It would be applicable to major development projects, aligning with the goals of NPF4. While based on a metric utilised in England, it would be refined to suit Scotland's requirements.
- A4.9 The design of the proposed development has sought to implement the NPF4 Mitigation Hierarchy with steps taken for avoidance and minimisation, prior to restoration and offsetting. It is noted that the applicant's Outline Landscape and Ecology Management Plan and Outline Peatland Restoration Plan proposes measures that would conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity including nature networks. The sufficiency of the avoidance and minimisation, along with the detail of the restoration and offsetting proposals, together with other enhancement is considered to conform with guidance, subject to further consultation responses from NatureScot and the Council's Ecology Officer. The

concerns raised in relation to the River Moriston SAC and Urquhart Bay Woods SAC are expected to be resolved pending further review of FEI submitted by the applicant. Likewise, the Council's Ecology Officer concerns raised in relation to inadequate peatland compensation, biodiversity net gain calculations and insufficient information on the ecological effects of the grid connection can be controlled by condition.

A4.10 While NPF4 considers national developments as a focus for delivery, they should also be exemplars of the community wealth building approach to economic development. The intent of NPF4 Policy 25 Community wealth building is to encourage, promote and facilitate a new strategic approach to economic development that also provides a practical model for building a wellbeing economy at local, regional and national levels. NPF4 Policy 25 supports the following proposals:

- Development proposals which contribute to local or regional community wealth building strategies and are consistent with local economic priorities would be supported. This could include for example improving community resilience and reducing inequalities; increasing spending within communities; ensuring the use of local supply chains and services; local job creation; supporting community led proposals, including creation of new local firms, and enabling community led ownership of buildings and assets; and
- Development proposals linked to community ownership and management of land would be supported. Following consultation, the Highland Council's Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024-2027 was agreed by the Council on 19 September 2024. The strategy provides a framework that sets out how the Council would utilise different activities to maximise the impact of investment in local areas and support more local ownership of assets and wealth. The finalised version of the strategy would be uploaded to the Council's website in due course.

A4.11 The applicant's proposed continuation of conversations with local stakeholders in regard to local housing could align well with the "Land and property" Objective in the Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024-2027. This states that a key Outcome is "Increasing the supply of affordable housing", with three actions as part of the Housing Challenge noted as:

- Develop options for increasing finance for housing;
- Develop options for increasing the number and variety of developments; and
- Develop options to increase land supply.

The applicant's Planning Statement states that there could be a maximum of 1000 people employed on site during the peak construction phase, with construction worker numbers varying depending on the stage of the works (the applicant anticipates that the construction phase would take approximately eight years). It is noted that the proposed development could generate up to the equivalent of 41 full-time jobs taking account of multiplier effects, which is stated as equating to a gross value added (GVA) impact of £2.3 million per annum into

the local economy including multiplier effects. When taking account of multiplier effects, the proposed development is stated as equating to a GVA impact of £132.7 million at the Highland level and £306.8 million at the national/Scottish level during the construction period.

- A4.12 Complementing those policies is NPF4 Policy 4 Natural Places, which sets out that development proposals by virtue of type, location, or scale that have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment would not be supported. The policy goes on to clarify what that means for different designations. It sets out that proposals with likely significant effects on European sites (SACs or SPAs) require appropriate assessment, and that development proposals that would affect a National Park, NSA or SSSI would only be supported where:
- i) the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas would not be compromised; or
 - ii) any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance.
- A4.13 As noted, the concerns raised by NatureScot in relation to the River Moriston SAC and Urquhart Bay Woods SAC are expected to be resolved pending further review of FEI submitted by the applicant.
- A4.14 Similarly, sites designated in Development Plans for local nature conservation or Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are protected in NPF4 Policy 4 unless the development would not result in significantly adverse effects on its qualities or its integrity, or these effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental, or economic benefits of at least local importance.
- A4.15 The Council's Landscape Officer has raised an objection as they consider the headpond dams and associated infrastructure would significantly harm the "Dramatic Great Glen" Special Quality of the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA, particularly from Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, where they consider operational effects would remain major and significant. However, they accept the SLA's overall integrity would not be lost.
- A4.16 Whilst their concerns are noted it is considered those significant effects are largely confined to a limited number of receptors, that the SLA as a whole would remain intact, and that the landscape impacts are outweighed by the substantial national renewable energy, storage, climate change and socioeconomic benefits delivered by the scheme.
- A4.17 Policy 6 aims to protect and expand forests, woodland and trees with significant protection offered to Ancient Woodland with a presumption against woodland removal without appropriate compensatory planting. NPF4 Policy 6 b) notes that "Development proposals will not be supported where they will result in:
- i) Any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition
 - ii) Adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value

iii) Fragmenting or severing woodland habitats, unless appropriate mitigation measures are identified and implemented in line with the mitigation hierarchy.” NPF4 Policy 6 c) notes that “Development proposals involving woodland removal will only be supported where they will achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits in accordance with relevant Scottish Government policy on woodland removal. Where woodland is removed, compensatory planting will most likely be expected to be delivered”. It is considered the proposal is generally in overall conformity with NPF4 Policy 6 given the significant compensatory planting scheme of woodland areas.

- A4.18 Whilst the Council’s Forestry Officer notes the proposal causes an unavoidable policy conflict through the loss of some designated Ancient Woodland and native woodland they consider this is outweighed by efforts made to minimise woodland loss, the proposed 674ha of woodland creation and enhancement. enhancement of existing designated Ancient Woodland along with the wider public benefits associated with a nationally significant PSH scheme. Therefore, it is considered the proposal is generally in overall conformity with NPF4 Policy 6 provided strengthened compensatory planting and woodland management measures are secured by condition.
- A4.19 Policy 11 intent is to “encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low-carbon and zero emissions technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS)”. It specifies that the principle of all forms of renewable, low-carbon, and zero emission technologies is supported (with the exception of wind farm proposals located in National Parks or National Scenic Areas).
- A4.20 It states that development proposals should only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities. The policy goes on to say that significant weight would be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, while identifying impacts, including cumulative impacts, that must be suitably addressed and mitigated against. Policy 11 e) i to xiii) sets out the criteria against which applications must be assessed.
- A4.21 This includes a broad range of matters similar those to be assessed under HwLDP Policy 67 including landscape and visual impacts. It advises that where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied such effects would generally be considered acceptable. While the adopted NPF4 reflects a stronger presumption in favour of all national scale energy developments, judgment is still required at the project level to ensure proposals do not have unacceptable landscape and visual impacts even if the contribution to national renewable energy targets is considerable.
- A4.22 On that point it is noted that both legislation and planning law indicate that where there may be incompatibility between NPF4 and the Local Development Plan (LDP) (HwLDP, Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan and Highland Council

Supplementary Guidance) published prior to NPF4, then the more recent document shall prevail. Notwithstanding however, in instances of incompatibility, this requirement may not eliminate the provisions of the LDP in their entirety whilst these documents remain an extant part of the adopted Development Plan. That means that the Council may wish to still give considerable weight to the provisions of its LDP over national policies where there is strong justification for doing so, such as where the Council feels that LDP policy is better equipped to respond to local matters of importance or site-specific conditions for example.

A4.23 Whilst Highland Council's Development Plans Team do not object to the application, they noted some concerns as to whether the proposed development is in overall conformity with the Development Plan without additional justification provided. NPF4 Policies 1 (Tackling the climate and nature crises), 2 (Climate mitigation and adaption) and 11 (Energy) together with the classification of PSH as a "Scotland-wide" National Development, mean that the principle of additional PSH schemes cannot be disputed. However, the site and proposal specifics of a particular scheme can be. In particular, the NPF4 in-principle support is subject to whether the particular scheme:

- Will "maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities" (Policy 11c) and Policy 25 (Community wealth building));
- Has "significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated", offers outweighing "social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance." (Policy 4b) and 4c) cross referenced from Policy 11d)); and,
- Includes an "appropriate assessment" of the implications of the development for any affected European natural heritage site (Policy 4b)).

A4.24 The adequacy and likely effectiveness of the mitigation proposed against these three tests will determine compatibility with NPF4 and the overall approved development plan. Additionally, other NPF4 policies are relevant but are unlikely to be crucial in the overall conclusion on development plan conformity. These include Policies 3 (Biodiversity); 5 (Soils); 6 (Forestry, woodland and trees); 13 (Sustainable transport); 20 (Blue and green infrastructure); 22 (Flood risk and water management); 29 (Rural development); and 30 (Tourism).

A4.25 On balance, it is considered the proposal is generally in overall conformity with NPF4 Policy 11. Policy 11 e) ii., e) viii. and e) ix. requires the proposed development project design and mitigation would demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:

- significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they would generally be considered to be acceptable;
- effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk; and
- biodiversity including impacts on birds.

- A4.26 The proposed development would have some significant adverse landscape and visual impacts on a range of features/receptors (including but not restricted to) residential properties, walkers, pleasure craft on Loch Ness and road users. The most apparent affects are experienced from the popular Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit and walking route overlooking the UCW infrastructure and recreational receptors on the loch who will see both the UCW and LCW infrastructure at various points when travelling the length of the loch. It is considered that significant effects will extend up to approximately 12km when on the water, but is less extensive when set back on from the coastline on surrounding roads, walking routes, settlements and scattered properties. As noted, whilst operational effects would remain major and significant Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA's overall integrity would be retained and confined to a relatively limited number of receptors.
- A4.27 Given the nature of pumped hydro storage, the proposed development would have a significant impact on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk. Whilst there are potentially significant hydrological and flood risk issues without mitigation, key consultees such as SEPA and the Council's Flood Risk Management Team conclude that, with the proposed mitigation offered by the upgraded Dochfour Weir, to be dealt with through a separate planning application, along with appropriate conditions relating to Loch Ness and surrounding water environment in place, the scheme would not have a significant adverse impact on hydrology, the water environment or flood risk.
- A4.28 The proposed development would have a significant impact on biodiversity with the removal of trees, peat and other habitat. Various mitigation measures including substantial tree planting, peatland restoration, deer control along with other biodiversity enhancement would be controlled through appropriate conditions subject to confirmation from NatureScot and the Council's Ecology Officer.
- A4.29 Additionally, whilst the generality of HwLDP's topic policies are superseded by those in NPF4 HwLDP policies that offer greater detail than NPF4 or that are tailored to Highland circumstance (and are not wholly incompatible with NPF4) are still relevant and may be applicable. In particular, Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage, Policy 61 – Landscape and Policy 67 Renewable Energy given the location partially within the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA along with the the River Moriston SAC and Urquhart Bay Woods SAC in the wider surrounding area and with the proposed development being pumped hydro storage.
- A4.30 It is considered the proposal is in overall conformity with Policy 57, Policy 61 and Policy 67 of HwLDP. Policy 57 requires all development proposals be assessed taking into account the level of importance and type of heritage features, the form and scale of the development, and any impact on the feature and its setting. The following criteria would also apply:
- For features of local/regional importance development would be allowed if it can be satisfactorily demonstrated that they would not have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource; and

- For features of national importance development would be allowed if it can be shown not to compromise the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource. Where there may be any significant adverse effects, these must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. It must also be shown that the development would support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services. NatureScot have confirmed informally, with a formal consultation expected timeously, that designations of national importance within the wider surrounding area including the River Moriston SAC and Urquhart Bay Woods SAC in the wider surrounding area will not be compromised subject to mitigation measures proposed and controlled by various conditions.

A4.31 In terms of Policy 67, whilst the proposed development would contribute towards meeting renewable energy generation targets and generally have a positive effect on the local and national economy the Council has to be satisfied that it is located, sited and designed not to be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments, having regard in particular to any significant effects on the following:

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

A4.32 **Part 3: Annex B – National Developments Statements of Need.** National developments are significant developments of national importance. Appendix B identifies 18 types of national development which would support the delivery of the spatial strategy. The statements of need set out in the Appendix are a requirement of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997). Any project identified as national development is required to be considered at a project level to ensure all statutory tests are met.

This project is classified as National Development under Annex B Section 2 Pumped Hydro Storage and Section Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure including:

a) On and offshore electricity generation, including electricity storage, from renewables exceeding 50 megawatts capacity;

A4.33 This brings the application under the tests set out under Policy 11. As noted earlier, it is considered the proposal is in overall conformity with NPF4 Policy 11.

Highland wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)

- A4.34 The HwLDP identifies the site as “wider countryside” under Policy 36. It sets out a range of parameters against which development would be assessed. It states that development proposals may be supported if they are judged to be not significantly detrimental under the terms of the policy noting “Renewable energy development proposals would be assessed against Renewable Energy Policies, the non-statutory Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and where appropriate the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance”.
- A4.35 HwLDP Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage requires all development proposals be assessed taking into account the level of importance and type of heritage features, the form and scale of the development, and any impact on the feature and its setting. It does acknowledge the site is in proximity to the River Moriston SAC and Urquhart Bay Woods SAC with the potential for the development to have an impact on the qualifying interests of these designations. Additionally, the site is partially within the locally designated Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA.
- A4.36 HwLDP Policy 67 - Renewable Energy sets out that “renewable energy development should be well related to the source of the primary renewable resource needed for operation”. It states that “The Council would consider the contribution of the proposed development in meeting renewable energy targets and positive/negative effects on the local and national economy as well as all other relevant policies of the Development Plan and other relevant guidance”. The Council would support proposals where it is satisfied they are located, sited and designed such as they would not be significantly detrimental overall, individually or cumulatively with other developments against eleven specified criteria (as listed in HwLDP Policy 67). Such an approach is consistent with the concept of Sustainable Design (HwLDP Policy 28) and the concept of supporting the right development in the right place at the right time.
- A4.37 Policy 69 – Electricity Transmission Infrastructure states that “proposals for overground, underground or sub-sea electricity transmission infrastructure (including lines and cables, pylons/ poles and vaults, transformers, switches and other plant) would be considered having regard to their level of strategic significance in transmitting electricity from areas of generation to areas of consumption”. Subject to balancing with this consideration, and taking into account any proposed mitigation measures, the Council would support proposals which are assessed as not having an unacceptable significant impact on the environment, including natural, built and cultural heritage features.
- A4.38 Although HwLDP Policy 67 and Policy 69 are considered compatible with NPF4 Policy 11, NPF4 expresses greater support for renewable energy projects outwith National Parks and NSAs and requires greater weight to be attributed to the twin climate and biodiversity crises in the decision-making process, whilst still recognising that a balancing exercise must still be carried out.
- A4.39 The proposal is in overall conformity with the approved development plan. The proposal’s expected contribution to help achieve net zero and interim climate

targets accords with NPF4 Policies 1 and 11 along with HwLDP Policy 67, notwithstanding that a pump hydro scheme will use electricity from the grid (generated from whatever sources) to pump the water up, this system will help ensure energy security and resilience. Subject to consideration as to whether the proposal's avoidance and minimisation of impacts is sufficient, the proposed mitigation in terms of restoration and offsetting, with net gain in terms of soils (bog / peat restoration), biodiversity and tree planting, in quantitative terms accord well with NPF4 Policies 3, 4, 5 and 6. The illustrated example of community wealth building aligns with the intention of NPF4 Policy 25 and with the Council's voluntary Community Benefit policy, though the exact community benefit from this proposal cannot be confirmed until its project costs and funding arrangements are finalised. The local socio-economic benefits will be substantial during the construction phase, whilst only 25 full-time jobs are anticipated once operational, dialogue between the applicant and key stakeholders in relation to support for specific projects in the local community will continue.

Area Local Development Plan: The Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2)

- A4.40 The IMFLDP contains policy on Nature Protection, Preservation and Enhancement (Policy 2). This sets out that proposals for national, major and EIA development will only be supported where it is demonstrated that the proposal will conserve and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks within and adjacent to the site, so that they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention, including through future management. This is similar to the approach taken in NPF4 and will be considered in the relevant sections of this report.
- A4.41 The IMFLDP also sets out that developers will be required to demonstrate that adequate capacity 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 will be highlighted in this report.

Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (2023)

- A4.42 The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan has been published for consultation. Ministers would likely give consideration to this document in their decision on the application; however, limited weight can be applied to the document given its draft status. The material on pumped hydro storage in the document reflects in large part that contained in NPF4. A fundamental part of the Strategy is expanding the energy generation sector. Overall, the draft Energy Strategy forms part of the new policy approach alongside NPF4 and confirms the Scottish Government's policy objectives and related targets reaffirming the crucial role that pumped hydro storage and enabling transmission infrastructure would play in response to the climate crisis which is at the heart of all these policies.

Appendix 4 – Viewpoint Assessment Appraisal – Visual Impact

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
VP1 – Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit	App	Very High	Medium, Medium	Moderate Adverse, Moderate Adverse	Significant, Significant	Medium, Medium	Moderate Adverse, Moderate Adverse	Significant, Significant
Approximately 0.27km from headpond, 2.33km from lower control works	THC	Very High	High, High	Major Adverse, Major Adverse	Significant, Significant	High, High	Major Adverse, Major Adverse	Significant, Significant
		During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction
	App	Very High	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant
	THC	Very High	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant
View looking North West	The baseline is as described in Section 6.5 Baseline Environment of the EIAR Volume 2: Chapter 6 Landscape of Visual.							

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	The viewpoint is from the Meall Fuar-mhonaidh summit, a key recreational route with the outlook offering panoramic views generally focused on Loch Ness and the Great Glen. The landscape comprises rocky moorland, lochs and upland hills, with distant mountain ranges forming the backdrop. Whilst Bhlaraidh Wind Farm, overhead lines and other development is visible, it is not a dominant feature due to the scale of the surrounding landscape. Receptors will be hill walkers, recreational walkers and visitors appreciating the view. The summit is within the Loch Ness and Duntlechaig SLA and overlooks key aspects of the SLA which increases its sensitivity. The location is noted as a “Key View” within the OWESG. The viewpoint is popular with a mixture of walkers taking a detour from the Great Glen Way, visitors stopping for take in the scenic views and local residents utilising the easily accessed route from the nearby car park Grottaig. The summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh (699m AOD) is a relatively straightforward gradual climb from the car park. Panoramic views across much of Loch Ness are a key feature of the vista and more distant views across the mountainous landscapes beyond form a dramatic backdrop with interior lochs visible in the all-encompassing outlook. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered Very High by the applicant. This is agreed. During the construction phase there would be an increase in activity and traffic associated with the construction of the headpond, main dam, saddle dams 1 and 2 and other infrastructure associated with the upper works, as well as cranes, other significant construction equipment							

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	and vehicles, from this viewpoint. This would result in a substantial and highly noticeable change to the foreground and middle-ground views from the summit, introducing large-scale infrastructure, earthworks, movement and lighting into a highly valued wild landscape. The applicant's assessment therefore concludes a Major Adverse (Significant) visual effect during the construction phase. This is agreed. During operational Year 1 the headpond, main dam, saddle dams 1 and 2, secondary bund, permanent compounds (including tunnel portal 4) along with permanent access tracks would be clearly visible in the foreground and middle ground. Whilst the applicant considers that the headpond and associated infrastructure would represent a prominent and noticeable change in the foreground and middle-ground views from the summit, they feel the wider landscape setting, including the mountain backdrop and views to Loch Ness, would remain largely intact. The applicant considers the effect reduces slightly from the construction phase to a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect at Year 1. Whilst it is considered that the applicant has understand their assessment it is agreed there will be a Significant visual effect. During operational Year 15 the same infrastructure noted previously will be visible and continue to form a noticeable man-made element within the foreground and middle-ground views. By Year 15, the proposed montane willow scrub, native woodland, riparian planting, dwarf birch, juniper and Scots pine regeneration and planting would become perceptible in the landscape. Whilst the increased size of the inundated loch would generally not appear out of keeping within a landform where lochs and lochans are common features, the scale, linear form of the dam and visible drawdown area would increase the influence of man-made features within the view which contrast with the surrounding hills. This will diminish the sense of naturalness and wildness from this view. New access tracks associated with the development will be seen in							

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
		the view. The applicant considers the effect remains as Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect at Year 1. Whilst it is considered that the applicant has understand their assessment it is agreed there will be a Significant visual effect. From a cumulative perspective, the proposed development adds further energy related development to the existing cluster in the wider outlook. Whilst the applicant considers the proposed development would not detract from views across Loch Ness and towards the Great Glen they concede that the inundated loch and associated infrastructure would draw receptor's attention away from the natural landscape in the western/north western sector of the view. The applicant considers this would incrementally increase the cumulative effect which remains as Moderate Adverse (Significant). Whilst it is considered that the applicant has understand their assessment it is agreed there will be a Significant visual effect. The visualisation is overcast in the middle portion of the view with the background appearing hazy. The resubmitted photography for VP1 is of a poor standard and the Landscape Officer considers that it does not fully conform to guidance. The images appear as obviously artificial when showing the upper reservoir at both maximum capacity along with the full drawdown extent with the water surface, and saddle dams 1 and 2 incongruous within the landscape. It is difficult to discern how the full drawdown extent of the upper reservoir would appear within the landscape as has been shown with a light grey shading as opposed to a brown peat-stained shade that would be expected. Additionally, it is odd that the updated visualisation has moved location given this is a summit location.						

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
The view from Foyers is characterised by mature vegetation on the steep slopes above Loch Ness, which substantially restricts views, although intermittent gaps provide outlooks across the loch to the western hillside and rocky moorland plateau. Activity within the view includes recreational boat traffic on Loch Ness and vehicles on the A82. The opposite lochside is dominated by extensive forestry plantation interspersed with pockets of native woodland, areas of scrub and forestry clear-felling, with the skyline defined by a largely unvegetated rocky moorland plateau. Receptors will be residents, recreational users and road users in and around Foyers, including people using the B852, Loch Ness 360 Trail, Caledonia Way and South Loch Ness Trail. It is located on the eastern side of Loch Ness within the SLA. The B852 – South Loch Ness shore is noted as a “Key Route” within the OWESG. The applicant considers the view is considered typical of the steep-sided Loch Ness glen and although it lies within the SLA, and the extensive forestry plantation limits its scenic qualities. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered High by the applicant. This is agreed. From the summit there are varied views, including elevated views, looking across mountainous landscape with glens and waterbodies visible at lower elevation. Loch Laggan is visible to the east and areas of forestry to the south.								

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
During the construction phase there would be increased activity in and around the lower control works including barges, cranes, earthworks and vegetation clearance seen from the opposite shore of Loch Ness. Views would be most apparent from elevated residential properties, while existing vegetation would screen many views from roads, footpaths and lower-level locations. Construction lighting would create additional light sources during low-light conditions, although these would be seen alongside existing settlement lighting in Foyers. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect during construction. This is agreed. During operational Year 1 the lower control works would be visible across Loch Ness within the focal part of the view, although views would remain heavily filtered by existing vegetation for most receptors. The development would introduce permanent infrastructure on a previously undeveloped section of the Loch Ness shoreline, including an elevated bridge structure and associated works. Proposed timber cladding, muted surface treatments and new planting would help integrate the infrastructure into the landscape to some extent, however, it would still be apparent as a new human intervention to the edge of the loch. The removal of shoreline vegetation would open up some additional views of activity along the A82 along with occasional maintenance vehicle movements. Motion-sensor and navigational lighting would also be present. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect at early operation. This is agreed. During operational Year 15 the lower control works would remain visible across Loch Ness, however, landscape planting will soften and screened the infrastructure to a certain extent as the becomes embedded. New shoreline woodland and planting beds would reinstate the wooded character of the shoreline, helping to integrate the bridge piers, retaining walls and associated structures into the surrounding								

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	landscape. The combination of mature planting, material finishes and the backdrop of the steep-sided glen would reduce the prominence of the development to some extent, however it will still be noticeable as a new human intervention to the edge of the loch. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect once the scheme has been operational longer term. Whilst it is considered they have marginally understated their assessment it is generally agreed the effect will not be significant. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects. The visualisation is hazy in the background with the plantation in the middle distance appearing artificial. Whilst the resubmitted photography for VP2A is a clear improvement to the original EIAR photography the updated image is still of a poor standard and the Landscape Officer considers that it does not conform to guidance.							
VP3 – Foyers campsite	App	High	High, Low	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant , Not Significant	High, Low	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant , Not Significant
Approximately 3.78km from headpond,	THC	High	High, Medium	Moderate Adverse,	Significant , Not Significant	High, Medium	Moderate Adverse,	Significant , Not Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	During operational Year 15 the lower control works would remain visible across Loch Ness, but established planting would help integrate the infrastructure into the shoreline landscape and reduce its prominence to some extent. New woodland and shoreline planting would soften views of the retaining walls and bridge structure, restoring the wooded character of the loch shore to some extent, however it will still be noticeable as a new human intervention to the edge of the loch. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect once the scheme has been operational longer term. Whilst it is considered they have marginally understated their assessment it is generally agreed the effect will not be significant. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects. This visualisation was resubmitted following concerns that the original image was overcast, with shadowing on Loch Ness and low-lying cloud making it difficult to perceive the lower works. The updated visualisation is much improved.							
VP4A – Great Glen Way and Bunloit	App	High	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	screened by vegetation, with views to higher ground generally limited to gaps between trees. The skyline is undulating and includes the distinctive summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh. Receptors will be a combination of hill walkers, recreational walkers along with residents at Bunloit and road users. Walkers appreciate the view from this highly valued and often visited location. This section of the Great Glen Way above Loch Ness is within the Loch Ness and Duntlechaig SLA. The Great Glen Way and Minor Road – Bunloit are noted as “Key Routes” within the OWESG. Although the view is characteristic of the western slopes above Loch Ness and lies within the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA, the applicant considers the combination of built development, vegetation, fencing and forestry in the outlook reduces its scenic quality and appreciation of the wider landscape. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered High by the applicant. This is agreed. During the construction phase activity associated with saddle dam 1, the spillway, temporary access tracks and construction compounds would be visible in small, distant parts of the view on the skyline and upper slopes. Views would be limited by intervening vegetation and landform, with much of the construction activity appearing as a small-scale and distant feature within the wider landscape. Temporary lighting associated with construction compounds and work areas would introduce some new light sources within the background of the view. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect during construction. This is agreed.							

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
During operational Year 1 saddle dam 1, the spillway and limited sections of permanent infrastructure would be visible as small, distant features on the skyline and upper slopes. Views would be heavily filtered by intervening vegetation, with the development occupying only a small part of the wider landscape and not affecting the silhouette of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh. Proposed mitigation planting would be barely perceptible at Year 1, while occasional maintenance traffic and lighting would have limited influence on the view. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect during early operation. This is agreed. During operational Year 15 saddle dam 1 and limited sections of permanent infrastructure would remain visible as small, distant features within the background of the view. Planting will become established tempering views of the headpond infrastructure and mitigate the visibility of access tracks and associated scarring. The development would occupy only a small part of the wider landscape and would remain subordinate to the surrounding landform and vegetation. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect during construction. This is agreed. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects. There is a slight haze in the resubmitted visualisation with plantation woodland shown at operational Year 15 appearing incongruous as it has in other images provided. However, the resubmitted photography is an improvement on the previous visualisation.								

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	The viewpoint is from the Loch Ness View scenic vantage point on the B852 noted as one of the easiest places to reach the Loch Ness shoreline. The outlook comprises a highly scenic and panoramic view from the shoreline with the foreground dominated by the expansive waterbody of the loch, with a rocky beach and limited areas of mature lochside vegetation, resulting in more open and uninterrupted views than those available from the adjacent elevated viewing point. The middle ground is characterised by the steep western slopes of Loch Ness and the presence of Urquhart Castle on a prominent promontory, which adds historic and cultural interest. The wider landscape encompasses the dramatic landform of the Great Glen, with a mosaic of forestry plantations, native woodland, agricultural fields and scattered properties around Drumnadrochit. Views extend southwards along the loch towards higher ground, with the Meall Fuar-mhonaigh forming a notable focal point in the distance. Receptors will be a combination of recreational users visiting the beach below the viewpoint and road users passing along the route. It is located on the eastern side of Loch Ness within the SLA. Urquhart Castle land-based views are noted as a “Key View” and the B852 – South Loch Ness shore road is noted as a “Key Route” within the OWESG. The applicant considers that despite the presence of commercial forestry, the overall scenic quality of the landscape remains high. The viewpoint is further enhanced by visitor facilities including signage, picnic benches and parking, reinforcing its status as a recognised destination for appreciating the landscape. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered Very High by the applicant. This is agreed.							

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
		During the construction phase activity associated with the lower control works, temporary compounds and the spillway would be visible as a relatively small, distant features within the wider panoramic view. The removal of shoreline vegetation, construction barges and associated activity on Loch Ness would introduce noticeable movement and change within an otherwise largely undeveloped landscape. Intervening landform and forestry would limit visibility of some construction elements, reducing their prominence within the view. Construction lighting would introduce additional light sources across parts of the panorama during low-light conditions. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect during construction. This is agreed. During operational Year 1 the lower control works would be visible as a small and distant feature within the wider panoramic view of Loch Ness, while the Spillway and other infrastructure would be largely screened by intervening landform and forestry. The most noticeable change would be areas of shoreline vegetation removal associated with the lower control works, although these would occupy a relatively very small part of the overall view. The surrounding landform and scenic qualities of Loch Ness would remain largely unchanged, and proposed mitigation planting would be barely perceptible at Year 1. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Not Significant) effect during early operation. This is agreed. During operational Year 15 the lower control works would remain visible as a small and distant feature within the wider panoramic view, while other infrastructure would be largely screened by intervening landform and forestry. Established mitigation planting would soften views of the						

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	development and reduce the prominence of shoreline vegetation loss and construction-related scarring to some extent but would still be perceptible longer term. The applicant considers there will be a Negligible Adverse (Not Significant) effect once the scheme has been operational longer term. Whilst it is considered they have marginally understated their assessment it is generally agreed the effect will not be significant. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects. The visualisation is misty with the middle portion and background of the view difficult to perceive. The resubmitted photography for VP5 is of a poor standard and the Landscape Officer considers that it does not conform to guidance. Plantation woodland shown at operational Year 15 appears notably artificial as it has in other images provided.							
VP6 – Great Glen Way near Urquhart Castle	App	High	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant
	THC	High	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse,	Not Significant,	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse,	Not Significant, Not Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
VP7 – Dores Beach Approximately 18.4km from headpond, 17.44km from lower works View looking South West	App	Very High	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant
	THC	Very High	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant
		During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction
	App	Very High	Low	Minor Adverse	Not Significant	Low	Minor Adverse	Not Significant
	THC	Very High	Low	Minor Adverse	Not Significant	Low	Minor Adverse	Not Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
development within an otherwise largely undeveloped part of the landscape, including construction activity on the loch and vegetation clearance along the shoreline. Although visible in an important part of the view, the effects would be reduced by distance and the relatively small proportion of the panorama affected. Construction lighting would introduce additional light sources within the distant landscape during low-light conditions. The applicant considers there will be a Negligible Adverse (Not Significant) effect during construction. This is agreed. During operational Year 1 the saddle dam 2, the lower control works and sections of permanent access track would be visible as small, distant features within the panoramic view of Loch Ness. The development would introduce minor alterations to the skyline and shoreline in a limited part of the view, although the surrounding landform and scenic qualities of Loch Ness would remain largely unchanged. Due to the distance involved, the infrastructure would be hard to perceive and would occupy a very small proportion of the wider panorama. Mitigation planting would not yet be noticeable at this point. The applicant considers there will be a Negligible Adverse (Not Significant) effect at the during early operation. This is agreed. During operational Year 15 the saddle dam 2, the lower control works and sections of permanent access track would remain visible as small, distant features within the panoramic view of Loch Ness. Established mitigation planting would soften views of the infrastructure and reduce the visibility of access track scarring, helping to integrate the development into the wider landscape. The scenic character of Loch Ness and								

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	the surrounding landform would remain largely unchanged, with the development occupying only a very small part of the overall panorama. The applicant considers there will be a Negligible Adverse (Not Significant) effect at the longer-term operational phase. This is agreed. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects. Whilst the resubmitted visualisation is an improvement on the original EIAR the image is hazy and plantation woodland shown at operational Year 15 appears artificial. The resubmitted photography for VP7 is of a poor standard and the Landscape Officer considers that it does not conform to guidance.							
VP8 – Suidhe viewpoint off the B862 Approximately 11.09km from	App	Very High	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant
	THC	Very High	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant,	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
on higher ground. The skyline is gently undulating and includes the distinctive summit of Meall Fuar-mhonaidh, while Bhlaraidh Wind Farm is visible in the distance but occupies a relatively small part of the panorama. Receptors will be a mixture of hill walkers, recreational walkers, tourists and road users given the short distance from the B862 and nearby An Suidhe car park. This viewpoint is within the SLA, on the Loch Ness 360 Trail, South Loch Ness Trail and also on General Wades Military Road adding to the historic and cultural significance. The applicant considers the elevated position provides expansive views across the landscape, and despite the presence of forestry and wind turbines in the outlook, the composition is considered highly scenic. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered Very High by the applicant. This is agreed. During the construction phase activity associated with the main dam and temporary access tracks would be visible as small, distant features within the background of the panoramic view. The works would introduce noticeable development and movement into a largely undeveloped upland landscape, although effects would be reduced by distance and the presence of existing forestry and Bhlaraidh Wind Farm. The development would affect only a small part of the overall view and would not alter the wider panoramic landscape or key visual features.								

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
		It is agreed there are no cumulative effects.						
VP9 – Loch Ness, canoeists and pleasure craft Approximately 10.39km from headpond, 11.95km from lower control works View looking North East	App	Very High	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Low, Low	Minor Adverse, Minor Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant
	THC	Very High	Medium, Medium	Moderate Adverse, Moderate Adverse	Significant, Significant	Medium, Medium	Moderate Adverse, Moderate Adverse	Significant, Significant
		During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction
	App	Very High	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Significant	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
		During the construction phase activity associated with the main dam, lower control works and temporary construction compounds would be visible within two parts of the panoramic view. The works would introduce noticeable movement and development into an otherwise largely undeveloped landscape, including construction activity on Loch Ness and changes to the skyline near Meall Fuar-mhonaidh. Whilst the effects would be reduced by distance to some extent the main dam would be visible within the view down the loch. Construction lighting would introduce additional light sources within the landscape during low-light conditions. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect during construction. This is agreed. During operational Year 1 the main dam, lower control works and sections of permanent access track would be visible features within the panoramic view of Loch Ness. The development would introduce man-made elements into the focal view down the loch, particularly the main dam. Again, whilst effects would be reduced by distance, intervening forestry and the scale of the surrounding landscape to some extent the development will introduce a new smooth ridgeline surrounded on either side by a more rough, natural hillside. Mitigation planting would not yet be perceptible at this stage. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect during early operation. It is considered the applicant has understated their assessment with a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect.						

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	During operational Year 15 The main dam, lower control works and sections of permanent access track would remain visible features within from Loch Ness. As with Year 1, whilst effects would be reduced to some extent by distance, intervening forestry, scale of the surrounding landscape to along with mitigation which will have matured the introduction of the smooth ridgeline is a notable intervention within the landscape. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect at the longer-term operational phase. It is considered the applicant has understated their assessment with a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects.							
VP10 – B862 and Loch Ness 360 Trail near to Fort Augustus Approximately 14.59km from	App	Very High	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant
	THC	Very High	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	Receptors will be a mixture of hill walkers, recreational walkers, tourists, road users and cyclists. The viewpoint is within the SLA on a combination of routes including Loch Ness 360 Trail, the Caledonia Way (National Cycle Route 78) and the B862. The outlook from Fort Augustus across the loch, Loch Ness East is noted as a “Key View” within the OWESG. The applicant considers the view as an iconic panorama along Loch Ness, and despite the presence of forestry, it retains strong scenic qualities. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered Very High by the applicant. This is agreed. During the construction phase activity associated with the lower control works and temporary construction compound would be visible as a very small and distant feature on the shoreline of Loch Ness. The works would introduce limited activity, vegetation removal and construction movement into the view down the loch, although visibility would be substantially reduced by distance and the backdrop of the steep-sided glen. Construction-related movement on Loch Ness and temporary lighting would be barely perceptible within the wider panoramic landscape. The applicant considers there will be a Negligible Adverse (Not Significant) effect during the construction phase. This is agreed. During operational Year 1 the lower control works would be barely perceptible as a small, distant feature on the shoreline of Loch Ness. The development would occupy only a very small part of the panoramic view and would be seen against the backdrop of the steep-sided glen, reducing its visual prominence. Occasional maintenance activity and operational lighting would have very limited influence on the view, while							

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	mitigation planting would be largely imperceptible at this stage. The applicant considers there will be a Negligible Adverse (Not Significant) effect at early operation. This is agreed. During operational Year 15 the lower control works would remain barely perceptible as a small, distant feature on the shoreline of Loch Ness. Established mitigation planting would further soften and filter views of the development, helping it integrate into the surrounding landscape. The development would continue to occupy only a very small part of the panoramic view, with the wider landscape and key scenic qualities remaining largely unchanged. The applicant considers there will be a Negligible Adverse (Not Significant) effect at the longer-term operational phase. This is agreed. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects.							
VP11 – Core Path to the north west of Fort Augustus	App	Medium	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant	Very Low, Very Low	Negligible Adverse, Negligible Adverse	Not Significant, Not Significant
	THC	High	Very Low, Very Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse,	Not Significant,	Very Low, Very Low	Moderate/Minor Adverse,	Not Significant, Not Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	Receptors will be a mixture of hill walkers, recreational walkers, tourists, road users and cyclists in the southern part of the Study Area. The A887 Glen Moriston road adjacent, is noted as a “Key Route” within the OWESG. Human influences within the view include Bhlaraidh Wind Farm on the horizon and overhead transmission lines visible through gaps in the forestry. The viewpoint is outwith the SLA and the applicant considers these elements, together with the extensive forestry cover and felling activity, reduce the scenic quality of the landscape. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered Medium by the applicant. It is considered the applicant has understated the sensitivity which should be considered High as the human influence and impact on receptors using the core path has been exaggerated. During the construction phase activity associated with the main dam and temporary access tracks would be visible as very small, distant features on the skyline and within the background of the view. The works would introduce limited movement and development into the upland landscape, although effects would be reduced by distance and the presence of existing forestry, wind farm and overhead line infrastructure. Construction lighting would introduce occasional additional light sources within a very small part of the view during low-light conditions. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect during the construction phase. Whilst it is considered they have marginally understated their assessment it is generally agreed the effect will not be significant.							

			proposed development			Cumulative			
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)	
VP12 – Local walking users off the Core Path network and Glen Coliltie Walking Loop Approximately 4.03km from headpond, 5.32km from lower control works	App	High	Medium, Low	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant, Not Significant	Medium, Low	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant, Not Significant	
	THC	High	Medium, Low	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant, Not Significant	Medium, Low	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant, Not Significant	
		During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	
	App	High	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant	
	THC	High	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant	Very High	Major Adverse	Significant	
The baseline is as described in Section 6.5 Baseline Environment of the EIAR Volume 2: Chapter 6 Landscape of Visual. The viewpoint is characterised by an undulating rocky moorland landscape, where the ground falls towards the River Coiltie before rising again to Glas-bheinn Bheag on the skyline. Rocky outcrops, low scrub vegetation and irregular areas of native woodland create a relatively enclosed and natural landscape with a strong sense of wildness and intimacy. Existing access tracks and areas of cleared forestry are visible in places, although these features are generally limited within the wider upland setting. Views from other sections of the walking network become more enclosed due to intervening landform and forestry, while higher ground provides broader vistas across the rocky moorland									

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
View looking South West			plateau. These more elevated views reveal greater evidence of human influence, including wind farms in the distance, forestry plantations, access tracks, maintenance vehicles and occasional farmland and residential properties.					
			Receptors will be a mixture of hill walkers and recreational walkers on surrounding routes including the Glen Coiltie Walking Loop and paths alongside the River Coiltie.					
			The applicant considers that overall, the viewpoint outwith the SLA is considered representative of the Rocky Moorland Plateau landscape and possesses moderate scenic qualities associated with its natural character and perceived wildness, despite some influence from forestry and infrastructure. These factors lead to the sensitivity being considered High by the applicant. This is agreed.					
			During the construction phase activity associated with temporary access tracks, construction compounds, tunnel portals and workers' accommodation would be visible across much of the foreground, middle ground and background of the view. The scale of the works would introduce substantial movement, infrastructure and land disturbance into an otherwise relatively wild and enclosed landscape, becoming a dominant feature within the view. Although some effects would be reduced by surrounding landform, existing forestry tracks and other human influences in the wider landscape, construction activity would remain highly prominent. Construction lighting associated with compounds would introduce additional light sources during low-light conditions. The applicant considers there will be a Major Adverse (Significant) effect during the construction phase. This is agreed.					

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
		During operational year 1 permanent access tracks, tunnel portals, compounds and the GIS switchyard would be visible across the foreground, middle ground and background of the view. The development would introduce noticeable man-made infrastructure into a relatively wild landscape, with the permanent compounds and access tracks forming prominent new features within the valley setting. While reinstated construction areas, existing forestry features and surrounding landform would reduce the degree of contrast, the development would remain clearly visible, particularly within the middle ground. Mitigation planting would not have matured at this stage, with only limited softening of views. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect during the early operation phase. This is agreed. During operational Year 15 established woodland planting would substantially soften and screen views of the permanent access tracks, tunnel portals, compounds and GIS switchyard, particularly within the foreground and middle ground. Reinstated construction areas would be fully integrated into the landscape, reducing the visibility of previously disturbed ground and infrastructure. The development would remain visible in parts of the background; however, the combination of landscape mitigation and reduced track scarring would lessen its prominence within the view to some extent. The planting would also contribute to restoring native woodland character within the River Coiltie valley. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect during the early operation phase. This is agreed. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects.						

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
		The operational Year 1 visualisations look artificial. The compensatory planting appears more natural in the operational Year 15 visualisations in comparison to those set further back from the development.						
VP13 – A82 layby Approximately 2.52km from headpond, 0.21km from lower control works	App	High	High, Medium	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant, Not Significant	High, Medium	Moderate Adverse, Minor Adverse	Significant, Not Significant
	THC	High	High, High	Moderate Adverse, Moderate Adverse	Significant, Significant	High, High	Moderate Adverse, Moderate Adverse	Significant, Significant,
		During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction	During construction
	App	High	High	Moderate Adverse	Significant	High	Moderate Adverse	Significant
	THC	High	High	Moderate Adverse	Significant	High	Moderate Adverse	Significant

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
	During the construction phase the lower control works would require vegetation clearance, opening up direct views of construction activity including barges, cranes, earthworks, concrete batching plant and new access works from the A82. The works would introduce prominent industrial activity along the loch shore and extending into Loch Ness, creating a substantial change to views in the foreground and middle ground. While the development would be highly visible due to its proximity, effects would be moderated by the existing influence of the A82 corridor, forestry activity and other built infrastructure within the wider landscape. Construction activity on Loch Ness would also introduce additional movement within the view. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect during the construction phase. This is agreed. During operational Year 1 the lower control works, including the new access from the A82, would be clearly visible in the foreground and middle ground, replacing sections of existing lochside vegetation with permanent infrastructure. The development would introduce noticeable man-made structures extending towards Loch Ness. This would be moderated by the existing road corridor, forestry activity and other infrastructure visible within the wider landscape to some extent. New mitigation planting would not be established at this stage. The development would remain a prominent feature in views from this location. The applicant considers there will be a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect during the construction phase. This is agreed. During operational Year 15 the lower control works would remain visible in the foreground and middle ground, however, the applicant considers established native planting would soften views of the infrastructure and improve its integration with the lochside landscape. Mature							

			proposed development			Cumulative		
Viewpoint	App / THC	Sensitivity of the Receptor (Value / susceptibility) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Magnitude of effect (Scale of Change / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance of Effect (Magnitude of effect / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year15)	Magnitude of Cumulative Change (Scale / Extent / Duration) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Level of Effect (Magnitude of Change / Sensitivity of Receptor) (Year 1, Year 15) Very High, High, Medium, Low, Very Low	Significance (Major and Major-Moderate are Significant. Moderate may be significant) (Year 1, Year 15)
		planting would reduce the prominence of built elements to some extent, while the development would continue to be viewed within the context of the A82 corridor, forestry activity and existing infrastructure on the opposite shore of Loch Ness. The development would remain noticeable but would appear less intrusive as the landscape mitigation becomes established. For tourists travelling along the A82 the impact will be more evident as opposed to those in the local community using the route on a regular basis where the visual effect will dissipate over time as the mitigation measures become established. The applicant considers there will be a Minor Adverse (Not Significant) effect during the longer-term operation phase. It is considered they have understated their assessment with a Moderate Adverse (Significant) effect extending for years after the development has become operational. It is agreed there are no cumulative effects. This visualisation was resubmitted following concerns that the original image was overcast making it difficult to perceive the lower works. The updated visualisation is much improved.						