Chapter 5: Ecology

Tables

Figures

5.1. Executive Summary

5.1.1. This Ecology chapter of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) assesses the likely significant effects of the Proposed Varied Development on non-avian ecological features. The assessment builds on comprehensive baseline data collected for the Consented Development, supplemented by an updated desk study to capture any additionally available ecological information.

5.1.2. The assessment considers only effects attributed to differences between the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development. Where it is unlikely that effects to ecological features will differ, these features are scoped out of the impact assessment for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.1.3. In this assessment **major** and **moderate** effects are considered 'Significant' in EIA terms, while **minor** and **negligible** effects are regarded as 'Not Significant'.

5.1.4. Baseline field surveys found that the Site is being used by otters (*Lutra lutra*) and water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*), bat activity was generally low or moderate and the fish community was primarily composed of resident brown trout (*Salmo trutta*). Two statutory designated sites, the Levishie Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and River Moriston Special Area of Conservation (SAC), were identified within a 3km buffer of the Site. Habitats within the Site were predominantly composed of wet heath and blanket bog, but wet modified bog, dry heath, unimproved acid grassland, marshy grassland and standing water were also present. Several of the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) communities within the Site have the potential to be groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTEs), but detailed hydrological assessment concluded that these habitats were all unlikely to be dependent on groundwater. Although unlikely to be a GWDTE, the M11 habitat in the Survey Area was considered to be a locally unusual wetland.

5.1.5. It was concluded that the potential effects on designated sites and protected species such as otters, water voles, bats and aquatic species would not differ between the Consented and Proposed Varied Development, and thus these features were not taken forward for impact assessment. Similarly, as no GWDTEs were considered likely in the setting of the Site, these were also scoped out.

5.1.6. Due to increases in hardstands and other changes to the layout, it was concluded that effects to peatland habitats and M11 mire could differ between

the Consented and Proposed Varied Developments, and these two Important Ecological Features (IEFs) were taken forward to impact assessment.

5.1.7. The iterative design process sought to avoid sensitive habitats where possible, and although it was previously concluded as unlikely to be groundwater dependent, the distance between the turbine located closest to a potential moderate dependency GWDTE (M15b) increased by 48.75m for the Proposed Varied Development compared to the Consented Development, thus decreasing any potential impacts. The M11 mire habitats are situated close (M11 area to South, increase of 5.54m to nearest hardstand and M11 area to the North, decrease of 33.69m to the nearest hardstand for the Proposed Varied Development compared to the Consented Development) to WTG11 and the borrow pit to the north of it. Most of the peatland habitats within the Site were in modified (moderate quality) or highly modified (poor quality) condition, and very few peatlands in near-natural (high quality) condition are present.

5.1.8. The embedded mitigation measures (**2021 EIAR, Volume 1, Chapter 5: Ecology, Section 5.8**), outline Habitat Management Plan (HMP) (**2021 EIAR, Volume 4, Technical Appendix 5.7**) and Deer Management Plan (DMP) (**2021 EIAR, Volume 4, Appendix 5.6**) presented in the Consented Development 2021 EIAR were all found to be appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development. No significant residual effects on peatland habitats, or M11 mire were identified in the 2021 EIAR.

5.1.9. Further detailed assessment undertaken in 2024 to refine the outline HMP to satisfy planning condition 18 of the Consented Development concluded that the proposed peatland restoration as presented in the final HMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a)** represented the full extent of what is achievable at the Site. The measures identified in the final HMP, and supporting Biodiversity Net Gain Report **(Technical Appendix 3.6c)** and DMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6d**), were concluded to deliver significant biodiversity enhancements for both the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development, in line with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).

5.1.10. Cumulative impacts of the Proposed Varied Development and three adjacent wind farms were considered for peatland habitats and M11 mire. Through successful implementation of the peatland restoration and reduced grazing outlined in the relevant plans, no significant cumulative effects were identified for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.1.11. A comparison of residual effects of the Proposed Varied Development with the Consented Development was undertaken. Both developments identified significant effects on peatland habitats (blanket bog and wet modified bog) before targeted mitigation was taken into consideration, although no significant residual effects were concluded for these habitats with implementation of

targeted mitigation. No significant effects were identified on wet heath for either the Consented Development or Proposed Varied Development.

5.1.12. Overall, through the implementation of embedded and targeted mitigation, compensation, and enhancement measures, the Proposed Varied Development is not expected to result in any new or materially different significant adverse ecological effects compared to the Consented Development. The proposed mitigation, compensation and enhancement align with best practice guidance and statutory policy, ensuring that biodiversity conservation and restoration are integral to the lifecycle of the Proposed Varied Development.

5.2. Scope of Assessment

5.2.1. A Scoping Report (**Technical Appendix 3.1: Scoping Report**) for this Section 36C (S36C) variation application was submitted in May 2025 to statutory consultees for their consideration. This chapter sets out the rationale behind the decision to assess or scope out ecological receptors based on the potential impacts of the Proposed Varied Development. This chapter of the S36C assessment assesses only the differences between the Consented and Proposed Varied Developments, and thus when the predicted impacts are expected to be the same for the two developments, no impact assessment is required.

5.2.2. All features scoped out of the 2021 EIAR (Druim Ba scheme, habitats, violet coral fungus, badger, wildcat, pine marten, red squirrel, freshwater invertebrates, terrestrial invertebrates (refer to **2021 EIAR Volume 1, Chapter 5, Section 5.7**) are also scoped out of impact assessment for the Proposed Varied Development. As outlined in the Scoping Report (**Technical Appendix 3.1: Scoping Report**), most IEFs included in the impact assessment for the 2021 EIAR were not assessed in this S36C EIA, as it was concluded that there would be no differences between the Consented and Proposed Varied developments, through successful application of embedded and targeted mitigation measures outlined in the 2021 EIAR (**Volume 1, Chapter 5, Sections 5.8 and 5.10**) (**Table 5.1).**

Table 5.1: IEFs scoped out of this EIAR

2021 EIAR IEF	Justification for scoping out of S36C EIAR
Designated sites (River Moriston SAC and Levishie Woods SSSI)	A search for designated sites within a 10km buffer of the Site did not identify any other sites that were not previously assessed in the 2021 EIAR that may be impacted by the Proposed Varied Development (**Figure 5.1: Designated Sites**). The differences between the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development are not anticipated to give rise to different effects on these two designated sites.
Ancient and semi-natural woodland	No direct impacts to ancient or semi-natural woodland were identified for the Consented Development, although indirect impacts to woodlands along the access track (**2021 EIAR Volume 1, Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.6.3**). As no changes along the access track are proposed for the Proposed Varied Development effects to these habitats will be the same as for the Consented Development.
GWDTEs (M11 and M15b)	The hydrological assessment in the 2021 EIAR concluded that the potential GWDTEs were very unlikely to be groundwater-dependent (**2021 EIAR Volume 1, Chapter 9, Paragraph 9.5.34**) and therefore no effects from the Proposed Varied Development are envisaged.
Standing and running water	No changes to watercourse crossings are included in the Proposed Varied Development, and therefore effects are not expected to differ from the Consented Development.
Juniper	The individual juniper plant that is likely to be lost to the Consented Development (**2021 EIAR Volume 1, Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.9.16)** is also likely to be lost to the Proposed Varied Development, and therefore effects to this IEF are the same. Dwarf juniper was also found to be more widespread across the site during the ground investigations and Site Enabling Works. Pre-construction checks as detailed within the approved CEMP will ensure mitigation for any juniper encountered elsewhere prior to works commencing.
Bats	The turbine blade length is only slightly greater for the Proposed Varied Development compared to the Consented Development, and buffers around foraging and commuting features (particularly Allt Saigh) were calculated at 127.4m and 129.7m for the Consented and Proposed Varied Developments, respectively (calculated as maximum blade tip length plus 50m). As this increase in blade tip length is negligible, effects are not expected to differ between the two developments.
Otter, water vole, freshwater fish	No changes to watercourse crossings are included in the Proposed Varied Development, and the minimum 50m buffer around watercourses

2021 EIAR IEF	Justification for scoping out of S36C EIAR
	(excluding crossing locations) included in the Consented Development is maintained in the Proposed Varied Development (**Chapter 2: Design Iteration and Proposed Development**). Therefore, effects are not expected to differ between the two developments.
Reptiles and amphibians	Only construction impacts were identified for these IEFs for the Consented Development (**2021 EIAR Volume 1, Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.9.27**). As the construction methods, mitigation and programme are not anticipated to change for the Proposed Varied Development, no differences in effects to these IEFs are anticipated.

5.2.3. In determining whether to take IEFs forward to impact assessment, this chapter considers the assessment completed for the Consented Development, the ecological baseline collected to support the assessment, the predicted effects of the Proposed Varied Development on IEFs and the proposed mitigation to reduce the significance of any effect.

5.2.4. The mitigation included in the Consented Development's planning submission has been secured through appropriately worded planning conditions within the Planning Consent. The ecological baseline, consultee comments on the Proposed Varied Development planning conditions associated with IEFs and a summary of the predicted effects of the Consented Development on IEFs are discussed in the following sections of this document.

5.2.5. Further to the above, the scope of the assessment presented in this chapter is to:

- Consider the previously collected ecological baseline information used to support the Consented Development's planning submission. This includes baseline survey information to inform the 2021 EIAR, ECoW target notes from ground investigations and Site Enabling Works (refer to **Figure 2.10: Environmental Constraints**) and a pre-construction fish survey in 2022 which informed the approved Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (**Technical Appendix 3.6g)**.
- Identify IEFs where effects of the Proposed Varied Development are predicted to differ from those for the Consented Development.
- Undertake an assessment of the predicted effects of the Proposed Varied Development on identified IEFs.
- Consider the differences between the Proposed Varied Development and Consented Development and compare the predicted effects of the Consented Development to those of the Proposed Varied Development.

- Consider the appropriateness of the mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures proposed in the 2021 EIAR, 2022 Additional Information Report (AIR) and subsequent reports delivered to satisfy planning conditions for the Consented Development to ensure they are in line with current guidelines and that the Proposed Varied Development will deliver significant biodiversity enhancements as required by NPF4 Policy 3(b) Biodiversity.

5.3. Consultations

5.3.1. An EIA Scoping Report (**Technical Appendix 3.1**) was submitted on 13 May 2025 for the Proposed Varied Development and responses from some consultees have been received. A summary of all consultation undertaken for the Proposed Varied Development is summarised in **Table 5.2.**

5.3.2. The following organisations were consulted on the EIA Scoping Report (**Technical Appendix 3.1**) but did not provide a response:

- Beauly District Salmon Fishery Board;
- Ness District Salmon Fishery Board;
- Ness & Beauly Fisheries Trust;
- Friends of the Earth (Scotland);
- John Muir Trust;
- Scottish Forestry;
- Scottish Wildlife Trust; and
- WWF (Scotland).

Table 5.2: Summary of consultations undertaken for the Proposed Varied Development

Consultee (Date) Nature of Consultation	Issue Raised	Response/Action Taken
The Highland Council (THC) **2 July 2025** **EIA Scoping Report**	In response to the EIA Scoping Report, THC raised the following comments (THC response paragraph numbers provided):	This EIAR considers only the differences between the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development and thus many of the IEFs from the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR are scoped out of this EIAR. Further details are below and in the text of this EIAR chapter.
	3.3: THC advises that a new Highland Local Development Plan will be issued in 2025.	3.3: This chapter makes reference to the current Highland Wide Local Development Plan (The Highland Council, 2012) and draft Chapter 5: Nature and Environment of the Highland Local Development Plan chapters as published in November 2025 (The Highland Council, 2025) as well as National Planning Framework 4 (Scottish Government, 2023) and the plan as well as the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (The Highland Council, 2024) in its assessment of Biodiversity Net Gain in Section 5.9.This is noted and factored into the chapter.
	3.37: The EIAR should include a full assessment of the impact of the development on peat.	3.37: The peatland condition assessment completed for the **2021 EIAR (Volume 4, Technical Appendix 5.5**) and the information relating to peatland restoration ground truthing undertaken to inform the 2024 HMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) were used to inform this impact assessment (Section 5.7). Further peat probing was also undertaken in line with current survey guidance and is discussed in **Chapter 10: Geology & Soils**.

	3.41, 3.51: The EIAR should address impacts of water quality and quantity on aquatic flora and fauna.	3.41: Impacts of the Proposed Varied Development on aquatic habitats, flora and fauna were considered in the EIA Scoping Report. It was concluded that none of the proposed changes to the layout would result in different effects than what were identified for the Consented Development, and therefore these receptors are scoped out of the impact assessment for the Proposed Varied Development. Further information supporting the scoping out of hydrological related effects are presented in **Chapter 9: Hydrology and Hydrogeology.**
	3.47: The EIAR should provide a baseline survey of the [ ] animal interest on site. 3.56: Protected species surveys (including bats) must be repeated.	3.47, 3.56: As detailed in the 2025 Scoping Report, baseline results from the 2021 EIAR and additional target notes recorded by the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) during ground investigations and the Site Enabling Works (refer to **Figure 2.10: Environmental Constraints**) were used to scope protected species out of the assessment of impacts of the Proposed Varied Development. NatureScot guidance (NatureScot, 2024b) states that *"in most situations the existing ecological survey information can be relied upon for section 36C applications. We will usually only recommend new survey in relation to the variation when there could have been a substantive change to environmental circumstances which could contribute to new or intensified significant effects."* In line with this guidance and based on the findings from the ECoW reports, no updated field surveys were undertaken to inform this chapter.

	3.47, 3.48: The EIAR should provide an account of the habitats present on the proposed development site, including rare, threatened or protected habitats. We also expect an up-to-date NVC survey. The EIAR should provide details of all direct, indirect, permanent, and temporary impacts to any bog habitat present on the site.	3.47, 3.48: Phase 1 and NVC habitat mapping used to support the Consented Development EIAR is considered suitable to support the EIAR for the Proposed Varied Development, in line with NatureScot guidelines for S36C variations (NatureScot, 2024b). Full details and relevant maps are provided in **Figure 5.2: Phase 1 Habitats , Figure 5.3: NVC Communities** and Section 5.5 of this chapter. Direct and indirect impacts to habitats are addressed in Section 5.7.
	3.47: Habitat enhancement and mitigation measures should be detailed, particularly in respect to blanket bog.	3.47: Enhancement measures are fully detailed in the HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) and the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment Report (**Technical Appendix 3.6c**) for the Consented Development. It was concluded that the measures outlined in these reports for the Consented Development are appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development (Section 5.9).
	The EIAR should address the likely impacts on the nature conservation interests of designated sites (3.49), wild deer (3.50) and aquatic interests in watercourses (3.51)	3.49: It is considered that the differences between the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development will not alter the assessment of impacts on these receptors, and therefore they are scoped out of the impact assessment presented in this chapter.
	3.52: Further advice can be found in NatureScot's consultation response on ecology in relation to the surveys required and adequacy of the work already undertaken.	3.52: SSER has reviewed NatureScot's response and has undertaken further consultation on the adequacy of the data used in the assessment (**Technical Appendix 3.3: Further Scoping Consultation**).

	3.53: The EIAR should include a map and assessment of impacts upon GWDTEs and buffers.	3.53: GWDTEs were scoped out of impact assessment in this chapter (**Table 5.1**) as the 2021 EIAR concluded that all potential GWDTEs were unlikely to be groundwater dependent. Maps showing potential and assessed GWDTEs are provided in Figures 5.5 and 5.6 of the 2021 EIAR.
	3.54: A draft or outline HMP and Species Protection Plan (SPP) should be produced as part of the EIA.	3.54: The final HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) was approved by the Planning Authority. This final HMP, as well as the Biodiversity Net Gain report for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6c**) were reviewed for this assessment and found to be appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development (**Section 5.8**). SPPs for otter, water vole, brown trout and reptiles and amphibians were approved by the Planning Authority to satisfy Condition 13 (**Technical Appendix 3.6h**). No additional SPPs are required in addition to those included for the Consented Development.
	3.57: Updated habitat data must inform impact assessments.	3.57: In line with NatureScot guidelines for S36C applications (NatureScot, 2024b), the habitat surveys undertaken for the 2021 EIAR were used to inform this assessment. Phase 1 and NVC habitat results are presented in **Figure 5.2: Phase 1 Habitats and Figure 5.3: NVC Communities** respectively.
	3.58: If existing data remains valid in accordance with NatureScot's professional guidance, scoping out is acceptable.	3.58: NatureScot guidance for Section 36C variations states that "*in most situations the existing ecological survey information can be relied upon for section 36C applications*." (NatureScot, 2024b). The findings of

		the field survey results to support the 2021 EIAR were considered appropriate for this assessment, in combination with updated information collected for the development of the HMP to satisfy Planning Condition 18 and by the ECoW during the Enabling Works.
	3.60: Assessments must address all habitats.	3.60: This assessment considered impacts to all habitats, and only peatland habitats and M11 mire were taken forward to impact assessment **Table 5.1**
	3.60: The impacts to peatland offset using the 1:10 loss/restored peatland restoration areas should be clearly identified and mapped.	3.60: Peatland restoration areas are clearly mapped in the Final HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**). Full details of the biodiversity enhancements for the Consented Development are detailed in the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment Report (**Technical Appendix 3.6c**). The suitability of the measures in both have been considered for the Proposed Varied Development assessment. The HMP for the consented development aims to restore all the restorable peat within the Site boundary. The BNG assessment for the consented development quantified significant uplifts in biodiversity value from the HMP (in accordance with NPF4).
	3.61: The Ecology Officer was not aware of any records or projects within or in the vicinity of the Site that may be pertinent to the assessment of impacts.	3.61: Noted.
NatureScot **7 July 2025**	The increase in blade tip height by 50m may require reassessment of buffer distances to key bat habitats.	The maximum proposed blade tip length for the Proposed Varied Development is 79.7m, compared to 77.4m for the Consented Development, resulting in an increase buffer of just 2.3m (buffer calculated as blade tip length + 50m). It was concluded that this

		increase would not result in a different effect on bats than what was identified for the Consented Development (**Table 5.1**).
	We welcome that an assessment will be undertaken of the effects of potential changes to land take on sensitive peatland habitats and updated habitat calculations for the Proposed Varied Development vs the Consented Development will be included.	Details provided in Section 5.7.
	We note that all mitigation measures and subsequent documents to satisfy pre-commencement planning conditions relation habitats will also be reviewed.	Noted.
	We agree impacts on the River Moriston Special Area of Conservation and Levishie Wood SSSI are scoped out of the EIA report if the mitigation proposed and agreed remains.	The existing mitigation measures and Deer Management Plan for the Consented Development are considered appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development. Details provided in Section 5.7 and **Technical Appendix 3.6d**.
	n/a	In a reply to this consultation, SSER explained that existing field survey data would be used to support this S36C EIAR and requested that NatureScot would confirm their opinion regarding the use of existing data. No response from NatureScot was received at the time of submission.
SEPA **30 May 2025**	We agree with scoping **out** of potential effects on aquifers, surface waters, water supplies and water dependant habitats such as GWDTEs.	Impacts to GWDTEs were scoped out of impact assessment, as detailed in Section 5.7.

5.3.1. A number of planning conditions relating to ecological receptors were imposed on the Consented Development in response to consultation responses from statutory consultees. The Applicant has prepared and submitted plans to satisfy the pre-commencement elements of these planning conditions and, where these plans have been approved by the Highland Council and NatureScot, and where they are relevant to this EIAR, these reports have been included as technical appendices. The relevant planning conditions are summarised in Table 5.3 along with the corresponding plans. Where relevant, the mitigation contained in the plans has been considered as part of this assessment.

5.3.2. The planning commitments agreed for the Consented Development will be adhered to for the Proposed Varied Development. The Applicant expects that similar conditions may be imposed for the Proposed Varied Development, and any additional mitigation identified through this assessment will be incorporated into updated plans as required.

Table 5.3: Planning conditions for the Consented Development relevant to ecological receptors

Planning Condition	Reason for the Planning Condition	Relevance to Ecology	Relevance to Proposed Varied Development EIA
10. Micro-siting	To enable necessary minor adjustments to the position of the wind turbines and other infrastructure to allow for site-specific conditions while maintaining control of environmental impacts and taking account of local ground conditions.	(c) No micro-siting shall take place within areas of peat deeper than currently shown for the relevant infrastructure on Figure 10.2 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report; and (d) All micro-siting permissible under this condition must be approved in advance in writing by the Environmental Clerk of Works ("ECoW") (see condition 12).	Micro-siting of infrastructure and associated construction areas away from sensitive ecological receptors is identified as a standard mitigation measure in the 2021 EIAR (**Volume 4, Chapter 5, Section 5.8**), which is carried through to this assessment (**Table 5.4**) and is identified as a Targeted Mitigation measure for sensitive habitats, as described in **Section 5.8** of this chapter.
12. Ecological Clerk of Works ("ECoW")	To secure effective monitoring of and compliance with the environmental mitigation and management measures associated with the Consented Development during the decommissioning, restoration and aftercare phases.	(a) impose a duty to monitor compliance with the **ecological**, ornithological and hydrological commitments provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report ("the EIAR"), the Additional Information Report and other information lodged in support of the Application, the Construction Environmental Management Plan (condition 13), the Peat Management Plan (condition 17), the Habitat Management Plan (condition 18), the Species Specific Surveys and Protection Plans (condition 13(2)(m)) and other plans approved in terms of the conditions of this planning permission ("the ECoW Works"); (b) advise on micro-siting proposals issued pursuant to Condition 10	The terms of appointment of an independent ECoW were submitted and approved in writing by the Planning Authority (in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA) for the Consented Development to satisfy Condition 12. The Applicant expects terms to be reviewed but will be similar for the Proposed Varied Development.

Planning Condition	Reason for the Planning Condition	Relevance to Ecology	Relevance to Proposed Varied Development EIA
13. Construction Environmental Management Plan ("CEMP")	To ensure that all construction operations are carried out in a manner that minimises their impact on road safety, amenity and the environment, and that the mitigation measures contained in the 2021 EIAR which accompanied the application, or as otherwise agreed, are fully implemented.	(d) a drainage management plan, demonstrating how all groundwater, surface water and waste water arising during and after development is to be managed and prevented from polluting any watercourses, water abstractions and private water supplies if relevant, including details of the separation of clean and dirty water drains, and location of settlement lagoons for silt laden water. Any temporary drainage during construction should be designed to accommodate a 1:200 year storm event; (l) confirmation that the M11 mire habitat identified in Target Note 2 on Figure 5.6 shall be physically marked on site so that it can be suitably protected from disturbance during construction. (m) Species specific surveys and Protection Plans carried out at an appropriate time of year for the species concerned, by a suitably qualified person. The survey results and any mitigation measures required for these species on site shall be set out in a species mitigation and management plan, which shall inform construction activities.	The measures identified within the approved CEMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6e**) relevant to ecological receptors were carried forward to this chapter to deliver the intended protections to ecological receptors during construction of the Proposed Varied Development.
14. Watercourse Design	In the interests of protecting the water environment.	All new watercourse crossings shall be designed following the recommendations in the Watercourse Crossing Schedule (Appendix 9.1 -Additional Information Report: Updated Watercourse Crossing Schedule) and if single span bridges are required these shall be designed to pass the 1 in 200-year flood plus an allowance for climate change. All existing watercourse crossings which require to be replaced	Ensuring ecologically sensitive design of all watercourse crossings will minimise impacts to fish habitats and avoid the creation of new barriers to migration.

Planning Condition	Reason for the Planning Condition	Relevance to Ecology	Relevance to Proposed Varied Development EIA
		shall be designed following recognised best practice guidance.	
17. Peat Management Plan	To ensure that a plan is in place to deal with the storage and reuse of peat within the Site, including peat stability and slide risk.	(c) a demonstration of how micro-siting and other measures have been used to further minimise peat and good quality peat habitat disturbance.	Measures to minimise impacts to peat will benefit sensitive peatland habitats within the Site Boundary for the Proposed Varied Development.
18. Habitat Management Plan (“HMP”)	In the interests of protecting ecological features and to ensure that the Consented Development secures positive effects for biodiversity.	(1) No development, with the exception of the Site Enabling Works, shall commence unless and until a finalised Habitat Management Plan ("HMP"), has been submitted to, and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot, and SEPA. The information shall include: (a) the mitigation measures contained in the EIAR and be based upon the Outline Plan provided (Appendix 5.7 – EIAR: Volume 4: Outline Habitat Management Plan); (b) The proposed habitat management of the site during the period of construction, operation, decommissioning, restoration and aftercare, and shall provide for the maintenance monitoring and reporting of habitat on site; (c) a scheme of works for peatland restoration works to deliver peatlands commensurate with the quality of the habitat that will be lost directly and indirectly and take advantage of the opportunity for peatland restoration across	The detailed HMP was submitted and approved in writing by the Planning Authority (in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA) for the Consented Development to satisfy Condition 18. The measures outlined in the final HMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) were assessed and concluded to be appropriate to the Proposed Varied Development (**Section 5.8**).

Planning Condition	Reason for the Planning Condition	Relevance to Ecology	Relevance to Proposed Varied Development EIA
		the site of the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm and Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension; (d) a scheme for planting of montane vegetation (such as juniper and willow). The scheme shall include details of all areas to be planted, the planting mix proposed and details of management of these areas for the lifetime of the Development; (h) the provision for regular monitoring and review to be undertaken to consider whether amendments are needed to better meet the habitat plan objectives. In particular, the approved habitat management plan shall be updated to reflect ground condition surveys undertaken following construction and prior to the date of Final Commissioning and submitted for the written approval of the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA.	
19. Borrow Pits – Scheme of Works	To ensure that excavation of materials from the borrow pit(s) is carried out in a manner that minimises the impact on road safety, amenity and the environment, and to secure the restoration of borrow pit(s) at the end of the construction period.	(b) details of the handling of any overburden (including peat, soil and rock);drainage measures, including measures to prevent surrounding areas of peatland, water dependant sensitive habitats and Ground Water dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTE) from drying out; (d) details of the reinstatement, restoration and aftercare of the borrow pit(s) to be undertaken at the end of the construction period, including	Borrow pits for the Proposed Varied Development are situated in proximity to sensitive peatland habitats, and overburden from and restoration of borrow pits should be managed to minimise impacts to surrounding habitats.

Planning Condition	Reason for the Planning Condition	Relevance to Ecology	Relevance to Proposed Varied Development EIA
20. Deer Management Plan	To protect ecological interests.	No development, with the exception with the exception of the Site Enabling Works, shall commence until a Deer Management Plan ("DMP") has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority in consultation with NatureScot. The DMP will set out proposed long term management of deer using the Development site and shall provide for the monitoring of deer numbers on site from the period from Commencement of development until the date of completion of restoration. The approved DMP shall thereafter be implemented in full.	The final DMP was submitted and approved in writing by the Planning Authority (in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA) for the Consented Development to satisfy Condition 20 (**Technical Appendix 3.6d**). The measures outlined in the final DMP were assessed and concluded to be appropriate to the Proposed Varied Development (**Section 5.8**).
24. Site Decommissioning, Restoration and Aftercare	To ensure the decommissioning and removal of the Consented Development in an appropriate and environmentally acceptable manner and the restoration and aftercare of the site, in the interests of safety, amenity and environmental protection.	(4) The detailed decommissioning, restoration and aftercare plan shall provide updated and detailed proposals, in accordance with relevant guidance at that time, for the removal of the Development, the treatment of ground surfaces, the management and timing of the works and environment management provisions.	A decommissioning, restoration and aftercare strategy was approved in writing by the Planning Authority (in consultation with NatureScot and SEPA)**.** The Applicant expects terms to be reviewed but will be similar for the Proposed Varied Development.
29. Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan	To ensure no deterioration of water quality and to protect fish populations within and downstream of the Site.	(1) There shall be no Commencement of development until an integrated Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan ("WQFMP") has been submitted to and approved in writing	A WQFMP was developed for the Consented Development in 2022 (**Technical Appendix 3.6g**), in consultation with the Ness District

Planning Condition	Reason for the Planning Condition	Relevance to Ecology	Relevance to Proposed Varied Development EIA
		by the Planning Authority in consultation with Ness District Salmon Fishery Board. (2) The WQFMP must take account of Marine Scotland Science's guidance.	Salmon Fishery Board. This plan was approved in writing by the Planning Authority. The Applicant expects terms to be reviewed but will be similar for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.4. Assessment Methodology

Desk and Field Data Collection

5.4.1. Desk and field survey data were used to support the assessment. An updated search for designated sites was undertaken using NatureScot's SiteLink website[1], to provide updated information on statutory and non-statutory designated sites potentially impacted by the Proposed Varied Development.

5.4.2. No additional field surveys were undertaken to support this assessment, but the following existing field survey results were used:

- Baseline habitat and protected species survey results, as detailed in Section 5.6 of the 2021 EIAR (**Volume 1, Chapter 5: Ecology and Nature Conservation**). The surveys covered the Site boundary plus buffers appropriate for each receptor.
- The results of updated habitat and peat surveys completed in 2023 to inform the final HMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**). Surveys were undertaken in the potential peatland restoration areas, the montane scrub planting search area and the riparian planting search area identified in the Consented Development. Within the peatland restoration areas, baseline peatland degradation features such as channels, gullies, peat hags and bare peat areas were recorded and mapped. Habitats within these search areas were mapped according to UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) guidelines at the time (Version 1.1; UK Habitat Classification, 2020) and condition assessments were undertaken in line with National England Biodiversity Metric 3.1 guidelines (Natural England, 2021).
- The results of a pre-construction survey for fish habitat and populations completed in 2022 at eight impact sites and two control sites across the Site (**Technical Appendix 3.6g**). The impact sites were in the same locations as those surveyed in the 2021 EIAR, although fewer locations were surveyed in 2022. The control sites were not previously surveyed for the Consented Development.
- Results from pre-works checks by the ECoW in 2022, 2023 and 2024 to support ground investigations and Site Enabling Works. The checks were

[1] https://sitelink.nature.scot/home [Accessed September 2025].

undertaken in areas within a 250m buffer of the Enabling Works layout, which includes the substation and its access track, one borrow pit search area between T02 and T11 and one hydro borrow pit south of T08 (Refer to **Figure 2.10: Environmental Constraints**).

Impact Assessment

5.4.3. The assessment of effects for the Proposed Varied Development follows Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) guidance (CIEEM, 2018), which was the approach used in the 2021 EIAR (**Volume 1, Chapter 5, Section 5.5**).

Embedded Measures and Mitigation

5.4.4. Embedded mitigation for the Proposed Varied Development will be the same as those as described for the Consented Development (**Table 5.4**). No changes to embedded mitigation measures were proposed in the 2022 AIR. Any additional mitigation contained within the various planning condition compliance documents contained in **Technical Appendix 3.6a-i** will also still apply to the Proposed Varied Development.

Table 5.4: Embedded mitigation measures for the Proposed Varied Development

Important Ecological Feature(s)	Effects Addressed	Embedded Mitigation Measures and Influence on the Assessment
Design and Pre-Construction Phase		
All IEFs	Habitat loss and fragmentation,	**Technical Appendix 3.6e: CEMP** A CEMP has been delivered and approved by the Planning Authority which details all measures required to protect habitats and species. The CEMP will consider, but not be limited to, the following: • noise and vibration; • dust and air pollution; • surface and ground water, including drainage controls and mitigation; • protected species and habitats; • waste; and

Important Ecological Feature(s)	Effects Addressed	Embedded Mitigation Measures and Influence on the Assessment
		• pollution incidence response (for both land and water).
Peat and peatland habitats	Habitat loss	**2021 EIAR Volume 1, Chapter 9, Section 9.7:** Areas of deep peat have been avoided where possible during detailed design.
Construction Phase		
All IEFs	Habitat loss and damage.	**2021 EIAR Chapter 5, Section 5.8; Chapter 16** All construction activities will be overseen and monitored by an ECoW. A CEMP has been delivered and approved by the Planning Authority which details all measures required to protected habitats and species (**Technical Appendix 3.6e**).
Habitats	Habitat loss	A micro-siting allowance of up to 50m in all directions was granted in the 2021 EIAR consent (Condition 10) in respect of each turbine and its associated infrastructure in order to address any potential difficulties which may arise if preconstruction surveys identify environmental constraints that need to be avoided. The Applicant expects similar conditions will apply to the Proposed Varied Development if consent is granted.

Cumulative Effects

5.4.5. The impact of the Proposed Varied Development together with other developments has been assessed to identify any cumulative effects on IEFs. The cumulative assessment for the Proposed Varied Development, as with the Consented Development, has focussed on other wind farms. Cumulative effects are considered for each IEF based on relevant impact pathways, which may differ between IEFs. For example, a wind farm located close to the Proposed Varied Development but in a different catchment may not result in

cumulative impacts on freshwater fish (due to a lack of hydrological connection) but could impact bats.

Comparison of Effects between Consented and Proposed Varied Developments

5.4.6. The assessment of effects of the Proposed Varied Development focuses on where and how these differ from those predicted for the Consented Development. This informed requirements for any alterations to mitigation, compensation or enhancements. The assessment considers construction, operational and decommissioning phases of both developments.

5.5. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

5.5.1. **2021 EIAR Chapter 5: Ecology and Nature Conservation** considered the potential effects of construction, operation and decommissioning of the Consented Development on ecological features present within the Site plus appropriate buffers. Baseline information on designated sites, protected species and habitats was collected through a combination of desk-based assessments and field surveys. Full details of the surveys and results are presented in **2021 EIAR Chapter 5: Ecology and Nature Conservation** and technical appendices, and only a summary of findings for IEFs scoped into this assessment are presented below.

5.5.2. Embedded mitigation, bespoke compensation and targeted mitigation measures were proposed that followed best practice guidelines at the time. Further management plans (e.g. DMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6d)** and HMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**)) which have been approved by the planning authority to satisfy conditions for the Consented Development detail some of the compensation and mitigation measures to ensure ecological features were protected.

5.5.3. The Consented Development is situated to the east of the Operational Bhlaraidh Wind Farm on the Glenmoriston Estate, northwest of Invermoriston in the Great Glen. The Site is located on an area of high rocky plateau with open, undulating moorland; rocky outcrops; small hills; many lochs, lochans and watercourses; and areas of bog. The surrounding landscape is similar to the Site and includes several distinct summits and wooded glens, primarily associated with Glen Urquhart and Glen Moriston.

5.5.4. Current land use at the Site involves sheep grazing in the summer and deer stalking in the autumn and winter. Deer are generally present in the

Consented Development Site during daylight hours and move to the south of Allt Saigh towards their preferred grazing fields beyond Levishie Wood at night (**Technical Appendix 3.6d**).

Habitats

5.5.5. Habitat mapping was undertaken in June 2019. Full details of habitats are presented in the **2021 EIAR, Volume 4, Technical Appendix 5.1**; **Figure 5.2: Phase 1 Habitats** and **Figure 5.3: NVC Communities**. The dominant Phase 1 habitats in the Survey Area were wet heath and blanket bog but standing water and wet modified bog were also prevalent (**Figure 5.2: Phase 1 Habitats**, **Table 5.5**).

Table 5.5: Phase 1 habitats in the Survey Area for the Consented Development

Habitat Type (Phase 1 code)	Area (ha)	Percentage of Survey Area
Blanket bog (E1.6.1)	418.99	27.69
Wet modified bog (E1.7)	79.88	5.28
Wet heath (D2)	875.84	57.88
Dry heath (D1.1)	0.22	0.01
Unimproved acid grassland (B1.1)	2.07	0.14
Marshy grassland (B5)	1.12	0.07
Standing water (G, G1.3 & G1.4)	135.20	8.93
Total	**1,513.32**	**100.00**

5.5.6. Running water was also present throughout the Survey Area, with the dominant watercourse being Allt Saigh, which flows east through the southern area of the Site towards Loch Ness. Numerous named and unnamed minor watercourses, many of which are inlets and outlets to the numerous lochans in the Site, were also present throughout the Site.

5.5.7. Dwarf juniper (*Juniperus communis nana*) was recorded at several locations in the Survey Area and a single violet coral fungus record (*Clavaria zollingeri*)

was documented near Allt Saigh between Loch an Dubhair and Loch na Feannaig. Juniper (*Juniperus communis*), of which dwarf juniper is a subspecies, is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) and SBL species and has experienced significant decline in the UK, particularly in England (Trees for Life, 2025). Violet coral fungus is widespread in the UK but scarce (The Wildlife Trusts, 2021).

5.5.8. No trees or invasive, non-native plant species were present in the Site during surveys for the Consented Development.

Peatland Condition

5.5.9. A peatland condition assessment was undertaken on discrete compartments within the Site, as described in full in the **2021 EIAR, Volume 4, Technical Appendix 5.5 Peatland Condition Assessment.** The majority of the peatland surveyed was of moderate quality (modified condition), with only nine of 36 compartments supporting high quality (near-natural condition) peatland. The shallower peat present in the Survey Area was dominated by wet heath, with occasional patches of other communities such as marshy grassland and acid grassland. The only species recorded in abundance in bog areas was red bog-moss (*Sphagnum capillifolium*), a species that is also common in wet heath. Here bog pools were recorded, with flat-topped bog-moss (*Sphagnum fallax*) and, more rarely, feathery bog-moss (*Sphagnum cuspidatum*). Papillose bog-moss (*Sphagnum papillosum*) was considered uncommon and thus bog habitats where it was present were considered to be close to near-natural condition and of higher quality than the bog areas without this species.

5.5.10. None of the peatland present in the Survey Area was considered to be of a similar high quality to those peatlands in the surrounding area that are notified as SSSIs and of natural condition.

5.5.11. A further peatland survey was undertaken in 2023 to provide updated information to support the final HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**). During this survey, baseline peatland degradation conditions were recorded and channels, gullies, peat hags and bare peat areas were mapped, with the intention of identifying peatland

compartments suitable for restoration. This assessment identified 31.88ha of blanket bog habitat considered suitable for restoration.

5.6. Summary of Effects Predicted & Mitigation Measures suggested for the Consented Development

5.6.1. The 2021 EIAR identified significant adverse effects on the Levishie Wood SSSI and blanket bog habitats, but residual effects for both were not significant and beneficial after the implementation of embedded mitigation measures (**Table 5.6**), and as demonstrated in the final HMP and DMP (**Technical Appendices 3.6a and 3.6d**, respectively). No other significant effects were identified for any other IEF for any of the phases of the Consented Development.

5.6.2. The 2022 AIR assessed impacts of the 15 turbine layout on all IEFs compared to the proposed 18 turbine layout assessed in the 2021 EIAR. No additional impacts were identified due to the removal of these three turbines and associated infrastructure and all effects were either the same or of reduced impact, due to the smaller footprint.

Table 5.6: Summary of impact assessment for the Consented Development from the 2021 EIAR

Important Ecological Feature	Predicted Effect	Significance	Mitigation	Significance of Residual Effect
Construction				
Habitats, including GWDTEs	Loss and degradation of habitat: blanket bog.	Significant adverse	Implementation of the final HMP, including habitat reinstatement, restoration and enhancement (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**)	Not significant beneficial
	Loss and degradation of habitat: wet modified bog and wet heath.	Not significant adverse	Habitat reinstatement per the final CEMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6e**).	n/a

Important Ecological Feature	Predicted Effect	Significance	Mitigation	Significance of Residual Effect
Decommissioning				
Habitats, including GWDTEs	Disturbance of habitats from removal of infrastructure	Not significant adverse	Habitat reinstatement per the CEMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6e**) and as secured through planning condition 24.	n/a

5.7. Revised Assessment of Effects for the Proposed Varied Development

5.7.1. In line with relevant guidance (e.g., Scottish Government, 2019; NatureScot, 2024b), this impact assessment focusses only on those effects that are likely to differ between the Consented Development and the Proposed Varied Development. The identification of IEFs to take forward for impact assessment considered the differences between the two layouts, including proposed turbine dimensions, as well as the suitability of the embedded mitigation and targeted compensation and enhancement measures (as outlined in the HMP and DMP, **Technical Appendices 3.6a** and **3.6d**, respectively) included in the 2021 EIAR for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.7.2. After considering the above, it was concluded that likely significant effects of the Proposed Varied Development are only expected to differ from the Consented Development for peatland habitats (blanket bog, wet modified bog and wet heath) and M11 mire during construction and decommissioning.

5.7.3. GWDTEs (M11 and M15b only) were scoped into the impact assessment for the 2021 EIAR. However, the 2021 EIAR concluded that all potential GWDTEs were unlikely to be groundwater dependent, and given this lack of connectivity, impacts to GWDTEs are not assessed in this chapter. Impacts to M11 mire and M15b (a wet heath community) are, however, assessed as peatland habitats.

5.7.4. All other IEFs assessed in the 2021 EIAR are not taken forward for impact assessment as effects are not expected to differ. The decision to scope protected species and the Levishie Wood SSSI out of impact assessment is

based on field survey results used to support the 2021 EIAR. Although these survey results are from 2019 and 2020, NatureScot guidance states that existing survey data can normally be relied upon and new surveys are only recommended when the variation is likely to have substantial changes that could result in new or intensified effects, which is not considered to be the case for the Proposed Varied Development (NatureScot, 2024b). Additional pre-construction checks undertaken by the ECoW to support the ground investigations and the Site Enabling Works (target notes included on **Figure 2.10: Environmental Constraints**), along with surveys undertaken to inform the Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (**Technical Appendix 3.6g**) confirm the findings from the 2021 EIAR and do not indicate that the distribution of otters, water vole or fish has changed since the surveys in 2019 and 2020.

5.7.5. Some built elements of the Proposed Varied Development have moved compared to the Consented Development. However, these changes are not expected to impact protected species differently, based on the previously recorded field survey results. In particular, otters and water voles are not expected to be impacted differently as the layout of the Proposed Varied Development will not result in any changes to impacts to watercourses and all built elements (apart from watercourse crossings) are still outside of the disturbance buffer for water vole burrows and habitats (10m; NatureScot, 2024c).

Conservation Value of IEFs

5.7.6. Blanket bog and wet modified bog are listed in Annex 1 of Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the 'Habitats Directive') and on the Highlands BAP (The Highlands Council, 2021). Within the Site, the blanket bog was in varying condition, but much of it was degraded and the assessment in the 2021 EIAR concluded it was not found to support indicators of national importance. The assessment in the 2021 EIAR found that the wet modified bog in the Site was generally of poor quality with low diversity and rare or absent *Sphagnum* species. Considering the protected status of these habitats and their local condition, blanket bog and wet modified bog are considered to be of **national conservation value**, with respect to the Proposed Varied Development.

5.7.7. Wet heath is identified in Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive and on the Highland BAP (The Highlands Council, 2021). The wet heath was found to be of variable condition with some areas supporting peat-forming vegetation and others dominated by common heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) or deergrass

(*Trichophorum cespitosum*). Based on the protected status of these habitats and their condition within the Site, both are considered to be of **local conservation value**, with respect to the Proposed Varied Development.

5.7.8. The M11 mire was considered to be a locally unusual wetland habitat and is present in small flushes that were reported to be too small to be mapped amongst wet heath (M15c) near Turbine 11 (**Figure 5.3: NVC Communities**). These wetland patches were considered to be in good condition with good diversity and naturalness. Although only small patches were present in the Site, this habitat is also present in the wider area (**2021 EIAR, Volume 1, Chapter 5, Table 5.10**). Based on the above, M11 mire is considered to be of **local conservation value**, with respect to the Proposed Varied Development.

Construction Effects

5.7.9. Construction activities are expected to result in habitat loss and modification due to plant movements, excavations and construction of permanent infrastructure. Habitats could be degraded as a result of pollution incidents.

5.7.10. To assess the impact of habitat loss and modification during construction, the following parameters were calculated:

- **Permanent, direct habitat loss (Table 5.7)**: Habitats that would be permanently lost beneath the footprint of the Proposed Varied Development. This includes the habitats associated with the footprints of:
  - 15 hardstanding areas;
  - permanent, 5.5m wide access tracks, including those constructed as part of the 2024 Site Enabling Works;
  - turning heads;
  - substation, as constructed as part of the 2024 Site Enabling Works; and
  - one LiDAR area with a 4m x 4m footprint.
- **Temporary, direct habitat loss (Table 5.7)**: Habitats that would be restored following construction of the Proposed Varied Developments. This includes the habitats associated with the footprints of:
  - borrow pit search areas;
  - hydro borrow pit search areas;
  - cross country cable routes;
  - one batching plant; and

– a satellite construction compound.

- **Permanent, indirect habitat loss/modification (Table 5.8)**: Habitats within a 10m buffer around the areas of permanent, direct habitat loss. This represents a worst-case scenario of permanent impacts to habitats during operation of the Proposed Varied Development.
- **Temporary, indirect habitat loss (Table 5.8)**: A 4m buffer around all infrastructure (temporary and permanent) to account for operation of plant outside of the direct footprint. This buffer will be reinstated following construction in line with the final CEMP.

5.7.11. The iterative design process sought to minimise habitat loss where possible, however, permanent and temporary direct habitat loss will occur for wet heath, blanket bog and wet modified bog, and temporary direct habitat loss will occur for a small area of bare ground as well (**Table 5.7**). Although some habitats will be lost beneath the footprint of the Proposed Varied Development, the overall percentages will be low in the context of the overall Site Boundary.

Table 5.7: Summary of direct habitat loss

Phase 1 habitat type	Total area of habitat within Site (ha)	Permanent, direct loss (ha)	Temporary, direct loss (ha)	Total Area Affected (ha)	% of relevant habitat within Site affected
D2: Wet dwarf shrub heath	674.54	13.71	19.40	33.11	4.91
E1.6.1: Blanket bog	332.91	2.92	0.12	3.05	0.92
E1.7: Wet modified bog	69.51	0.18	0.38	0.56	0.81
J4: Bare ground	23.1	0	0.66	0.66	2.86
Total	**1100.06**	16.81	20.57	37.38	-

5.7.12. Temporary indirect habitat modification will occur due to plant movements around all built elements and permanent, indirect habitat modification will occur around permanent infrastructure. This habitat modification will

predominantly affect wet heath; blanket bog, wet modified bog and bare ground will also be impacted (**Table 5.8**). However, the total percentage of the Site affected by indirect habitat modification (permanent and temporary) is low overall.

Table 5.8: Summary of indirect habitat modification

Phase 1 habitat type	Total area of habitat within Site (ha)	Permanent, indirect modification (ha)	Temporary, indirect modification (ha)	Total Area Affected (ha)	% of habitat within Site affected
D2: Wet dwarf shrub heath	674.54	19.52	10.51	30.03	4.45
E1.6.1: Blanket bog	332.91	3.65	1.74	5.39	1.62
E1.7: Wet modified bog	69.51	0.74	0.36	1.1	1.58
J4: Bare ground	23.1	0	0.11	0.11	0.48
Total	**1100.06**	**23.91**	**12.72**	**36.63**	**-**

5.7.13. The peatland condition assessment in **2021 EIAR, Volume 4, Technical Appendix 5.5** found that 60 of the 69 assessed peatland compartments were in modified (moderate quality) or highly modified (poor quality) condition, and the remaining nine compartments contained peatlands in near-natural (high quality) condition. During the iterative design process for the Proposed Varied Development, these high-quality peatlands were avoided where possible, in line with the design principles of the embedded mitigation in the 2021 EIAR (**Table 5.4).** Sensitive peatlands will be further avoided where possible through the micro-siting allowance of 50m.

5.7.14. Peatland habitats were further surveyed in 2023 to identify suitable areas for peatland restoration and inform the final HMP, which has been approved by the planning authority (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**). The Proposed Varied Development has avoided these areas targeted for peatland restoration.

5.7.15. Targeted and embedded mitigation measures from the 2021 EIAR (e.g., final HMP and DMP; **Technical Appendix 3.6a, Technical Appendix 3.6d**) which

will protect peatland habitats during construction include the implementation of the final CEMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6e**), which will outline pollution prevention and other measures required to protect habitats, and the appointment of an ECoW to oversee construction (**Table 5.4**).

5.7.16. Blanket bog and wet modified bog are considered to be of national conservation value, with respect to the Proposed Varied Development. Direct habitat loss and indirect habitat modification is anticipated to affect these habitats, but the combined percentage of the total areas of blanket bog and wet modified bog affected within the Site will be 2.53% and 2.39%, respectively (**Table 5.7, Table 5.8**). Considering the small scale of these impacts, and the moderate or poor quality of these habitat types within the Site, the magnitude of habitat loss and modification to peatlands is considered to be low. Peatland habitats are of national conservation value and although the magnitude is low, any loss or degradation of these habitats is concluded to result in a **significant adverse** effect, taking into consideration embedded mitigation.

5.7.17. Wet heath is considered to be of local conservation value with respect to the Proposed Varied Development. Habitat loss and modification, both temporary and permanent, was found to impact a total of 9.36% of the total area of wet heath within the Site (**Table 5.7, Table 5.8**). Considering the small scale of these impacts, and the varying condition of wet heath within the Site, the magnitude of habitat loss and modification is considered to be low, resulting in an overall effect that is **not significant**.

5.7.18. M11 mire is of local conservation value with respect to the Proposed Varied Development. The access track for Turbine 11 crosses the southeastern extent of the southern area of this habitat (Target Note 2b, **Figure 2.10: Environmental Constraints**) and the northern area of this habitat (Target Note 1, **Figure 2.10: Environmental Constraints**) overlaps slightly with the borrow pit to the north of Turbine 11. Based on the close proximity to the Proposed Varied Development, there is a potential for habitat loss or modification during construction. However, this will result in an overall small amount of habitat loss or modification, and although this is a locally unusual wetland habitat, it is present in the wider area around the Site. Considering this, the magnitude of the impact of habitat loss and modification is considered to be the same as the Consented Development: low, resulting in a **not significant** effect.

Operation and Decommissioning Effects

5.7.19. No operational effects to habitats were identified in the 2021 EIAR (**Volume 4, Chapter 5, Paragraph 5.9.28**), and the Proposed Varied Development is also not anticipated to give rise to any operational effects on habitats.

5.7.20. Decommissioning effects on habitats were assessed in the 2021 EIAR (Volume 4, Chapter 5, Paragraphs 5.9.32 and 5.9.33). Decommissioning is not anticipated to be different for the Proposed Varied Development and therefore the conclusion of no significant effects from the 2021 EIAR is considered to be applicable to the Proposed Varied Development.

5.8. Revised Mitigation Measures for the Proposed Varied Development

Targeted Mitigation

5.8.1. To further minimise impacts on IEFs, the 2021 EIAR included targeted mitigation measures such as implementation of the final HMP and DMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a** and **Technical Appendix 3.6d** respectively), adherence to good working practices to minimise impacts to sensitive habitats and commitment to reinstate habitats as soon as possible following construction and decommissioning.

- The final HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) commits to restoring 31.88ha of blanket bog within five years of commissioning the Consented Development, which is an increase over the commitment of 6.93ha in the Outline HMP (**2021 EIAR, Volume 4, Appendix 5.7**).

5.8.2. This assessment acknowledges the importance of peatland habitats for supporting biodiversity, including rare species, and as an important carbon store. This has been addressed through implementation of avoidance of peatland habitats where possible (Paragraph 5.8.6), a commitment to maintaining hydrological connectivity during construction (Paragraph 5.8.6), and restoring as much peatland within the Site as possible, as outlined in the final HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**). Furthermore, woodland planting was included in the detailed HMP for the Consented Development to provide additional carbon sequestration and

storage, as detailed in the Biogenic Carbon Assessment Report (**Technical Appendix 3.6b**).

5.8.3. In refining the final HMP for the Consented Development, targeted peatland condition assessments were undertaken within the Site to identify all peatlands within the Site that were candidates for restoration, which resulted in 31.88ha targeted restoration (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**). This represents a commitment to restoring the full extent of peatland identified as suitable for restoration within the Site. Considering this, it is concluded that the final HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) is appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development, particularly when considered in combination with the working practices designed to minimise impacts to peatland habitats (5.8.6).

5.8.4. The aims of the final DMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6d**) are:

- To summarise the potential impacts upon Levishie Wood SSSI from the temporary displacement of deer and avoid or reduce impacts on the qualifying interest species to non-significant levels.
- To maintain a healthy red deer population as part of the overall estate management in order to provide sporting opportunities.
- To remove existing deer fencing within the Operational Corridor where possible.
- To minimise grazing pressures on areas of peatland restoration, Caledonian woodland planting and montane scrub planting included within the final HMP to ensure successful establishment of planting and successful restoration of peat.

5.8.5. Of these, the fourth objective will benefit peatland restoration areas within the Site as it seeks to minimise grazing pressure on these areas. This will be achieved through a reduction in deer numbers within the Site, as opposed to fencing. As the areas of peatland to be restored are the same between the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development, the final DMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6d)** is considered to be appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.8.6. The 2021 EIAR includes the following good practice measures during construction as part of the final CEMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6e**):

- Micrositing working areas and infrastructure away from blanket bog and other sensitive habitats.

- Maximising the distance of infrastructure and the associated construction working areas from the small area of M11, where possible, and from the two areas of M15b habitat.
- Minimising the extent of working areas in blanket bog.
- Maintaining hydrological connectivity in peatland habitats; particularly blanket bog, wet heath, M11 and M15b habitats; through the successful application of suitable drainage and surface water measures. Full details will be outlined in the CEMP, and will follow industry-standard guidance (e.g., NatureScot, 2024a).

5.8.7. These good working practices identified in the 2021 EIAR are considered appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development, as they focus on avoiding the sensitive peatland habitats impacted by the Proposed Varied Development.

5.8.8. Following both construction and decommissioning, the 2021 EIAR commits to reinstatement of habitats in line with current guidelines. This commitment is considered appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development, as reinstatement proposals will follow the most up to date guidance at the time of construction and decommissioning.

Residual Effects

5.8.9. In this assessment **major** and **moderate** effects are considered 'Significant' in EIA terms, while **minor** and **negligible** effects are regarded as 'Not Significant'.

5.8.10. In the absence of the above targeted mitigation, the effects of habitat loss and modification on IEFs were significant for bog habitats and not significant for wet heath and M11 mire (**Table 5.9**). The HMP for the Consented Development proposes 31.88ha of peatland restoration, which was concluded to be the full extent of peatland available within the Site for restoration based on detailed field survey assessment (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**). The DMP also proposes a reduction in red deer numbers which will benefit peatland habitats through reduced grazing and trampling pressure, although this enhancement could not be quantified (**Technical Appendix 3.6d**). Micro-siting the access track and other infrastructure away from the M11 mire can minimise or avoid habitat loss and modification. After considering the differences in land take between the Proposed Varied Development and Consented Development, it was concluded that the measures outlined in the

HMP and DMP for the Consented Development are appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.8.11. Through successful implementation of the peatland restoration and enhancement (e.g., Caledonian woodland and montane scrub planting) measures in the final HMP and DMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a, Technical Appendix 3.6d**), it is anticipated that the Proposed Varied Development will result in an overall beneficial effect for peatland and wet heath habitats (**Table 5.9**). Avoiding the M11 mire where possible will result in an effect that is negligible, but not adverse or beneficial.

5.8.12. In this assessment **major** and **moderate** effects are considered 'Significant' in EIA terms, while **minor** and **negligible** effects are regarded as 'Not Significant'.

Table 5.9: Summary of impact assessment for IEFs (significant effects in bold)

IEF (conservation value)	Impact	Effect	Targeted Mitigation	Residual Effect
Blanket bog & wet modified bog (National)	Habitat loss and modification	**Moderate adverse (significant)**	Restoration of 31.88ha of peatlands (HMP) Reduced grazing pressure (DMP)	Minor beneficial (not significant)
Wet heath (Local)		Negligible adverse (not significant)	Reduced grazing pressure (DMP)	Negligible beneficial (not significant)
M11 mire (Local)		Negligible adverse (not significant)	Micro-siting (CEMP)	Negligible (not significant)

5.9. Comparison of Effects of the Proposed Varied Development with the Effects of the Consented Development

5.9.1. The magnitude of the effect of habitat loss on blanket bog was considered to be low for both the Consented and Proposed Varied Developments. However, the overall effect on this IEF was concluded to be significant for both, due to the importance of these habitat types (**Table 5.9)**. All other effects to peatland

habitats were not significant for both the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development.

5.9.2. The area of M15b is 192.6m away from Turbine 09 in the Proposed Varied Development, compared to 175.03m from Turbine 09 in the Consented Development. Based on the distance from the Site, and taking into consideration the regional Conservation Value of this potential GWDTE and the unlikely dependency on groundwater, both the 2021 EIAR and this assessment concluded that the overall effect would be not significant on M15b as a potential GWDTE.

Table 5.10: Comparison of residual effects for the Consented Development and Proposed Varied Development

	Effect with no targeted mitigation		Residual	
IEF (conservation value)	**Consented Development**	**Proposed Varied Development**	**Consented Development**	**Proposed Varied Development**
Peatland habitats: Blanket bog & wet modified bog (National)	**Significant (blanket bog)** Not significant (wet modified bog)	**Moderate adverse (significant)**	Not significant	Minor beneficial (not significant)
Peatland habitats: Wet heath (Local)	Not significant	Negligible adverse (not significant)	Not significant	Negligible beneficial (not significant)

Biodiversity Enhancement

5.9.3. Since the Consented Development was approved, the Scottish Government published National Planning Framework 4 which sets out the planning strategy for Scotland until 2045 (Scottish Government, 2023).

5.9.4. The Proposed Varied Development is situated within Highlands Council area, and the Site location is covered by the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2; The Highland Council, 2024b) and the existing Highland-Wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP; The Highland Council, 2012). Further guidance on Biodiversity Enhancement is provided in The Highland Council's Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance document (The Highland Council, 2024a) and relevant proposals within the evidence report for the

forthcoming Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP; The Highland Council, 2025).

5.9.5. Policies within these plans related to biodiversity enhancement include:

- **NPF4 Policy 3b Biodiversity**: Development proposals for national or major development, or for development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment will 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.
- **The Highland Council Biodiversity Enhancement Guidance**: This guidance sets out The Highland Council's recommended approach to delivering biodiversity enhancements in line with NPF4. For EIA-scale developments, this guidance recommends that a metric approach is taken, using metrics such as the Statutory Biodiversity Metric for England or an alternative metric that utilises different methodology to quantify biodiversity enhancement. The guidance further states that a minimum 10% biodiversity enhancement is required, although it acknowledges that consideration will also be given to habitat enhancement measures that cannot be adequately quantified using a metric approach. On site enhancement measures are preferred.
- **HwLDP**: A biodiversity enhancement requirement is not included in the HwLDP (The Highland Council, 2012), however Section 21.3 Species and Habitats states that "we will encourage the protection and enhancement of green networks."
- **HLDP:** The HLDP evidence report includes a commitment to delivering positive effects for biodiversity from development and states that the HLDP will detail the requirements for delivering biodiversity enhancement. Such requirements are likely to include a minimum threshold for biodiversity enhancement for all new development, ensuring nature-based solutions are delivered, specifying a biodiversity enhancement level for acceptable development within an HMP area and considering whether a financial payment or financial contribution to an appropriate project is acceptable where off-site biodiversity enhancements are unachievable.
- **IMFLDP2 Policy 2 Nature Protection, Preservation and Enhancement:** All developments must contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity,

including restoring degraded habitats and building and strengthening nature networks and the connections between them.

5.9.6. Neither NPF4, HwLDP, HLDP nor the IMFLDP2 require a specific method for demonstrating biodiversity enhancement or present a threshold that developments should meet to ensure that the proposed enhancement will be significant. The Highland Council's Biodiversity Enhancement Guidance stipulates that 10% enhancement is required and recommends the use of an appropriate metric for demonstrating that this has been achieved (The Highland Council, 2024a).

5.9.7. In their advice on developments on carbon-rich soils, NatureScot recommends that for an area equivalent to approximately 10% of the baseline extent of priority peatland habitat should be restored, in addition to any peatland restored for offsetting habitat loss or impact (NatureScot, 2023).

5.9.8. The Consented Development HMP and DMP (**Technical Appendices 3.6a and 3.6d respectively**) include the following measures which will deliver biodiversity enhancements:

- Restoration of 31.88ha of peatland, which represents the full extent of peatland restoration achievable within the Site.
- Planting 23.64ha of a low-density Caledonian woodland in land outside the Site. This will increase woodland cover in the wider area and provide a foraging resource for black grouse (*Lyrurus tetrix*) while maintaining open ground for foraging golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*).
- Planting 23.25ha of montane scrub in land outside of the Site. This will increase habitat heterogeneity in the wider area and improve habitat for golden eagle prey species, such as grouse and hares.
- Installing artificial nesting habitat for black-throated divers (*Gavia arctica*). This will increase nesting opportunities for this species.
- Reduction in red deer grazing pressure on habitats across the Site. This is expected to increase natural generation and tree growth within the Site.

5.9.9. A Biodiversity Net Gain assessment was undertaken for the above measures (**Technical Appendix 3.6c**). This assessment quantified that the habitat creation and enhancements (i.e., peatland restoration areas, Caledonian woodland planting, montane scrub planting) will deliver 4-40% enhancement, before consideration of measures that cannot be captured by the metric (e.g., artificial nesting habitat for black-throated divers, natural regeneration due to a reduction in deer number). The range of percent enhancement is related to the

use of different underlying assumptions in the metric, in an effort to better represent how these measures provide benefits in the Scottish context. For example, one of the HMP objectives is to plant low density Caledonian woodland, and much of the existing heathland at the planting site will be retained as a permanent understory. Habitat creation in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric for England assumes a total loss of the existing habitat, in this case heathland, which is not an accurate reflection of the habitat being created or the total biodiversity value of both the Caledonian woodland and heathland understory.

5.9.10. The artificial nesting habitat for black-throated divers and habitat enhancement related to a reduction in grazing pressure could not be quantified using a metric approach; however, a qualitative assessment was used to describe their benefit to species.

5.9.11. The overall impacts of the Proposed Varied Development were very similar to the Consented Development, albeit with some minor differences to habitat loss and modifications. The SSE Renewables Biodiversity Toolkit was run using the habitat loss and change calculations for the Proposed Varied Development and the resulting enhancement found that there would be a significant biodiversity net gain, mirroring the findings for the Consented Development (refer to **Technical Appendix 3.6c** for more detail). Based on these overall similarities, the measures proposed for the Consented Development were found to be appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development in delivering significant biodiversity enhancement for species and habitats in line with NPF4.

5.10. Cumulative Impacts

5.10.1. The cumulative impact assessment for the Consented Development focussed on other wind farm developments within a 10km buffer of the Site Boundary, and the same buffer was applied to the Proposed Varied Development to identify other developments for the cumulative assessment. No other wind farms were present within the 10km buffer of the Consented Development in the 2021 EIAR and so no cumulative effects were identified.

5.10.2. For this updated assessment, three wind farms were identified within this buffer to be assessed cumulatively, all of which were directly adjacent to the Proposed Varied Development:

- Bhlaraidh Operational Wind Farm: 32-turbine operational wind farm;
- Chràthaich Wind Farm: 14-turbine consented wind farm; and
- Loch Liath Wind Farm: 13-turbine wind farm awaiting a decision.

Peatland habitats

5.10.3. All three of these wind farms quantified some loss of bog and heathland habitats (**Table 5.11**), but all concluded that residual impacts would be not significant. The HMP for the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm (the Operational Wind Farm) includes blocking of drainage ditches with peat plugs to enhance habitat for black grouse (SSER, 2014), the Chràthaich Wind Farm proposes peatland restoration and enhancement in its HMP (Atmos Consulting, 2022) and the Loch Liath Wind Farm also proposed peatland restoration in its outline restoration and enhancement plan (LUC, 2023c).

5.10.4. When peatland restoration is taken into account, the Proposed Varied Development was found to have a minor beneficial impact to peatland habitats and the EIARs for the Bhlaraidh, Chràthaich and Loch Liath wind farms all concluded no significant residual impacts on peatland habitats (Chràthaich Renewables LLP, 2023; LUC, 2023a). Considering the above, it is concluded that the Proposed Varied Development will not result in significant cumulative impacts to peatland habitats.

Table 5.11: Summary of habitat loss for the cumulative impact assessment

	Blanket bog & wet modified bog		Wet & dry heath	
Development Name (planning reference)	**Permanent Loss (ha)**	**Temporary Degradation (ha)**	**Permanent Loss (ha)**	**Temporary Degradation (ha)**
Proposed Varied Development	3.11	2.59	14.69	28.93
Bhlaraidh Wind Farm (12/02556/S36)	11.1	23.7	9.8	35.2
Chràthaich Wind Farm (23/03311/S36)	4.1	9.9	2.4	4.2
Loch Liath Wind Farm (23/02462/S36)	8.9	not calculated	11.01	not calculated

5.11. Conclusion

5.11.1. This chapter identified the likely effects of the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Varied Development, focussing on how those differed from the Consented Development.

5.11.2. An assessment of impacts on habitats was completed, informed by a desk-based study and field surveys. The same field survey data was used for the Consented and Proposed Varied Development assessments, but an updated desk-based study was undertaken for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.11.3. The Proposed Varied Development Site was predominantly composed of wet heath and blanket bog, but wet modified bog, dry heath, unimproved acid grassland, marshy grassland and standing water were also present. Several of the NVC communities within the Site have the potential to be GWDTEs, but a hydrologic assessment concluded that groundwater dependence was unlikely (**2021 EIAR Volume 4, Chapter 9**). The Levishie Wood SSSI and River Moriston SAC are both in the close vicinity of the Proposed Varied Development. Field surveys indicated that otter and water vole are using the Site, bat activity was generally low or moderate and fish communities were dominated by brown trout.

5.11.4. Peatland condition assessment found that most of the peatlands within the Site were in modified (moderate quality) or highly modified (poor quality) condition, and very few peatlands in near-natural (high quality) condition. The Proposed Varied Development sought to avoid direct impacts to peatland habitats where possible, and embedded mitigation measures for the Consented Development were found to be appropriate for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.11.5. Considering only embedded mitigation measures for the Consented Development, a moderate adverse (significant) effect was identified for habitats (peatlands and M11 mire) for the Proposed Varied Development due to habitat loss and modification.

5.11.6. The final HMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) proposed restoring 31.88ha of degraded peatlands within the Site and planting of Caledonian woodland and montane scrub outside of the Site boundary. Although the amount of peatland lost to the Proposed Varied Development differed from the Consented Development, it was concluded that the restoration efforts in the Consented Development final HMP were appropriate

for the Proposed Varied Development, as the area to be restored represented the full extent of peatland restoration possible within the Site.

5.11.7. The final DMP for the Consented Development (**Technical Appendix 3.6d)** will result in a reduction in grazing intensity across the Site, which will benefit peatland habitats. These benefits are considered equally applicable to the Proposed Varied Development.

5.11.8. Biodiversity enhancements for the Consented Development include the peatland restoration, Caledonian woodland creation and montane scrub creation as outlined in the final HMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a)**, indirect habitat improvement related to reduced deer grazing pressure as well as habitat enhancements for ornithological features (**Chapter 6: Ornithology**). When the habitat changes were quantified using the SSER Toolkit and the other, non-quantifiable measures (i.e. habitat improvement from deer grazing and ornithological enhancements) were considered, it was concluded that these measures would deliver the significant biodiversity enhancements required under NPF4.

5.11.9. Taking the final HMP, DMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**, **Technical Appendix 3.6e**) and other biodiversity enhancement measures into account, it was concluded that there would be no significant residual impacts on peatland habitats or M11 mire from the construction, operation or decommissioning of the Proposed Varied Development.

5.11.10. The cumulative assessment considered three other wind farm developments, all of which are located directly adjacent to the Proposed Varied Development. Through implementation of relevant habitat management measures, no significant cumulative effects were identified for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.11.11. Overall, through the implementation of embedded mitigation and targeted mitigation, compensation, and enhancement measures (as outlined in the final HMP and DMP; **Technical Appendix 3.6a and Technical Appendix 3.6e**), the Proposed Varied Development is not expected to result in any new or materially different significant adverse ecological effects compared to the Consented Development. The proposals align with best practice guidance and

statutory policy, ensuring that biodiversity conservation and restoration are integral to the development's lifecycle.

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