Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension Section 36C Variation

Technical Appendix 3.1: Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension S36C Scoping Report

Please note: this appendix contains the text of the scoping report only. For a full list of downloadable figures and technical appendices, please visit the ECU website, where the full upload and the scoping opinion can be viewed together:

Scottish Government - Energy Consents Unit - Application Details

Bhlaraidh Extension Varied Development

S36C Scoping Report

Document Classification | **Confidential while in Draft – Public on Application**

sse Renewables

Contents

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Revision History		
Revision	**Date**	**Details**
V1	13/05/25	Scoping Submission

Abbreviations

AIR	Additional Information Report
CCC	Climate Change Committee
CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
COP21	21st Conference of the Parties
COP29	29th Conference of the Parties
ECU	Energy Consents Unit
EIAR	Environmental Impact Assessment Report
GI	Ground Investigation
GWDTE	Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystem
HES	Historic Environment Scotland
HET	Historic Environment Team (Highland Council)
HMP	Habitat Management Plan
HWLDP	Highland Wide Local Development Plan
MW	Megawatt
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NS	NatureScot
NPPF4	National Planning Policy Framework 4
OWPS	Onshore Wind Policy Statement
PMP	Peat Management Plan
PWS	Private Water Supply
SEPA	Scottish Environment Protection Agency
SSER	SSE Renewables
S36	Section 36
S36C	Section 36C (Variation Application)
THC	The Highland Council
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN	United Nations
WQFMP	Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan

Terminology

- **The 'Consented Development'** - the 15-turbine Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension consent granted by the Scottish Ministers in August 2022.

- **The 'Varied Development'** - the variations to the Consented Development which will form the **Variation Application**.

- **The 'Development Site'** - the site of the Consented Development and the same site for the proposed Varied Development as defined by the red line boundary submitted for the planning application(s).

- **The 'Applicant'** - the applicant for the proposed Varied Development is SSE Renewables Ltd; this is the same applicant that sought and was granted the Section 36 consent for the Consented Development.

- **"Site Enabling Works"** – Defined within Annex 2, part 2 of the S36 consent decision notice (August 2022) and constructed in full in 2024.

- **The '2021 EIAR'** - the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension Environmental Impact Assessment Report that accompanied the Section 36 application for an 18-turbine proposed development that was located on the same site as the Consented Development.

- **The '2022 AIR'** – Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension Additional Information Report submitted in 2021 for an amendment to the (then) Proposed Development by way of the deletion of three turbines. The 15-turbine layout was subsequently consented in August 2022 (the Consented Development).

1. Introduction

1.1. The Project

1.1.1. Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension, the "Consented Development", comprises a total of 15 turbines with an expected installed capacity of 84 megawatts (MW) and is situated on Glenmoriston Estate, north-west of Invermoriston in the Great Glen.

1.1.2. SSE Renewables Ltd (hereafter 'the Applicant') submitted a Section 36 application for the Consented Development in August 2021 for 18 turbines. The application was accompanied by a full Environmental Impact Assessment Report (2021 EIAR). Following the South Area Planning committee in February 2022, the Highland Council offered no objection subject to removal of three eastern most turbines and subject to modified planning conditions. The Applicant submitted an Additional Information Report (2022 AIR) to the Scottish Ministers in March 2022 presenting a revised 15 turbine scheme and detailing the changes to the assessment following removal of the three turbines. Highland Council confirmed no objection in May 2022 and the Section 36 consent was granted on 30th August 2022 (Planning Ref: 21/04080/S36 and ECU Section 36 Ref: ECU00001900).

1.1.3. The Consented Development is immediately adjacent, to the east, of SSE's Operational Bhlaraidh Wind Farm, which was consented in 2014, constructed in 2017, and comprises 32 turbines with an installed capacity of 108 MW (Planning Ref: 12/02556/S36).

Consented Development Reference Information:

- Electronic copies of the Consented Development Environmental Impact Assessment Report (2021 EIAR) and the Additional Information Report (2022 AIR) are available on the ECU portal (case ref ECU00001900) and the SSE Renewables website here: https://www.sserenewables.com/onshore-wind/in-development/bhlaraidh-extension/

- **Figure 1.1** of the 2021 EIAR shows the site location: bhlaraidh-extension-eiar-volume-2-figure-1-1-site-location-plan.pdf

- **Figures 2.2 and 2.3** of the 2022 AIR shows the Consented Development site layout and the wider site layout with the adjacent Operational Development turbine locations. bhlaraidh-extension-air-figure-2-2-site-layout-plan-15-t-layout.pdf and bhlaraidh-extension-air-figure-2-3-wider-site-layout-plan-15-t-layout.pdf

1.1.4. The Applicant was fully committed to commencing construction of the Consented Development in early 2025, and to ensure on time delivery of the substation platform in accordance with the network providers requirements, had commenced and completed the Site Enabling Works civil works package in 2024. Various documents required to satisfy pre-commencement planning conditions for the Consented Development were also submitted and approved by Highland Council. Unfortunately, due to factors and challenges affecting the onshore wind industry, the project economics were considered unsuitable, and the project was put on hold.

1.1.5. After a detailed project feasibility review, the Applicant is now proposing to apply to vary the scheme by increasing the tip height of the turbines and other associated changes to infrastructure. The application will be made to vary the Description of Development provided in Annex 1 of the Section 36 consent.

1.1.6. The proposed variations to the Consented Development are detailed in **Section 2** of this Scoping Report and illustrated on:

- **Figure 1: S36C Scoping Report Proposed Varied Development Layout** (2025, Drawing LN000127-BHLX-SID-SK-0006-10).

1.1.7. In addition to seeking a variation to the Annex 1 Description of Development, the Applicant will request that conditions contained in Annex 2 of the current Section 36 Consent remain similar but are updated as appropriate to the varied development and its deemed planning permission.

1.1.8. The application to vary the Consented Development is to be made under Section 36C of the Electricity Act 1989, and The Electricity Generating Stations (Applications for Variation of Consent) (Scotland) Regulations 2013, together with a direction under Section 57 (2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. The application and proposals will also follow the Energy Consents "Applications for Variation of Section 36 Consents Guidance"[1].

1.1.9. The proposed varied scheme, and the application under Section 36C and Section 57(2), are hereinafter referred to as the "Varied Development" and the "Variation Application" respectively.

[1] "*Guidance Note: Applications for variation of section 36 consents guidance*", 20 May 2019, Energy and Climate Change Directorate. Web link accessed January 2025: Supporting documents - Energy consents: applications for variation of section 36 consents guidance - gov.scot

1.1.10. In accordance with Regulation 3(1)(c) of the 2013 Regulations, the reasons for seeking a variation to the S36 consent are as follows:

- The increase in tip height would substantially increase the energy yield from the Consented Development, thus improving the commercial viability of the project.

- The relocation and re-orientation of turbines and crane hardstands, along with minor track alignments will aim to reduce earthworks and result in associated environmental benefits.

- The Varied Development would make an even greater contribution to the achievement of legally binding UK and Scottish Government net-zero targets.

1.2. Scoping Report Objectives

1.2.1. This report is provided to the Energy Consents Unit (ECU) of the Scottish Government under Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations and is submitted to the Scottish Ministers as a formal request for a scoping opinion on the information to be provided within the EIAR which will accompany the S36C application.

1.2.2. For a variation application relating to an EIA development, the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations December 2017 require further assessment to consider the impacts of the variations rather than requiring the whole development to be assessed again. In considering the impacts of the variation, in accordance with Regulation 5(4), the EIA Report will consider the results identified in the 2021 EIAR and the 2022 AIR.

1.2.3. The objectives of this Scoping Report are therefore to:

- Define the Varied Development being considered (Chapter 0).

- Describe the approach to the EIA in relation to the proposed Varied Development and outline which features and impacts are to be scoped in or out of the EIA (Chapter 3).

- Describe the predicted environmental effects of the Varied Development (**Chapters 4 – 15)**, including the following information:

a) **Consented Development EIAR Baseline**
Summary of the predicted level of impacts in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR.

b) **Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions**
Summary of the consultation outcomes for the Consented Development application. Where relevant, this section also discusses how the planning conditions for the Consented Development have been addressed to date or will be taken into account for Varied Development.

c) **Issues scoped in / out**
Summary (presented in table or text format) of the issues proposed to be scoped into and out of the Varied Development EIA, including description of the anticipated potential effects, rationale for scoping in or out of the assessment, and where relevant a commentary on the changes to potential significant environmental effects resulting from the Proposed Varied Development (compared with the Consented Development).

d) **Assessment Methodology**
Description of the proposed methodologies that will be used to assess potential changes to impacts compared to the Consented Development.

e) **Mitigation Measures**
Approach to the identification of the mitigation measures that will be taken into account for the assessment of the residual effects.

f) **Summary and Conclusions**

g) **References** - list of references used to compile the scoping chapter.

1.3. Key Questions for Consultees

1.3.1. For each of the predicted effects associated with the Varied Development, responses to the following key questions are put to Consultees:

- Are Consultees content with the proposed baseline?
- Are Consultees content with the proposed approach to the evaluation and impact assessment methods?
- Can Consultees provide details of any recent records or projects within or in the vicinity of the site, which may not yet be in the public domain, and which may be pertinent to the assessment of impacts relating to the Proposed Varied Development?
- Are Consultees content with the effects that are proposed to be scoped out of the assessment?

1.4. Aims of the Scoping Report

1.4.1. The aims of the scoping exercise are to:

- Confirm with Scottish Ministers that the proposed changes to the consented scheme are of a nature and scale that a S36C is the appropriate application route.

- Seek agreement from Scottish Ministers and consultees on the likely significant effects associated with the proposed development and confirm that all likely significant effects have been correctly included in the proposed scope of the EIAR ('scoped in').

- Seek agreement where non-significant effects have been excluded ('scoped out').

- Invite comment on the proposed approach to baseline data collection, prediction of environmental effects and the assessment of significance.

- Obtain a scoping opinion which ensures that the future EIA report is effective, proportionate and minimises the burden of information provision where it is appropriate and possible to do so.

1.4.2. Unless consultees specifically request otherwise, all scoping responses and any other pre-application consultation will be collated and presented as a Technical Appendix to the EIAR.

2. Proposed Variation

2.1.1. The Development Site boundary of the Consented Development and the Varied Development are identical. There are some movements to turbine locations and associated realignment of tracks and hardstands to accommodate these movements and the larger turbines.

2.1.2. The proposed changes to the Consented Development are summarised in **Table 1** below and presented on **Figure 1: S36C Scoping Report Proposed Varied Development Layout** (2025, Drawing LN000127-BHLX-SID-SK-0006-10).

Table 1: S36c Proposed Variations

S36 Consent (Annex 1 Description of Development)	S36c Proposed Variations
15 turbines each with a maximum blade tip height of up to 180m	15 turbines each with a maximum blade tip height of up to 230m. While the overall layout of the scheme is not substantially changed, due to the increase in tip height and resultant change to wake zones and increased safety buffer for topple distance, some turbines have necessarily been repositioned.
Crane hardstandings for each turbine	The size of the hardstands has increased to reflect the proposed candidate turbine model. Some hardstands have also been repositioned /reorientated to improve and reduce earthworks requirements and in response to turbine repositioning.
Approximately 7.9km of new access tracks	No change. The realignment of tracks has balanced out and the same length of track is proposed for the Varied Development compared to the Consented Development. 1.4km of access track was constructed in 2024 as part of the Site Enabling Works.
Approximately 13.5km of existing access tracks	No change.
An onsite substation	No change. The substation platform has been constructed up to 275mm below final ground level (bFGL) as part of the Site Enabling Works in 2024. The final 275mm profile and construction of the substation building and associated infrastructure is still to occur as part of the main works.
Eight turning heads	Nine unloaded turning heads to accommodate turbine supplier delivery requirements for larger components. Removal of one loaded turning head.

S36 Consent (Annex 1 Description of Development)	S36c Proposed Variations
Up to 8 borrow pit search areas	Reduced to 7 borrow pit search areas. The consented borrow pit adjacent to T17 has been removed. Two borrow pits have been worked and reinstated during construction of the Enabling Works in 2024 and these borrow pits will not be reworked.
Two temporary construction compounds	No change
A single permanent LIDAR station	No change
A concrete batching plant	No change
6 new access track water crossings	No change. Varied Development proposes same 6No. major watercourse crossings and no new ones have been identified for the realigned tracks. One bridge crossing, to the west of T07 identified in the 2021 EIAR as WXC-01, has been constructed as part of the Site Enabling Works in 2024.
Two routes of cross-country cabling approximately 700m and 1200m in length.	Re-routed – although some realignment to connect to T15, the approx. length remains the same from the Consented vs Varied Development.
Enabling Works	No change – Enabling works were completed in 2024.

3. Approach to Assessment

3.1. Baseline

3.1.1. The variations to the Consented Development will likely relate to an increased rotor diameter and tip height of turbines, with resultant repositioning of some turbine locations, and required increases in hardstand sizes. The general arrangement of the site layout remains as close as possible to the consented layout and construction methodology and mitigation will remain as previously reported. While this will be reviewed as part of the comparative assessment, it is anticipated that the predicted levels of construction and decommissioning impacts will not change from those reported in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR.

3.1.2. While comparative assessments will be undertaken as required to demonstrate no change to the significance of previously reported predicted effects during construction and decommissioning, the EIA will focus primarily on any change to the significant effects likely to arise during the operation of the Varied Development, and specifically on the following main determining issues highlighted by Scottish Ministers in the Consented Development decision notice:

- the landscape and visual impacts and their cumulative effects including the effects of aviation lighting;
- the impact on designated sites and protected landscapes; and
- the extent to which the Proposed Development accords with and is supported by Scottish Government policy.

3.1.3. Existing survey data will be utilised for all topics 'scoped in' to the EIA Report as it is considered that all previous survey data collected remains valid. Baseline conditions will therefore be assumed to be as per the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR. This will allow a comparison of effects for the topics 'scoped in' to the EIA Report between the Consented and Varied Developments.

3.1.4. Where turbines or tracks have been repositioned or realigned, any survey data gaps will be considered accordingly and updated surveys completed as required to inform the updated assessment. Use of and validity of existing data is explained further under each individual topic in this report.

3.1.5. The cumulative baseline scenario would be reviewed for each topic and updated where necessary.

3.2. Approach to Assessment

3.2.1. The Consented Development was subject to a rigorous design process that aimed

to reduce potential effects on the environment as far as practicable. The layout revisions developed through the iterative EIA process considered potential effects on sensitive habitats, peat, ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems, protected species as well as potential landscape and visual effects before a final layout was determined. As such, many potentially significant environmental effects were avoided through the design process.

3.2.2. All sensitive receptors have been reviewed for all proposed variations and the EIA Report will provide an assessment of the effects of the Varied Development and for topics 'scoped in', a comparative assessment between the Consented Development and the Varied Development will be undertaken. The comparative assessment would consider the potential for any material change between the findings of the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR and the assessment of the Varied Development.

3.2.3. In line with standard practice, for the purpose of the EIA, other wind farm developments which are not already part of the baseline and are operational or subject to a full and validated planning application will be included in the consideration of potential cumulative effects (subject to a cut-off point to allow assessments to be undertaken).

3.2.4. To further prevent, reduce or offset potential effects, the mitigation measures specified within the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR will be reviewed in light of the Varied Development, but it is assumed that these will remain largely in their current form for inclusion within the EIA for the Varied Development.

3.3. Varied Development Proposed EIA Scope

3.3.1. **Table 2** lists each chapter of the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR for the Consented Development and opinion and justification on whether the topic will be scoped in or out of the S36C Variation Application.

Table 2: Proposed EIA structure and S36C Scoping Justification

EIAR Chapter	Scoped In	Scoped Out
Chapter 1: Introduction	Describes the planning history of the Consented Development and context of the S36C Varied Development application.	-
Chapter 2: Design Iterations and Proposed Development	Describes the proposed Varied Development, including details on design iterations and changes to infrastructure compared to the Consented Development.	-
Chapter 3: Approach to EIA	Describes comparative EIA methodology.	-

EIAR Chapter	Scoped In	Scoped Out
Chapter 4: Planning Policy	Updates planning policy context.	-
Chapter 5: Ecology	Habitats comparison review and comparative Habitat Loss Calculations.	Protected species - scoped out as no change or impact on new habitat that might affect species (terrestrial or aquatic). All previously agreed mitigation set out in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR, along with Species Protection Plans submitted and approved to satisfy pre-commencement planning conditions will remain unchanged.
Chapter 6: Ornithology	Change to turbine geometry requires updated collision risk model. This will be completed for all previously agreed and assessed Important Ornithological Features (IOFs)* and comparative EIA. *IOFs: red-throated diver, Slavonian grebe, black grouse, golden eagle, greenshank and golden plover.	Disturbance, displacement and habitat loss effects on ornithological receptors during construction, operation and decommissioning. As with protected species, no significant impacts were previously predicted following implementation of agreed mitigation and approved Breeding Bird Protection Plan. Any bird species previously scoped out / not on the list of IOFs.
Chapter 7: Archaeology and Cultural Heritage	Cultural Heritage Setting Due to increased turbine height and repositioning of some turbines, comparative visual assessments for operational effects associated with the potential for impacts upon the setting of designated heritage assets within the 5km and 10km study areas will be undertaken.	Direct impacts on archaeology or cultural heritage assets. No previous features were identified on site and no effects were predicted during construction, therefore assessment of the potential for physical impacts upon designated and non-designated heritage assets during construction will be scoped out.
Chapter 8: Landscape and Visual	Landscape character and visual amenity and wild land. A comparative EIA will be undertaken to assess changes in operational LVIA impacts as	As set out in Chapter 8, and summarised in Table 8.1 of this scoping report, assessment of the potential for changes to receptors where a material change is deemed unlikely will be scoped

EIAR Chapter	Scoped In	Scoped Out
	a result of increased tip height and changes to aviation lighting requirements. The assessment will include the effects on landscape character and visual amenity and wild land for the operational phase of the Proposed Varied Development.	out.
Chapter 9: Hydrology and Hydrogeology	Comparative assessment only to confirm no change.	Potential effects on aquifers, surface waters, water dependant habitats, such as GWDTEs, and water supplies. No previous significant effects were predicted and mitigation will remain as previously reported in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR and as agreed in post consent Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (WQFMP). Given the limited changes to layout, no encroachment on watercourse buffers and no new watercrossings, hydrogeological and hydrological impacts of the Proposed Varied Development are proposed to be scoped out.
Chapter 10: Geology and Soils	Comparative EIA required to confirm aggregate requirements and whether changes to size of hardstands, track re-alignments and reduction in borrow pits will alter the calculations and potential impacts associated with excavation and reuse of peat.	Impacts on geological designations and contaminated land assessment. Previously no effects or impacts predicted, therefore no change expected, and this will be scope out.
Chapter 11: Noise	-	Scoped out as no nearby receptors, no change to construction or operational impacts and no significant impacts previously assessed.

EIAR Chapter	Scoped In	Scoped Out
Chapter 12: Traffic and Transport	Updated assessment of delivery route required due to size and no. of turbine component deliveries.	-
Chapter 13: Socio-Economic, Tourism and Recreation	-	Scoped out as changes to the scheme will not result in any new adverse changes to previous impact assessment.
Chapter 14: Climate Change	-	Scoped out as increased energy yield will benefit previous assessment, therefore no negative change.
Chapter 15: Aviation and Radar	Revised radar, aviation safety and lighting assessment required due to increase in tip height and requirement for visible lighting scheme.	-
Other Issues: Forestry, telecoms, shadow flicker	Operators of telecommunication networks will be consulted with final proposed turbine locations to confirm that no impacts on telecommunication pathways or fixed links are anticipated.	Forestry and shadow flicker – previously scoped out of Consented Development EIA and no change expected as a result of Varied Development.

3.3.2. The following EIAR chapter structure is proposed for those topics ‘scoped in’ to the EIA:

a) Introduction.

b) Scope of assessment.

c) Consultations.

d) Assessment methodology.

e) Baseline.

f) Summary of effects predicted for Consented Development & mitigation measures.

g) Revised assessment of effects for Varied Development.

h) Revised mitigation measures for Varied Development.

i) Comparison of Varied Development effects with effects of Consented Development.

j) Conclusion.

4. Planning Policy

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. The EIAR accompanying the Varied Application will include a chapter which will identify the relevant energy and planning legislation and policy considerations relating to the Varied Development. A separate standalone Planning Statement will provide an assessment of the Varied Development's compliance with this legislation and policies.

4.1.2. The EIAR Planning Policy Chapter and the accompanying Planning Statement for the Variation Application will include the following:-

- a description of the consenting framework for a Section 36C application including legislation, the variation process, administration and planning permission
- a description of the fundamental and most relevant UK, Scottish Government and International Climate Change and Energy legislation and policies.
- a description of the Development Plan Policy Framework. It is important to note that for an application under the Electricity Act, the duty outlined in Section 25 of the Planning Act (to determine the application in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations suggest otherwise) does not apply. However, the development plan remains a material consideration.

4.1.3. The standalone Planning Statement will provide a full and robust assessment of the Varied Development's compliance with the referenced legislation and policies, and will demonstrate that the substantial increase to the energy yield from the Consented Development will make an even greater contribution to the achievement of legally binding UK and Scottish Government net-zero targets, thereby further enhancing the needs case as outlined in various national planning policy and guidance documents.

4.2. Climate Change, Energy Legislation & Policy

4.2.1. The EIAR Planning Policy Chapter and the accompanying Planning Statement will provide a commentary on the energy legislation and policy considered to be of most relevance to the Varied Development. This would not be an exhaustive list of policies and plans relevant to the subject area, only the most salient pieces of legislation and policies would be referenced.

4.2.2. The most relevant UK and Scottish Government Legislation, Policy statements and guidance on Climate Change and Energy are referenced within Table 3 below.

Table 3: Legislation & Policy

UK Legislation	Key Points
Climate Change Act 2008	The Legislation set legally binding targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Emission Reduction Targets were aimed at reducing emissions by 80% by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. The Committee on Climate Change established.
The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019	The 2008 Act was updated by the 2019 Amendment to increase the previous target of 80% reduction to net-zero by 2050.
Energy Act 2023	Support for UK commitment to Net Zero transition including acceleration of clean energy technology such as Carbon Capture and Hydrogen production.
Scottish Legislation	**Key Points**
The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009	Followed on from The Climate Change 2008 Act. Statutory targets for 80% reduction in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 (compared to 1990 levels). The Scottish Committee on Climate Change was established and annual targets to be set to ensure consistent progress.
Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act (2019)	The Act committed Scotland to achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045, making it one of the most ambitious targets globally as well as interim targets including 75% reduction in emissions by 2030. Annual reporting introduced and emphasis on “Just Transition”.
Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act (2024)	The Act abandons the interim emissions reduction targets due to acknowledgement of 75% reduction by 2030 as “being out of reach”. The system was replaced by five year carbon budgets which set the total of allowable GHGs for specific period up to achieving net zero by 2045
UK Energy Policy	**Key Points**
Climate Change Committee (CCC) - Progress in Reducing Emissions – 2024 Progress Report to Parliament (published July 2024)	The report provided a review of the UK’s progress in reducing GHG. Overall, the report showed mixed progress in different sectors and certain gaps in government policies. The report also stated that the UK was at risk of missing up and coming carbon budgets unless urgent action was taken to accelerate emissions reductions.

"Clean Power 2030 Action Plan; A new era of clean electricity", UK Government, Dec 2024	The plan outlines the UK's strategy to transition to a clean electricity system by 2030. In summary, it aims to do this via reduction of reliance on fossil fuels, by speeding up the adoption of clean, homegrown energy sources, supporting clean energy projects, and supporting infrastructure development to build and reform the electricity network.

Scottish Energy Policy	Key Points
Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS), Scottish Government, Dec 2022.	OWPS sets out the goals of achieving 20GW of onshore wind capacity by 2030. The statement clearly sets out that onshore wind will be a critical technology to help deliver the 2030 (now abandoned) and 2045 climate change targets. The OWPS states (in paragraph 3.6.2) that *'stronger weight'* is now to be given to the contribution of a development to the climate emergency in the planning balance, as well as community benefits. Critically, the OWPS does not just want developers to deliver onshore wind energy in isolation. Proposals need to maximise the economic, social and environmental benefits too, to help the just transition to a net zero society.
CCC – Progress in Reducing Emissions – 2023	The 2023 Report to the Scottish Parliament was published in March 2024. One of the key messages of the report is that Scotland missed the 2021 annual target of a 51.1% reduction in GHG emissions which is the eighth target Scotland has missed within the last 12 years. Secondly, the report noted that the acceleration required in emissions reduction to meet the 2030 target is 'now beyond what is credible'. The report also noted that 'current overall policies and plans in Scotland fall far short of what is needed' to achieve the legal emissions reduction targets.
Draft Energy & Just Transition Plan (2023)	Focuses on ensuring a fair and equitable shift to net zero economy and sets out the vision for this sustainable and equitable energy transition. Aims to increase renewable electricity generation capacity by 20GW by 2030, nearly doubling the current levels.
Report to Parliament (to Scotland 2025) Serving Scotland –	Outlines the Scottish Government's priorities and legislative plans for the year. Published on the 6th May 2025, two of the four key priorities are Growing the Economy and Tackling the

Programme for Government 2025-2026	Climate Emergency

4.2.3. The most relevant International Legislation and policy statements on Climate Change and Energy are referenced within Table 4 below.

Table 4: International Legislation and Policy - United Nations

United Nations	Key Points
The Paris Agreement 2015	The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international UN treaty on climate change, adopted in 2015 during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris. The Paris Agreement sets out the ambition of holding the increase of global average temperature to "well below 2°C" and pursuing efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C. The agreement requires that all 195 parties of the UN prepare, communicate and maintain Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) which outline what they intend to achieve and must be updated every 5 years.
United Nations (UN) Emissions Gap Report 2024 – No more hot air … please!	The report highlights the need for increased climate action. Report warns that current policies and NDCs insufficient and that the world is potentially on track for a temperature rise of 2.6 to 3.1 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Emission Reduction Targets to be aligned with the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal, and global emissions must be reduced by 42% by 2030 and 57% by 2035. The Nations must implement ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and deliver rapid emissions cuts through renewable energy, energy efficiency, and reforestation
COP 29 - The 29th **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (**UNFCCC) conference of the parties (COP29) – Baku – November 2024	COP 29 reinforced the urgency of global collaboration to address the climate crisis.

4.3. The Development Plan

4.3.1. As stated in paragraph 4.1.4, unlike planning applications determined under Section 25 of the Planning Act, the Development Plan does not have primacy under a Section 36C application. However, the Development Plan will still be a material consideration. The EIAR Energy and Planning Policy Chapter and the accompanying Planning Statement will describe the Development Plan Framework and reference the relevant polices as stated below. The accompanying Planning Statement will provide a full analysis of NPF4 and its impact since publication in 2023 and assess how the Varied Development complies with the policies and guidance contained within Development Plan.

4.3.2. The Statutory Development Plan relating to the propose comprises the following:-

- **National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) 2023**. The key NPF4 policy directly related to Renewable Energy is Policy 11. Other key policies include 1,3,4,5,6,7,13,14,20,22, 23,25, 26 & 29.

- **The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (adopted April 2012).** Key HwLDP policies will include Policies 57, 61 and 67. Other HwLDP policies that will be considered include policies 28, 30, 31, 36, 51, 52, 55, 56, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 66, 69 and 77.

- **Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2) (Adopted July 2024.** Key policies to include Policy 1, 2, 3, 9, 14.

4.4. Summary

4.4.1. The relevant planning policy, renewable energy and electricity targets and emissions reduction which would be secured by the Proposed Varied Development both in terms of the Scottish targets and the UK targets will be described in the EIA Report.

5. Ecology (non-avian)

5.1. EIAR Baseline

5.1.1. Baseline Data

5.1.2. An extended Phase 1 habitat survey, an NVC habitat survey, fish population and a suite of protected mammal surveys were undertaken on the site in 2019 and 2020 and included in the full ecological assessment completed for the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR for the Consented Development application.

5.1.3. To incorporate mitigation described in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR, and to satisfy pre-commencement planning conditions ahead of construction, the Highland Council confirmed acceptance of the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) submitted in relation to Planning Condition 13 for the Consented Development. The CEMP included the following approved appendices: Species Protection Plan, Breeding Bird Protection Plan, and Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan. The following surveys have been completed in accordance with these approved plans:

- Environmental Clerk of Works (ECoW) pre-works protected plants and species checks during Ground Investigation (GI) works July to August 2022.
- Pre-construction (baseline) water quality monitoring July 2022 to September 2023 and construction phase water quality monitoring during Site Enabling Works October 2023 to July 2024.
- Baseline (pre-construction) fish population surveys in September 2022.
- Prior to Site Enabling Works, ECoW pre-construction surveys for protected plants (dwarf birch and juniper) and mammals in May 2023 and ECoW supervision during main works Ground Investigations in June 2023.
- Peatland, UKHab and habitat condition assessment (HCA) survey in July 2023.
- Pre-works checks and ECoW presence on site during the Site Enabling Works, full time between September 2023 and January 2024, and part time February 2024 to August 2024.

5.1.4. During GI and Site Enabling Works, the ECoW undertook pre-works checks for protected plants and species (including nesting birds and mammals), noted other incidental sightings of scarce birds or breeding activity and monitored compliance with the approved CEMP, including species and habitat protection plans and the peat management plan.

5.1.5. To provide up to date field survey data to inform the HMP development, the peatland survey in 2023 was undertaken in conjunction with a UKHab and habitat condition

assessment (HCA) survey by a soil scientist with a PhD in Peatland Management, an ecologist, suitability experienced in UKHab surveys, and an associate member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and an ecologist suitability experienced in ornithology, also a member of CIEEM.

5.1.6. It is considered that the validity and extent of the available data is sufficient, and no further habitat or species surveys are required to inform the comparative assessment of the proposed Varied Development vs the Consented Development.

5.1.7. **Baseline Assessment**

5.1.8. Chapter 5 of the 2021 EIA Report provides an Ecological Impact Assessment (ECiA) and considers the potential impacts and their resulting effects on ecological features, such as designated nature conservation sites, habitats and protected species in line with best practice guidance. The predicted effects are summarised below.

Designated Sites

5.1.9. No statutory designated nature conservation sites for ecological features occur within the Proposed Development boundary. Only the following designated sites were taken forward for ECiA:

- The River Moriston SAC is located 18m from the site entrance and temporary construction compound. Due to the separation and the nature of the work in the vicinity of the SAC, the 2021 EIAR considered that pollution would have a low magnitude and short-term impact and the effect is **not significant**.

- Levishie Wood SSSI is located 1.4km to the south and construction may lead to the localised, short-term and temporary displacement of red deer during construction towards the SSSI, potentially causing damage to the qualifying birch-juniper woodland interests. Following implementation of the Deer Management Plan, the effects are **not significant**.

Habitats

5.1.10. Without consideration of mitigation, the permanent loss or degradation of blanket bog will result in an adverse effect on a feature of regional importance. Although, this would be a low magnitude adverse impact that would still leave functioning habitat, much of the blanket bog in the field study area and surrounding area is of poorer quality, therefore further loss or degradation of good quality blanket bog is considered to be significant. However, following implementation of proposed mitigation (including reinstatement work) and habitat management as described within the HMP (including restoring a larger area of blanket bog than the area lost), the residual adverse effects are anticipated for the medium-term (approximately ten to 15 years), to be **not significant**.

5.1.11. Seven potential areas of GWDTEs were recorded and it was concluded that these are not a significant constraint as they are unlikely to be groundwater dependent in the setting of the Site. Two small areas of M11 *Carex demissa-Saxifraga aizoides* mire were identified and although these are considered to be locally unusual wetland habitats, it is concluded that these are unlikely to be groundwater dependant in this setting and any effects are considered to be **not significant**. Regardless, the M11 areas were identified as a constraint within the CEMP and mitigation proposed.

5.1.12. Juniper was identified on the edge of the existing Livishie Hydro track to be upgraded and is likely to be lost or damaged as a result of the Proposed Development, although, with several other records present throughout the field study area, the effect is considered to be **not significant**. Regardless, requirements for juniper encountered during any pre-works checks was included within the CEMP and successful transplantation of juniper was undertaken during the Site Enabling Works and therefore this is considered to be a suitable mitigation measure that would be taken forward to the Varied Development.

5.1.13. Overall, with the completion of the mitigation and good practice measures detailed in the 2021 EIAR, whereby the most ecologically valuable and sensitive habitats have been avoided and measures to reduce impacts on all other habitats of higher value and sensitivity have been employed, the effects on habitats are considered to be **not significant**.

Protected Species

5.1.14. Protected species surveys identified the presence of two terrestrial mammal species at the site: otter and water vole. With the completion of mitigation and good practice measures, the residual effects on these protected species are considered to be **not significant**.

5.1.15. Five bat species were identified: common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat, Daubenton's bat and Natterer's bat. Effects on bats were predicted as **not significant**.

5.1.16. Fish studies identified that brown trout and three-spined stickleback are likely to be the only native fish species present in the field study area, with common minnow likely introduced by anglers. Residual effects are predicted to be **not significant** following the implementation of proposed mitigation.

5.2. Consultation Summary & Planning Conditions

5.2.1. NatureScot, Scottish Forestry and the Highland Council's Forestry Team did not raise any concerns in relation to impacts on Levishie Wood SSSI. While NatureScot raised concerns about impacts on the River Moriston SAC, they did not object subject to imposition of conditions. The Scottish Ministers concluded that, "*subject to the mitigation measures identified in Chapter 16 (Schedule of Environmental Commitments) in Volume 1 of the EIA report, secured through the imposition of conditions attached to the planning permission at Annex 2, the Proposed Development will not, either alone or in combination with other*

Developments, adversely affect the integrity of any qualifying interest of any [ ] designated sites".[2]

5.2.2. All ecological mitigation proposed within the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR, and informed by updated survey data post consent, was incorporated into the following plans approved by The Highland Council and relevant consultees to satisfy pre-commencement planning conditions:

- Deer Management Plan (DMP), which included measures to address potential significant impacts on Levishie Wood, such as monitoring and removal of deer fencing around established native woodland (Planning Condition 20).

- Habitat Management Plan (HMP): in relation to impacts on carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat, NatureScot welcomed the commitment to an HMP and approved the developed HMP prior to commencement of Site Enabling Works (Planning Condition 18).

- Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) which included Species Protection Plan and Breeding Bird Protection Plan appendices (Planning Condition 13).

- Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (WQFMP) (Planning Condition 29).

5.3. Ecological Effects Scoped In

5.3.1. The proposed variations will alter land take figures due to the realignment of some sections of access track, increase in size of hardstands associated with the increased turbine height, and removal of a borrow pit.

5.3.2. The assessment will be undertaken of the effects of any changes to land take (whether increased or decreased) on peatland habitats and areas of M11 mire present within the site boundary. The assessment will utilise existing baseline National Vegetation Classification (NVC), peatland condition and peat depth survey data and will refer to the approved HMP (including Biogenic Carbon and Biodiversity Net Gain Reports) and the CEMP.

5.4. Ecological Effects Scoped Out

5.4.1. Habitats that occur in the field study area that are unlikely to be impacted due to their distance from the development area include coniferous woodland plantation, mixed woodland plantation, dry heath, marshy grassland and bare/disturbed ground. These habitats

[2] S36 Decision Notice: "Consent Under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 And Deemed Planning Permission Under Section 57(2) of the Town And Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997fFor the Construction and Operation of Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension in The Highland Council Planning Authority Area", Energy Consents Unit, 30 August 2022.

were scoped out of the 2021 EIAR and proposed to be scoped out of the Varied Development EIAR.

5.4.2. It is considered that the construction impacts from displacement of deer and potential significant impacts on the Levishie Wood SSSI will remain the same and therefore the mitigation proposed and agreed within the CEMP, WQFMP, DMP and HMP will also remain. The impacts on the River Moriston SAC and Levishie Wood are proposed to be scoped out of the comparative Varied Development EIA.

5.4.3. The field study area does not contain habitats suitable to support badger or red squirrel and no records of these species were made during field surveys. Similarly, no records of wildcat or pine marten were recorded and the habitats in the field study area are of low suitability. These species were previously scoped out and will not be considered further in the comparative assessment for the proposed Varied Development.

5.4.4. Although present on the Site, no significant impacts are predicted to otters, water voles or bats. No change to habitats or distribution of these protected species is expected or has been reported during any post consent ECoW surveys undertaken since the application for the Consented Development was made. Variations to the development will not alter the likelihood and magnitude of any impacts and all previously approved mitigation will remain as previously described. On this basis it is proposed that comparative assessment of protected species will be scoped out.

5.4.5. No significant effects are predicted on watercourses following the application of standard mitigation measures, therefore freshwater invertebrates, previously scoped out of the 2021 EIAR, are proposed to be also scoped out of the comparative assessment for the Varied Development.

5.4.6. Freshwater pearl mussels are a qualifying feature of the River Moriston SAC. No significant impacts were predicted in the 2021 EIAR, there will be no change to the scale and location of works in the vicinity of the SAC, and all other mitigation measures detailed within the 2021 EIAR, 2022 AIR and approved CEMP would be expected to be replicated during the construction and operation of the Varied Development. On this basis, impacts on the River Moriston SAC and it's qualifying features will be scoped out of the Varied Development comparative assessment.

5.4.7. Surveys of invertebrates were considered unnecessary and these were scoped out for the Consented Development as the EcIA adopts a precautionary approach and includes appropriate mitigation, where required, to avoid significant effects.

5.5. Proposed Assessment Methodology

5.5.1. An assessment will be undertaken of the effects of potential changes to land take on sensitive peatland and M11 habitats present within the site boundary. Updated habitat loss calculations for the Varied Development vs the Consented Development will be provided and the impact assessment updated accordingly following the standard CIEEM (2018) guidance for Ecological Impact Assessment.

5.5.2. The assessment will utilise existing baseline data, namely: peatland condition assessment, Phase 1 habitat and National Vegetation Classification (NVC) surveys completed in June 2019, alongside the results of peat probing surveys completed in September 2020 and ground investigation data from 2024.

5.6. Mitigation Measures

5.6.1. All mitigation measures presented in the 2021 EIAR (summarised in 2021 EIAR Chapter 16), and subsequent documents submitted to satisfy pre-commencement planning conditions relating to peatland and M11 habitats, such as the CEMP, HMP and Peat Management Plan, will be reviewed to determine their applicability in light of the Varied Development assessment.

5.7. Summary and Conclusions

5.7.1. Considering the previous consultation and findings of the Scottish Ministers in determining the Consented Development, it is considered that the only alteration relevant to key ecological receptors is the potential impacts on habitats, namely priority peatland and potentially areas of sensitive wetland habitats (M11), as a result of the repositioning of some turbines and associated realignment of access tracks and hardstands.

5.7.2. However, the impacts on these habitats, and the habitat loss calculations for the Varied Development are considered unlikely to be significantly greater than the Consented Development and therefore no change to the significance of effects to these receptors is expected from the proposed variations. This is because the revised layout has been optimised following detailed ground investigation and engineering design to minimise earthworks, remove unnecessary infrastructure (e.g. a borrow pit) and avoid sensitive habitats wherever possible.

5.7.3. Following implementation of agreed mitigation, it is concluded that there would be no alterations to all other previously predicted non-significant impacts as described in the 2021 EAIR and 2022 AIR on other ecological receptors (excluding those habitats mentioned above). Therefore, the effects on all other habitats and ecological species receptors (including bats, otters, watervoles, pine martens, wildcats and badgers and aquatic species) are scoped out.

5.7.4. Similarly, no significant effects are predicted on the qualifying interests of the River Moriston SAC and an appropriate assessment is not considered to be required for the proposed Varied Development application.

6. Ornithology

6.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

6.1.1. There are no statutory nature conservation designations with an ornithological interest within the site. Table 6.6 of the 2021 EIAR details the designated sites located within 20km of the Proposed Development Site that have ornithological interests, with locations shown on 2021 EIAR Figure 6.3.

6.1.2. Previously 'scoped-in' IOFs of Medium or High nature conservation importance that are known to be present within the Site or surrounding area (as confirmed through survey results and consultations) comprise: red-throated diver, Slavonian grebe, black grouse, golden eagle, greenshank and golden plover.

6.1.3. In addition, all SSSIs and Ramsar sites within 20km that have Slavonian grebe as a qualifying feature were scoped-in to the assessment, based on consultation requests by NatureScot, RSPB and Highland Council. These are:

- Knockie Lochs SSSI;
- Dubh Lochs SSSI;
- Balnagrantach SSSI;
- Glendoe Lochans SSSI; and
- Loch Ruthven SSSI and Ramsar site.

6.1.4. SPAs where Slavonian grebe is a qualifying feature were considered separately as part of the HRA process (2021 EIAR Appendix 6.4). These are:

- Loch Knockie and Nearby Lochs SPA;
- North Inverness Lochs SPA;
- Glen Affric to Strathconon SPA;
- West Inverness-shire Lochs SPA; and
- Loch Ruthven SPA.

6.1.5. The 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR assessments conclude that unmitigated likely effects of construction disturbance or displacement on each of the identified IOFs is considered to be not significant. For each IOF, it is concluded that there would be no predicted

significant unmitigated effects, when considered at a population level.

6.1.6. No adverse effects were identified on the integrity of any SPA due to the presence of the Proposed Development, either alone or in-combination with other projects.

6.1.7. For all IOFs, predicted effects were considered to be negligible or minor adverse and therefore not significant, when mitigation measures are applied. This includes any predicted effects on scoped-in nationally designated sites with Slavonian grebe as a qualifying interest, specifically Knockie Lochs SSSI, Dubh Lochs SSSI, Balnagrantach SSSI, Glendoe Lochans SSSI, and Loch Ruthven SSSI and Ramsar site.

6.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

6.2.1. During the pre-application EIA process for the Consented Development, NatureScot, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Scotland and The Highland Council provided comment relating to ornithological matters. NatureScot was presented with further information on confidential data, and planned scope of surveys and assessment in November 2019, and provided further comment in January 2020. A further consultation letter describing survey effort in 2020 was provided in December 2020, with a response from NatureScot in January 2021. IOFs were agreed and taken forward for assessment following this consultation for the Consented Development.

6.2.2. Following Appropriate Assessments, NatureScot concluded that the Proposed Development “will not adversely affect the integrity” of the Loch Ruthven SPA, North Inverness Lochs SPA and Loch Knockie and Nearby Lochs SPA.

6.2.3. Despite the non-significant unmitigated effects associated with the Proposed Development for all IOFs, planning conditions 13 and 18 require commitment to ornithological receptors.

6.2.4. A Breeding Bird Protection Plan (BBPP) was submitted and approved in 2024 as Appendix 7 of the CEMP to satisfy Condition 13 for the Consented Development.

6.2.5. A final HMP for the Consented Development was also submitted and approved in 2024 by Highland Council and NatureScot to satisfy Planning Condition 18. This contains measures committed to by the Applicant to ensure the delivery of biodiversity enhancement, which include an emphasis on habitat enhancements for black grouse and golden eagle and installation of an artificial nesting raft for divers, as well as engagement with the Regional Eagle Conservation Management Plan and operational monitoring.

6.3. Issues scoped in / out

6.3.1. Due to the changes proposed to turbine geometry, it is proposed that updated collision risk modelling is **scoped in** for all IOFs.

6.3.2. Assessment of displacement and disturbance impacts from construction activities

will be **scoped out**. This is because: no previously significant impacts were predicted; construction activities will not change significantly from the methodology presented and assessed as part of the Consented Development application; and the Applicant is committed to delivering added safeguards through implementation of approved mitigation.

6.3.3. An assessment of lighting effects on ornithology was not undertaken in the original assessment as no visible lights were required on the Consented Development. While the proposed increase in turbine height for the Varied Development will exceed the required limit for visible aviation lighting, based on the Proposed Varied Development not meeting any of the following criteria, as defined in Annex 2 of NatureScot's guidance[3], this is not considered to be required and will be **scoped out**:

1. Turbines are not on or adjacent to a seabird colony that hosts the burrow nesting species, Manx shearwater, European storm petrel, Leach's storm petrel and Atlantic puffin;

2. Wind turbines are not on or adjacent to protected areas that host large concentrations of wintering waterbirds, where such sites are located within open country away from other sources of artificial light; and

3. The wind farm is not located on migratory corridors or bottlenecks for nocturnally migrating passerines.

6.4. Assessment Methodology

6.4.1. In line with guidance provided by NatureScot[4] regarding changes to turbine tip heights (*extract provided below in italics*), it is proposed to only present updated collision risk modelling using the two years of baseline flight activity gathered between October 2018 and August 2020 (presented in 2021 EIAR, Chapter 6). The assessment will also provide a review of any potential changes to the cumulative collision risk assessment (to that provided in the original assessment).

> **"*Proposals to alter turbine dimensions***
>
> *For section 36C proposals to alter (i.e. typically increase) turbine dimensions there are two key issues to consider – birds and landscape.*
>
> *For birds, in the majority of cases where the number and location of turbines are not changing, all that will be needed is a re-working of the collision risk model, rather than new survey work. Revised collision risk calculations should be presented in the EIA report and, where appropriate, in combination with other wind farm developments. Seek specialist bird*

[3] General pre-application and scoping advice for onshore wind farms.pdf, NatureScot, Sept 2020.

[4] Guidance on dealing with proposals for the variation of section 36 wind farm consents | NatureScot, 2025 (last updated:01/01/2024).

advice if there are any complications such as when existing flight data only includes flights between the upper and lower limits of the previously proposed risk window, or flight data has been collected in a way that lumps it together above and below the previously proposed risk window, or if there are changes to the number and location of turbines.

6.4.2. The updated Collision Risk Model will follow the same methodology as used for the 2021 EIAR (Band *et al.* (2007[5]), as recommended by NatureScot) and will include a review / inclusion of any potential updates to published collision avoidance rates. 2021 EIAR Technical Appendix 6.1, Annex E provides details of the methods used.

6.4.3. In line with the guidance provided by NatureScot regarding the data on which a Section 36C assessment should be based, it is proposed to undertake the revised assessment using only the baseline data gathered for the original consent. This data was gathered under current NatureScot baseline wind farm survey methodology (SNH 2017[6]) between October 2018 and August 2020 and there is considered to have been no substantive changes at the site since these surveys with the habitats on site continuing to be open upland moorland with land management practices also unchanged.

6.5. Mitigation Measures

6.5.1. Construction

6.5.2. All mitigation and enhancement measures outlined in the 2021 EIAR, translated post-consent and post updated surveys into the approved Breeding Bird Protection Plan (BBPP) submitted as Appendix 7 of the CEMP to satisfy Condition 13 for the Consented Development, remain committed to by the Applicant, despite the non-significant unmitigated effects associated with the Proposed Development for all IOFs. Mitigation measures identified for specific species are summarised as follows:

Slavonian Grebe

6.5.3. Previously the borrow pit associated with T17 was identified as the closest infrastructure to the nearest Slavonian grebe breeding loch (located 1.1km to the east). Evidence presented in the EIA Report suggests that at this distance, Slavonian grebes are unlikely to be disturbed by construction activities. Nevertheless, breeding Slavonian grebe would fall under the remit of the Breeding Bird Protection Plan (BBPP) and pre- and during-construction checks will be carried out by the Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) or an ornithologist, who would ensure that no breeding attempts are disturbed. It is noted that this borrow pit is proposed to be removed from the Varied Development, thereby potentially reducing further any likelihood of disturbance.

[5] Band, W.; Madders, M.; Whitfield, D. (2007). Developing Field and Analytical Methods to Assess Avian Collision Risk at Wind Farms In Birds

[6] Scottish Natural Heritage (2017). Recommended Bird Survey Methods to inform impact assessment of Onshore Windfarms. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/recommended-bird-survey-methods-inform-impact-assessment-onshore-windfarms

Black Grouse

6.5.4. Four Black Grouse lek sites were recorded during baseline surveys, three are located to the south of the main Site (refer to EIA Report Figure 6.6) and although it is concluded unlikely that leks would be affected by construction activities, mitigation measures are included within the remit of the approved BBPP and pre- and during-construction checks by the ECoW or an ornithologist would also apply.

6.5.5. **Operations – HMP Commitments**

6.5.6. The approved HMP (submitted to satisfy Planning Condition 18) contains the following aims and objectives, complete with operational phase monitoring, in relation to ornithological features:

- Aim 3: To detail locations and planting requirements for Caledonian woodland and montane scrub creation.

  - Objective 3: To enhance biodiversity in the wider area, and specifically provide suitable habitat for black grouse, whilst maintaining areas of open ground for golden eagle. The woodland planting includes species which will provide a food source for black grouse and will be done appropriately to maintain areas of open ground for golden eagle foraging.

- Aim 4: To detail the location and specification for the installation of an artificial nesting raft for divers.

  - Objective 4: To increase availability of nesting sites for black throated diver. The artificial rafts would help combat any potential impacts and provide a more secure nesting site for one or more diver species.

6.6. Summary and Conclusions

6.6.1. The 2021 EIAR (Chapter 6) assessed construction disturbance, displacement and collision risk and concluded that, following the implementation of mitigation, no significant residual effects are predicted to any ornithological features. This was re-evaluated for the 15 turbine Consented Development in the 2022 AIR and a similar conclusion was reached. Due to changes proposed to turbine geometry (height and associated rotor diameter changes), the Varied Development may alter collision risk modelling and therefore the predicted impacts on key IOFs will be reviewed.

7. Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

7.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

7.1.1. Chapter 7 of the 2021 EIAR, and Chapter 7 of the AIR established the historic environment baseline for the site and assessed the potential setting effects on the cultural heritage receptors which might result from the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Consented Development.

7.1.2. Assessment for the potential for direct effects upon archaeological remains during the construction phase were scoped out with the agreement of The Highland Council Historic Environment Team (THC HET).

7.1.3. The potential for settings effects on heritage assets resulting from the operation of the Proposed Development were assessed on designated heritage assets within the 5km and 10km study areas, and Urquhart Castle within 15km. The assessment concluded:

7.1.4. Minor and not significant adverse effects have been predicted upon the setting of Levishie Cottage fort (Site 2), Dell Farm burial mounds (Site 3), Gazebo, Invermoriston (Site 17) and Urquhart Castle (Site 25).

- Negligible and not significant effects have been predicted upon the setting of the barracks and servant's tunnel, Invermoriston (Site 15); Burial Ground, Invermoriston (Site 20); and the shooting box and bothy, Loch Ashlaich (Site 23).

- Neutral and not significant effects have been predicted upon the setting of the old bridge at Whitebridge (Site 9); Torgoyle Bridge (Site 12); the Cottage and Pottery Studio, Invermoriston (Site 16); Church of Scotland, Invermoriston (Site 19); Old Bridge, Invermoriston (Site 21); and the road bridge, Invermoriston (Site 22).

7.1.5. The possibility of cumulative effects was also considered and assessed and no significant cumulative effects were identified.

7.1.6. In summary, no significant effects were predicted on archaeological or cultural heritage assets.

7.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

HES and Highland Council Historic Environment Team provided consultation responses on the previous application for the Consented Development. A summary of the responses is provided as follows:

Historic Environment Scotland (HES)

7.2.1. HES provided pre-application advice for the Consented Development in June 2019

when they recommended that the potential impacts on Levishie Cottage, fort and earthwork 1050m NE of (SM 4567) and Urquhart Castle (SM90309) should be assessed as part of the EIA process and that visualisations should be provided to support the assessment conclusions.

7.2.2. In their response to the Consented Development's Scoping Report in August 2019, HES confirmed that the scope of the proposed assessment was appropriate for their historic environment interests. It was also confirmed that, at that stage, no additional heritage assets had been identified for assessment. A detailed ZTV would assist in identifying any further assets likely to receive impacts on their setting.

7.2.3. HES were consulted directly regarding proposed viewpoints for assessment of impacts upon cultural heritage receptors. In September 2020, HES confirmed they would welcome a wireline from Levishie Cottage (Site 2). With regard to Urquhart Castle (Site 25) they noted that viewpoint on the eastern/southern side of the Loch Ness may be sufficient approximation to assess the potential impact upon the castle but also recommended consideration be given producing a viewpoint from the centre of the loch to approximate views which would be obtainable from cruise boats.

7.2.4. In their response to the Gatecheck Report in November 2020, HES reiterated their recommendation that a viewpoint from the loch be considered and also requested a viewpoint taken from the north of Urquhart Castle which would include both the castle and the Proposed Development. Following further direct consultation HES confirmed, on in February 2021, that LVIA Viewpoint 4, would satisfy their request for a viewpoint taken from the north side of the loch and incorporating Urquhart Castle. In March 2021 HES agreed that a wireline from Loch Ness, on the approximate route of the Jacobite Cruise ships, would be sufficient to assess the potential impacts upon the setting of Urquhart Castle, along with the LVIA viewpoints noted here.

Highland Council Historic Environment Team (HET)

7.2.5. In their response to the Scoping Report HET noted the requirement to identify all designated assets with the potential to be affected directly or indirectly by the Proposed Development. They noted that the assessment should contain a full appreciation of the setting of the assets and the likely impact on their settings.

7.2.6. Direct consultation was undertaken with HET regarding the need to consider the potential for direct effects upon heritage assets as part of the EIAR and the need to carry out a walkover survey on the Site. HET responded in April 2020, confirming that direct effects could be scoped out of the EIAR and that a walkover survey was not required to inform the assessment. Direct consultation was undertaken with HET on the visualisations proposed to support the EIAR. HET did not respond to this consultation.

Post Consent Consultation

7.2.7. HES did not object to the Proposed Development on the basis that it would not have any "direct physical effects" on any assets within their remit. HES also advised that

they are “content” that the Proposed Development “would not affect the integrity of the setting of scheduled monuments in the surrounding area”. HES also advised that they are “satisfied” that the Proposed Development “would not raise issues of national interest for our remit”. HES maintained this position in their response to the Additional Information consultation.

7.2.8. HET response stated that they are satisfied that direct impacts have been designed out” and “the potential for unrecorded buried remains to survive is not such that mitigation is recommended in this case”.

Planning Conditions.

7.2.9. No planning conditions were imposed in relation to archaeological or cultural heritage assets.

7.3. Issues scoped in / out

7.3.1. There have been no changes to the on-site baseline since the previous assessment; however, the cumulative wind farm context may have changed and therefore this will be **scoped in** (reviewed and re-assessed as appropriate).

7.3.2. Indirect setting effects on cultural heritage assets will be **scoped in** and reassessed due to the proposed increase in tip height of the turbines and also the requirement for aviation lighting. This will include a review of setting effects on all cultural heritage sites identified in Table 7.7 of Chapter 7 of the 2021 EIAR.

7.3.3. There were no previous direct impacts to cultural heritage assets as a result of the proposed development’s infrastructure, and as this baseline remains the same, direct effects will be **scoped out**.

7.4. Assessment Methodology

7.4.1. All assets previously identified where there may be an impact upon setting will be taken forward for comparative reassessment, the first stage of which will be to assess and identify those sites where there is a change in visibility as a result of the higher turbines. This will be guided by the Proposed Varied Development’s ZTV (refer to Chapter 8: Landscape and Visual Assessment, of this Scoping Report). Where visibility and potential changes to the significance of effects are identified, the effects shall be reassessed using the same assessment methodology as that previously employed for the Consented Development.

7.4.2. To support the assessment of the potential for effects upon setting, figures and wirelines will be updated specifically for the cultural heritage assessment as per the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR, including:

Figure No.	Title / Description
Figure 7.1	Designated Heritage Assets within Study Areas & Urquhart Castle
Figure 7.2	Designated Heritage Assets within Study Areas & Urquhart Castle with ZTV
Figure 7.3	Cultural Heritage Viewpoint Locations
Figure 7.4 a-c	Cultural Heritage Viewpoint 1 - Cumulative Wireline from Levishie Cottage (Site 2)
Figure 7.5	Cultural Heritage Viewpoint 1 – Wireline from Levishie Cottage (Site 2)
Figure 7.6	Cultural Heritage Viewpoint 2 - Cumulative Wireline from Loch Ness approximating views from the Loch towards Urquhart Castle (Site 25)
Figure 7.7	Cultural Heritage Viewpoint 2 - Wireline from Loch Ness approximating views from the Loch towards Urquhart Castle (Site 25)

7.5. Mitigation Measures

7.5.1. No specific mitigation is required for direct disturbance effects on archaeological and cultural heritage features. This is supported by the HET consultation response on the Consented Development that mitigation not required in this case, and no planning conditions were imposed on the Consented Development with regards mitigation.

7.5.2. Effects due to visual impacts on setting will be addressed through mitigation by design as far as is reasonably practical.

7.6. Summary and Conclusions

7.6.1. No significant effects were previously identified for the Consented Development, for either direct impacts or effects on setting of cultural heritage sites, including cumulative effects. As there are no identified archaeological or cultural heritage factors within the site boundary, there will be no change to the baseline in relation to direct effects, therefore these will not be reassessed.

7.6.2. Higher turbines may result in changes to visibility of turbines from some sites and therefore effects will be reviewed and reassessed as part of the Varied Development EIAR. This will include indirect setting effects and cumulative effects.

8. Landscape and Visual

8.1. Introduction

8.1.1. The following chapter presents the proposed approach to the assessment of potential effects of the Varied Development on landscape and visual receptors.

8.1.2. A landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) was previously undertaken for the Consented Development by ASH design + assessment Ltd (ASH). The LVIA undertaken as part of the 2021 EIAR assessed a layout consisting of 18 turbines with a maximum tip height of 180m. The consultation response received from The Highland Council (THC) in February 2022 raised no objection to the application subject to the removal of three turbines (T13, T14 and T18). An Additional Information Report (AIR) for the 15 turbine layout was submitted in March 2022, and consent was granted in August 2022.

8.1.3. The LVIA for the Varied Development Application will consider the potential for material changes to the impacts identified for the Consented Development as a result of the Varied Development, assessing a layout consisting of 15 turbines with a maximum tip height of 230m.

8.2. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

8.2.1. **Assessment Summary of 2021 EIAR**

8.2.2. The assessment undertaken as part of the 2021 EIAR assessed the 18 turbine layout with a maximum tip height of 180m. The scope of the LVIA was agreed in detail with both NS and THC.

8.2.3. The 2022 AIR provided an assessment of how the landscape and visual effects arising from the Consented Development compared with those described for the 18 turbine 2021 EIAR Layout.

8.2.4. The following subsections summarise the findings of the LVIAs presented in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR.

Landscape Character and Designated and Protected Landscapes

8.2.5. The 2021 EIAR assessment of potential landscape effects considered Landscape Character Types (LCTs) identified by NatureScot[7]. No significant landscape effects were

[7] Scottish Natural Heritage (2019). SNH National Landscape Character Assessment. Available at https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions. Accessed February 2025

identified to any of these LCTs. Some localised minor-moderate (not significant) effects were identified within LCT 222: Rocky Moorland Plateau – Inverness during construction and operation as a result of the introduction of the 2021 EIAR Layout within this LCT. Anticipated effects on other LCTs within the study area ranged from Negligible to Minor.

8.2.6. The 2021 EIAR assessment of potential landscape effects also considered designated and protected landscapes, including National Scenic Areas (NSAs), Wild Land Areas (WLAs) and Special Landscape Areas (SLAs). The following designated and protected landscapes within the study area were included within the assessment:

- Glen Affric NSA;
- WLA 19: Braeroy – Glenshirra – Creag Meagaidh;
- WLA 24: Central Highlands;
- Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA; and
- Strathconon and Mullardoch SLA.

8.2.7. No significant landscape effects were identified for any of these areas as a result of the 2021 EIAR Layout. This was largely due to the location of the 2021 EIAR Layout adjacent to the Operational Development and context of other existing wind developments in the landscape which provide a precedent in most areas for the types of effects which would be experienced. A number of other designated and protected landscapes within the study area were scoped out of the assessment as significant effects were considered unlikely.

8.2.8. It was not considered that there would be any changes to landscape effects or cumulative landscape effects from the Consented Development in comparison to the 18 turbine layout assessed in the 2021 EIAR, since it would occupy a similar footprint and have a similar scale and appearance within the wider landscape.

Visual Amenity

8.2.9. The assessment of potential visual effects for the 2021 EIAR considered views from visual receptors at 26 representative viewpoints, and from residential areas, and on transport and recreational routes within 25km of the Development Site. No significant visual effects were identified for the majority of receptors. However, significant visual effects were found for small number of receptors within a localised area within 9-11km of the 2021 EIAR Layout, on the eastern side of Loch Ness in the Stratherrick area, on / near the B862 road, (VP 5 ‘Suidhe Viewpoint, B862’, VP 7 ‘B862 south of Foyers’, and from a small number of properties in the vicinity of VP 7 (localised within residential grouping ‘R13’)).

8.2.10. The 2022 AIR concluded that for the 26 viewpoints assessed, the removal of T13, T14 and T18 would result in very few perceptible changes. For receptors at VP 6 (Summit by Suidhe Viewpoint, B862), the visual effect would change from Minor-Moderate to Minor (both not significant), but for all receptors at all other VPs, the visual effect would not change from the 2021 EIAR. For settlement and route options, the 15 turbine Consented Development would lead to a reduction in the number of visible turbines seen from some settlement and route based receptors, but would not result in changes to any of the effect ratings.

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

8.2.11. A CLVIA was included in the 2021 EIAR assessment. The CLVIA considered two cumulative baseline scenarios (reflecting the situation as of 30th March 2021, as agreed with consultees). Scenario 1 comprised agreed operational / under construction and consented sites; while Scenario 2 comprised agreed operational / under construction, consented and application / appeal sites.

8.2.12. For both scenarios, the 2021 EIAR CLVIA found that there would be no significant cumulative landscape effects and that significant cumulative visual effects would be limited to receptors at VP 7 'B862 south of Foyers' and a small number of receptors in the vicinity (localised within residential grouping 'R13').

8.2.13. The 2022 AIR concluded that for receptors at VP 6 (Summit by Suidhe Viewpoint, B862), the removal of T13, T14 and T18 would result in a reduction of cumulative visual effects to Minor, compared to the Minor-Moderate cumulative visual effect identified in the 2021 EIAR.

8.2.14. As no other changes to visual effects ratings were anticipated (non-cumulative) for receptors at VPs, it also concluded that there would be no other changes to cumulative visual effects reported in the 2021 EIAR. As the Consented Development would continue to have a similar presence within the view from all VPs, it was not considered that there would be any change to how this would be perceived within the cumulative baseline.

8.3. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

8.3.1. In response to the consultation for the 2021 EIAR 18 turbine layout, NatureScot expressed concern about three views; from the promoted Suidhe viewpoint on the B862; from Meall Fuar-mhonaidh; and from the B862 south of Foyers and from nearby settlement. However, they "*agree[d] with the findings of the LVIA that this proposal would incur no significant effects on landscape character and on valued landscapes*." In their response to the 2021 AIR for the Consented Development they note that the removal of 3 turbines would slightly improve the design of the wind farm from most VPs and result in a more balanced composition, as well as removing outlying turbines in views from some VPs.

8.3.2. The Highland Council stated in their response to the 2021 EIAR consultation that "*On balance, and subject to the removal of turbines 13, 14 and 18, it is considered that*

the landscape and visual impact of the scheme can be seen as acceptable". In response to the 2022 AIR for the Consented Development, they considered that as a result of the removal of the three turbines, impacts would be "*reduced from VPs, by improving the overall composition through horizontal containment, removing the most prominent/ perceptible turbines and reduced stacking or density of turbines*".

8.3.3. In the decision letter Scottish Ministers conclude that "*having considered the EIA report [2021 EIAR], the Additional Information [2022 AIR], the consultation responses and the representations, the Scottish Ministers are satisfied that whilst there are landscape and visual impacts, these are tolerable when weighed against the benefits of the Proposed Development*."

8.3.4. The feedback given on the Consented Development has been carefully considered and informed the design chill (scoping design) for the Varied Development.

8.4. Study Area

8.4.1. A study area of 45km from the Development Site is proposed in line with current guidance for turbines with a maximum tip height of over 150m (SNH, 2017d, p12). This is the study area which was used for the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR and is still considered to be the maximum distance within which any significant landscape or visual effects may be experienced. The initial ZTV which has been run for the Varied Development indicates a limited increase in the extent of theoretical visibility compared to the Consented Development (see Figure 8.1). For the 2021 EIAR a smaller study area of 25km (the detailed study area) was defined for a more targeted and fine-grained assessment following initial review and site appraisal. It is still anticipated that the majority of significant effects would be most likely to occur within this area and it is proposed a detailed study area of 25km be used for the Varied Development.

8.5. Issues scoped in / out

Landscape Assessment

8.5.1. No significant impacts on landscape character were identified within the 2021 EIAR. A localised Minor-Moderate effect was identified within LCT 222: Rocky Moorland Plateau – Inverness, within which the majority of the Varied Development would be located. All other effects were assessed as ranging between Negligible and Minor, with most of the Minor effects being localised.

8.5.2. The assessment of the Varied Development will consider effects within LCT 222, as it is considered that any changes in effect with the potential to result in significant effects would be limited to this LCT. This will include assessment of the direct effect of potential physical change to landscape elements and experiential effects on the character of the Development Site and surrounding areas. The LVIA will include an update on any changes to the baseline context compared to the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR.

8.5.3. No significant impacts to designated and protected landscapes were identified

within the 2021 EIAR or 2022 AIR. The following table sets out which designated and protected landscapes have been scoped in and out of the S36C LVIA and the reasoning behind this.

Table 8.1: Designated and protected landscapes to be included within assessment

Designated / Protected Landscape	Inclusion in assessment	Effect rating (during operation) in 2021 EIAR	Reasoning
Glen Affric NSA	Yes	Negligible (not significant)	The 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR concluded that effects on the Glen Affric NSA would be negligible. While the indicative ZTV for the Varied Development does not indicate a substantial increase in the extent of theoretical visibility and there is considered to be low potential for significant effects overall, the potential requirement for turbine lighting may result in some new effects on this designated landscape.
WLA 19: Braeroy – Glenshirra – Creag Meagaidh	Yes	Locally Minor Adverse (not significant) within a very localised area of the WLA on the summits and facing slopes of mountains within 22km, Negligible elsewhere	Some localised minor effects were identified within this WLA on summits and facing slopes within 22km. Elsewhere within this WLA effects were considered to be Negligible. While the indicative ZTV for the Varied Development does not indicate a substantial increase in the extent of theoretical visibility and there is considered to be low potential for significant effects overall, the potential requirement for turbine lighting may result in some new effects on this designated landscape.
WLA 24: Central Highlands	Yes	Locally Minor Adverse (not significant) within localised areas north of Glen Cannich, Negligible elsewhere	Some localised minor effects were identified within this WLA, north of Glen Cannich. Elsewhere within this WLA effects were considered to be Negligible. While the indicative ZTV for the Varied Development does not indicate a substantial increase in the extent of theoretical visibility and there is considered to be low potential for

Designated / Protected Landscape	Inclusion in assessment	Effect rating (during operation) in 2021 EIAR	Reasoning
			significant effects overall, the potential requirement for turbine lighting may result in some new effects on this designated landscape.
Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA	Yes	Locally Minor Adverse (not significant) within open elevated areas of the SLA, Negligible elsewhere	Some localised minor effects were identified within this SLA, for open elevated areas. While the indicative ZTV for the Varied Development does not indicate a substantial increase in the extent of theoretical visibility, the increased height of the turbines may result in the Varied Development appearing more prominent within parts of this landscape.
Strathconon and Mullardoch SLA	No	Locally Negligible-Minor (not significant) for elevated eastern areas of the SLA and Negligible elsewhere	A localised negligible-minor effect was identified for the Consented Development for elevated eastern areas. The indicative ZTV for the Varied Development does not indicate a substantial increase in the extent of theoretical visibility, and it is unlikely that this would materially increase the effects.

Visual Assessment

8.5.4. The visual assessment for the Varied Development will consider the potential for material changes to the effects on visual amenity within the study area to those identified for the Consented Development. The visual assessment for the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR included a series of 26 viewpoints (VPs) which were selected in consultation with NatureScot and The Highland Council (THC). It is proposed to include 10 out of these 26 VPs within the visual assessment for the Varied Development. This includes VPs where significant ratings or ratings of Minor-Moderate were previously identified, as well as other locations where the indicative ZTV and indicative comparative wirelines indicate potential for a material increase to effects in comparison with the Consented Development.

8.5.5. The list of VPs proposed to be used in the assessment of the Varied Development are detailed in Table 8.2 below and illustrated on Figure 8.1.

Table 8.2: Proposed Viewpoint List

VP	Name	OS Grid Reference	Effect rating (during operation) in 2021 EIAR	Inclusion in assessment
1	Track to Loch Liath	235061, 818397	Minor (not significant)	Yes
2	Old Bridge, Invermoriston	241975, 816565	Minor (not significant)	Yes
3	Meall Fuar-mhonaidh	245699, 822202	Minor-Moderate (not significant)	Yes
4	Achtuie Road near Creag Nay	252144, 830624	Negligible-minor (not significant)	No
5	Suidhe Viewpoint, B862	244964, 810542	Moderate (significant)	Yes
6	Summit by Suidhe Viewpoint, B862	244256 810363	Minor-Moderate (not significant)	Yes
7	B862 south of Foyers	249743, 817317	Moderate (significant)	Yes
8	Lochside picnic layby on B852	258073, 832121	Negligible (not significant)	No
9	Carn na Saobhaidhe	259879, 814376	Negligible-minor (not significant)	No
10	Great Glen Way near Carn a' Bhodaich	256110, 839075	Minor (not significant)	No
11	Meall Mor,	224901,	Negligible-minor (not	No

VP	Name	OS Grid Reference	Effect rating (during operation) in 2021 EIAR	Inclusion in assessment
	Glen Affric	828054	significant)	
12	Creag Dhubh	222752, 821610	Negligible (not significant)	No
13	Sgùrr nan Conbhairean	212993, 813884	Negligible (not significant)	No
14	Meall Dubh	224543, 807880	Negligible-minor (not significant)	No
15	Poll-gormack Hill	239054, 797974	Minor (not significant)	Yes
16	Geal Charn	256145, 798766	Negligible (not significant)	No
17	B862 south of Dores	259368, 832474	Minor-Moderate (not significant)	Yes
18	Track near Dun Fhamhair fort	247262, 846684	Negligible-minor (not significant)	No
19	Path north of Loch Affric	214810, 822924	Negligible (not significant)	No
20	Path north of Affric Lodge	218283, 823945	Negligible (not significant)	No
21	Toll Creagach	219449, 828285	Negligible-minor (not significant)	Yes

VP	Name	OS Grid Reference	Effect rating (during operation) in 2021 EIAR	Inclusion in assessment
22	Sgurr na Ruaidhe	228902, 842603	Negligible-minor (not significant)	No
23	An Cabar (Ben Wyvis)	245032, 866581	Negligible (not significant)	No
24	NCN1 Between Dingwall and Evanton	256730, 861462	Negligible (not significant)	No
25	Minor road near Tore	261234, 853906	Negligible (not significant)	No
26	VP26 A87 Bun Loyne	221488, 809497	Minor (not significant)	Yes

8.5.6. In addition to the VP based assessment, a more targeted assessment of potential visual receptors was undertaken for the Consented Development in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR, considering views from routes within the wider study area, including public roads, core paths and other established recreational routes, and views from settlements and residential areas within the detailed study area. Some locally significant (Moderate Adverse) effects were identified in the visual assessment to residential receptors within receptor grouping R13 which included a range of properties on or in the vicinity of the B862 minor public road in the area near Whitebridge, as well as to two route route-based receptors; The Great Glen Way and Core Path IN12.04, from which localised Minor-Moderate (not significant) effects were identified for the Consented Development. Outside of this, most effects identified within the visual assessment of the Consented Development ranged between Negligible and Minor. The assessment of the Varied Development will focus on those receptors where impacts of Minor-Moderate or higher were identified for the Consented Development, as this is considered to capture any potential receptors which may experience a material change to effects on visual amenity as a result of the Varied Development.

Visualisations

8.5.7. The visual assessment will be supported by a series of photomontages and wireframes from the VP locations proposed in Table 8.2. Visualisations from these VPs

will be prepared in accordance with best practice guidance (SNH, 2017) using the baseline photography included in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR assessments. In addition, a separate set of visualisations produced to meet THC's (2016a) standards will be provided.

Night-time Assessment

8.5.8. For the Consented Development it was agreed with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) that there would be no requirement for visible aviation lights on the Consented Development turbines. Instead, infra-red lights to Ministry of Defence (MoD) specifications would be installed on the nacelles of perimeter turbines. A night-time assessment was therefore not required. However, due to the increased height of the Varied Development turbines, further consultation with CAA will be undertaken to establish the requirements for turbine lighting.

8.5.9. An assessment of night-time impacts on landscape and visual receptors will be carried out. Supporting figures and visualisations will include: ZTV illustrating the theoretical visibility of the lighting proposed, and two photomontages from viewpoints likely to be used at night. Old Bridge, Invermoriston (VP2) and Suidhe Viewpoint, B862 (VP5) are proposed to be used for the nigh-time visualisations, to be agreed with The Highland Council and NS.

Cumulative Assessment

8.5.10. In line with SNH guidance 'Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments' (SNH, 2012) the assessment of the Varied Development will consider other wind farms within the LVIA study area including those which are operational, consented and those for which an application has been submitted but which are yet to be determined. The LVIA will include an update to the cumulative baseline assessed in the 2021 EIAR and 2022 AIR, including any changes in the status of the other wind farm developments within the study area. Table 8.3 includes the cumulative sites which are proposed to be included within the cumulative assessment. This is based on the THC Wind Turbine dataset, which was updated in December 2024. We ask THC to advise of any wind developments in the area which are not included in the list below and which would need to be considered as part of the CLVIA.

Table 8.3: Cumulative sites proposed to be included within the LVIA

Site Name
Operational / Under Construction
Aberarder Wind Farm
Beinneun Wind Farm
Beinneun Wind Farm Extension

Site Name
Bhlaraidh Wind Farm
Coire na Cloiche Wind Farm
Corriegarth Wind Farm
Corriemoillie Wind Farm
Corrimony Wind Farm
Dunmaglass Wind Farm
Fairburn Wind Farm
Farr Wind Farm
Glen Kyllachy Wind Farm
Lochluichart Wind Farm and Extension
Millennium Wind Farm
Moy Wind Farm
Novar Wind Farm
Novar Wind Farm Extension
Stronelairg Wind Farm
Tom nan Clach Wind Farm
Consented
Bunloinn Wind Farm
Cloiche Wind Farm
Cairn Duhie Wind Farm
Dell Wind Farm
Lochluichart Wind Farm Extension 2
Kirkan Wind Farm

Site Name
Strathrory Wind Farm (redesign)
Tom nan Clach Wind Farm Extension
Application / Appeal
Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm
Chrathaic Wind Farm
Corriegarth 2 Wind Farm
Culachy Wind Farm
Dell 2 Redesign Wind Farm
Loch Liath Wind Farm
Tomchrasky Wind Farm

8.6. Assessment Methodology

8.6.1. The LVIA for the Varied Development will be undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance, Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition) (The Landscape Institute and Institute for Environmental Management and Assessment, 2013) (GLVIA3). This will separately address the potential effects of the Varied Development on the landscape resource and visual receptors within the agreed study area.

8.6.2. The LVIA will evaluate the sensitivity to change, magnitude and significance of effect for all landscape and visual receptors during operation. The assessment of operational effects will assume the implementation of any mitigation measures proposed. The assessment will focus on those receptors where potential changes in effects would be most likely to result in additional or increased significant effects compared with those identified for the Consented Development.

8.6.3. Potential effects will be presented as ratings of Negligible, Minor, Moderate and Major, taking into account sensitivity and magnitude ratings and on the basis of professional judgement. Where appropriate, interim ratings will be allocated (e.g. Minor to Moderate or Moderate to Major). Effects identified as being at a level of Moderate or greater are considered significant in accordance with the EIA Regulations.

8.7. Mitigation Measures

8.7.1. An iterative design process was undertaken for the Consented Development to reduce potential significant effects on the landscape and visual resource where possible. The siting and design of turbines and associated tracks and other infrastructure resulted from a constraints exercise which included consideration of potential impacts from an LVIA perspective, and was also influenced by national and local policy and/or guidance from NatureScot, THC and other consultees, including the Siting and Designing Windfarms in the Landscape (SNH, 2017). Further design refinement has been undertaken for the Varied Development in light of the height increase.

8.7.2. The potential for mitigation measures relating to visible aviation lighting will be explored in consultation with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

8.8. Summary and Conclusions

8.8.1. The LVIA for the Varied Development will separately address the potential effects on the landscape resource and visual receptors within the agreed study area, focusing on those landscape and visual receptors for which significant effects were previously identified for the Consented Development, or where there is considered to be potential for impacts to increase to significant levels. This includes receptors for which a rating of Minor-Moderate was previously identified. The initial ZTV which has been run for the Varied Development does not indicate a substantial increase in the extent of theoretical visibility, although due to their increased height the turbines would appear more prominent within some areas.

8.8.2. The landscape assessment will focus on potential effects within LCT 222: Rocky Moorland Plateau – Inverness, within which the Varied Development turbines would be located. It will also consider potential effects to the Glen Affric NSA, WLA 19: Braeroy – Glenshirra – Creag Meagaidh, WLA 24: Central Highlands and the Loch Ness and Duntelchaig SLA.

8.8.3. A 45 km study area is still considered appropriate for the Varied Development. Upon reviewing the findings of the 2021 EIAR and the 2022 AIR, 10 viewpoints have been identified for inclusion in the assessment of the Varied Development, for which visualisations will be prepared in accordance with best practice guidance to meet SNH and THC standards. Due to the increased height of the turbines which will necessitate aviation lighting, an assessment of night-time impacts on landscape and visual receptors will be carried out. This will be supported by night-time visualisations from two VPs; Old Bridge, Invermoriston (VP2) and Suidhe Viewpoint, B862 (VP5).

8.8.4. A CLVIA will be included within the assessment, which will include any updates to the cumulative baseline assessed in 2021.

8.9. References

Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013). Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition.

Scottish Natural Heritage (2019). SNH National Landscape Character Assessment. Available at https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions. Accessed February 2025

Scottish Natural Heritage (2017a). Visual Representation of Wind Farms, Guidance, Version 2.2, February 2017.

The Highland Council (2016a). Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments, July 2016

9. Hydrology and Hydrogeology

9.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

9.1.1. Chapter 9 of the 2021 EIAR (and 2022 AIR) presents: the baseline conditions; identifies potential alteration of run-off rates and volumes of surface water, sediment regime and water quality of the surface water environment; identifies the aspects of the Proposed Development which may affect the hydrogeology; and assesses the effects on surface water, groundwater levels, groundwater flows, groundwater quality, groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTE) and Private Water Supplies (PWS).

9.1.2. An updated Watercourse Crossing Schedule was prepared for the Consented Development (refer to 2022 AIR Appendix 9.1). A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) was also undertaken (refer to 2021 EIAR Appendix 9.2).

Designated Sites

9.1.3. The River Moriston is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated SAC primarily as it as it supports a functional freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*) population. There are no other environmental designations within or immediately out with the Site that require assessment in this chapter.

Hydrology

9.1.4. The Site features numerous watercourses and water bodies draining two catchments: Allt Saigh catchment and the Allt Bhlaraidh catchment which connects to the River Moriston catchment (refer to 2021 EIAR, Figure 9.2). The main watercourses within the study area are classed by SEPA as heavily modified water bodies (HMWB), influenced mainly by infrastructure of the Livishie hydro-electric scheme (refer to 2021 EIAR Figure 1.2). The overall sensitivity of baseline hydrological resources is considered to be high, reflecting the Good classification of the Allt Saigh, Loch a'Chrathaich and the River Moriston and considering the River Moriston is a SAC. The Allt Bhlaraidh is currently recorded as having a Bad classification due to water levels and flows.

9.1.5. The construction compound at the site entrance, utilised during construction of the Operational Development, is located within the catchment of the River Moriston. The temporary construction compound, site of the former batching plant for the Operational Development, is located within the Allt Bhlaraidh catchment. The access tracks via the existing wind farm track are located within each of the above discussed catchments (Allt Saigh catchment, River Moriston catchment and the Allt Bhlaraidh catchment). Some localised widening of bends and extension of culverts may be required to facilitate delivery of larger turbine components for the proposed Varied Development, however, no major works are required on these tracks. All turbines and associated infrastructure are located within the Allt Saigh catchment (refer to 2021 EIAR Figure 9.2). This remains unchanged for the proposed Varied Development.

Hydrogeology

9.1.6. Shallow peat (generally <1m) and superficial cover is absent across the majority of the Site and bedrock is at or close to the surface (bedrock outcrops are widespread). This is confirmed by the 1:50,000 BGS Superficial Geology Map, site reconnaissance survey work undertaken for the Consented Development application, Stage 1 and Stage 2 peat probing surveys (refer to Chapter 10 (Geology and Soils)), ground investigations undertaken in 2024 and conditions reported during the construction of the Site Enabling Works in 2024.

9.1.7. Peat would be expected to have low permeability and inhibit groundwater flow. The solid geology underlying the Site is all recorded as low productivity aquifer with small amounts of groundwater in near surface weathered zones and secondary fractures. Any groundwater within peat or other localised superficial deposits is unlikely to be in hydrological connectivity with deeper groundwater.

9.1.8. The overall sensitivity of groundwater resources at the Site is considered to be low, reflecting the limited superficial cover which is unlikely to be in hydrological continuity with the deeper groundwater and the low productivity bedrock aquifer. It is noted that this groundwater is within a groundwater drinking water protection zone. There is no expected change to this baseline for the Varied Development.

GWDTE

9.1.9. Potential M15 (M15 and M15a, b, c and d) and M25a GWDTE habitats were identified based on NVC and Phase 1 habitat mapping (refer to 2021 EAIR Chapter 5), and the majority of infrastructure is situated on M15c. It was agreed with SEPA that these habitats are unlikely to be groundwater fed and are instead fed by surface water run-off and incident rainfall. NVC mapping also identified two small areas of M11 (*Carex demissa-Saxifraga* aizoides mire) – classed as potentially highly groundwater dependent. While it is recognised as an unusual wetland habitat, it is considered that these are not dependent on groundwater in this setting.

9.1.10. It is considered that all potential GWDTEs at the Proposed Development are not dependent on groundwater and instead are fed by surface water run-off and incident rainfall and there is no change to this baseline for the Varied Development.

Public and Private Water Supplies (PWS)

9.1.11. Seven PWSs were identified (refer to 2021 EIAR (Table 9.6 and Figure 9.7)). These comprise a mixture of groundwater and surface abstracted water supplies. The

overall sensitivity of PWS is considered to be low / negligible.

9.1.12. An updated PWS risk assessment (PWSRA) was completed in 2024[8] which identified two PWSs, Bhlariadh Wind Farm PWS and Briarbank PWS, that are assigned a Low risk (No measurable impact on receptor is predicted) and protection through the implementation of a programme of water level and quality monitoring, which supplement the embedded mitigation measures set out in the CEMP has been approved. No changes to this baseline are expected for the Varied Development.

Flooding

9.1.13. The flood risk assessment conducted as part of the 2021 EIAR considered risks to the River Moriston SAC, local surface water environment (including all watercourses considered to have a high sensitivity), groundwater (with respect to superficial deposits and bedrock geology) and Private Water Supplies (with respect to locations sourced from surface waters). The Site's risk to flooding has been designated to be low to negligible risk and this is not expected to change as a result of the proposed variations.

Watercourse Crossings

9.1.14. There are 6 No. major watercourse crossings and several additional crossings originating from minor watercourses (not shown on OS mapping) and discrete watershed pathways which are common in upland areas. The Watercourse Crossing Schedule presented in 2022 AIR (Appendix 9.1) describes the solution for each crossing included in the Consented Development. One bridge crossing, to the west of T07 identified in the 2021 EIAR as WXC-01, has been constructed as part of the Site Enabling Works in 2024.

9.1.15. All major crossings remain unchanged for the Varied Development.

Baseline Summary

9.1.16. Potential effects on hydrological and hydrogeological receptors have been assessed as negligible to minor adverse and **not significant**. The significance of residual effects on hydrological and hydrogeological receptors is considered to be negligible to minor adverse and **not significant**.

9.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

9.2.1. Consultation was undertaken with Scottish Water, SEPA and THC at the Scoping stage following initial consultation with THC during the Pre-Application process for the Consented Development. Further consultation was undertaken pre-application with SEPA in December 2020 regarding watercourses and potential GWDTE (refer to 2021 EIAR

[8] Natural Power (2024) Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm: Private Water Supply Risk Assessment

Appendix 3.5) and confirming a detailed qualitative GWDTE assessment was not required. Despite acknowledgement of non-GWDTE status, SEPA requested areas of M11 are warranted specific protection.

9.2.2. SEPA raised no objection to the S36 application, subject to conditions, and stated "*All new watercourse crossings shall be designed following the recommendations in the Watercourse Crossing Schedule (Appendix 9.1) with single span bridges designed to pass the 1 in 200 year flood plus an allowance for climate built for WXC01, 07 and 08. All existing watercourse crossings which require to be replaced shall be designed following recognised best practice guidance".*

9.2.3. Conditions imposed through the S36 consent in relation to hydrology and hydrogeology include requirement to provide a construction environmental management plan (CEMP), Watercourse Crossing Design and Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (WQFMP). Documents to satisfy these conditions were approved in 2024 by SEPA and the Highland Council and it is expected that all control and mitigation measures proposed therein will translate to the Varied Development.

9.3. Issues scoped in / out

9.3.1. As all infrastructure changes proposed for the Varied Development are situated outwith watercourse buffers and there is no change to construction methodology or embedded mitigation it is proposed that effects on all hydrological and hydrogeological receptors are **scoped out**.

9.3.2. The Varied Development EIAR will however provide a comparative review of the changes and include updated figures including detail on: hydrological overview; watercourse buffers and catchments; watercourse crossings and private water supplies.

9.4. Mitigation Measures

9.4.1. All previously applied buffers surrounding watercourses and waterbodies have been applied for the proposed Varied layout. All embedded mitigation, as set out in the EIAR for the Consented Development and presented in documents submitted to satisfy pre-commencement planning conditions will be implemented for the Varied Development. This includes the CEMP and the Water Quality and Fish Monitoring Plan (WQFMP) which includes a PWS monitoring plan.

9.5. Summary and Conclusions

9.5.1. No previously significant impacts were identified on hydrology or hydrogeological features for the Consented Development. This is expected to remain unchanged for the Varied Development and therefore the assessment of effects will be scoped out. The Varied Development EIAR will contain a chapter reflecting this and provide evidence in the form of updated figures as required to support this.

10. Geology and Soils

10.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

10.1.1. Bedrock across the Site is at shallow depth and comprises psammite with micaceous layers and calc-silicate pods of the Upper Garry Psammite Formation in the west of the Site (also known as Tarvie Psammite Formation), and psammite and semipelite of the Achnaconeran Striped Formation in the east of the Site.

10.1.2. Two phases of peat depth probing surveys were completed between July 2019 and September 2020. Ground investigations were undertaken in 2022, to inform detailed design of the Site Enabling Works and in 2023 to inform detailed design of the main works. Peat deposits are present across the majority of the Site, with 92% of peat probe depths reported as <1m. The proposed Varied Development layout has also considered all peat depth data and this baseline is considered likely to remain unchanged, however where there may be insufficient peat depth data at locations of repositioned infrastructure, further peat surveys will be undertaken.

10.1.3. The risk of peat slide events occurring were found to be Very Low to Low, with localised areas of the Site indicated to have a Medium risk. The results of the peat slide risk assessment informed the layout design for both the Consented Development and the proposed Varied Development layout and all areas of medium risk have been avoided.

10.1.4. A Borrow Pit Appraisal Report (2021 EIAR Appendix 10.1) was completed for the Proposed Development and included assessment of eight potential borrow pit areas identified at the Site, including three existing borrow pits utilised during the construction of the existing hydro scheme access road in the south of the Site. The assessment indicated that sufficient rock will be available on Site for use during construction of the Proposed Development. During Enabling Works bedrock encountered at or near the surface was utilised for track construction, thereby reducing the amount of borrow pit working required. While hardstands and turbines foundations will increase to accommodate the higher turbines, the length of track and all other infrastructure changes will remain approximately the same. It is therefore considered that despite proposed removal of one borrow pit search area for the Varied Development application there will remain sufficient rock on site for use during construction.

10.1.5. The 2021 EIAR evaluated the effect to Geology and Soils and, with the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures, all residual effects on peat, peat stability, soil and underlying geology would be negligible, i.e. **not significant** in terms of the EIA Regulations.

10.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

10.2.1. In their scoping opinion on the Consented Development, SEPA requested that the Applicant "*clearly demonstrate that suitable steps have been taken in the layout design to minimise peat disturbance". "We will expect it to be demonstrated that the supporting*

infrastructure is minimised as much as possible. We would hope to see compound areas, laydown areas and borrow pits from the existing site re-use to minimise overall environmental disturbance". In further pre-application consultation in 2020, SEPA stated that "*peat on this site is generally shallow and avoiding deep peat is not a significant issue for this site*".

10.2.2. In their application consultation response, SEPA confirmed they had no objection to the application subject to conditions relating to: provision of finalised Peat Management Plan (PMP); *implementation* of design changes and further actions identified in the Peatland Condition Assessment; and limiting micrositing onto deeper peat or high quality habitat.

10.2.3. A Stage 2 Peat Management Plan was approved by SEPA to satisfy pre-commencement planning condition 17 in 2024 and, taking into account all available data, concluded that all peat at the site is capable of reuse and there would be no surplus. Measures to reduce impacts on peatland habitats as identified in the peatland condition assessment were addressed as part of the final HMP submitted to satisfy planning condition 18.

10.2.4. Planning Condition 19 requires approval of a "*scheme for the working and restoration of [the/each] borrow pit*". The Applicant expects this condition would be retained for any new consent for the Varied Development and the updated borrow pit working schemes would be provided for those borrow pits included in the Varied Development application.

10.3. Issues scoped in / out

10.3.1. As the Varied Development design layout has been informed by detailed ground investigation data and is considered to be optimised from a civil design perspective, it is considered that the variations will not alter the baseline. The Applicant would request similar conditions to those attached to the S36 to be applied to any new S36C consent. This would ensure all residual effects on peat, peat stability, soil and underlying geology would still be negligible and remain not-significant. An assessment of effects on soils and geology, including a Borrow Pit Assessment and Peat Slide Risk Assessment, are therefore **scoped out.**

10.3.2. Due to the increased turbine height, the extent of the turbine foundations and hardstandings for the proposed Varied Development are anticipated to increase. Therefore, it is expected that the amount of peat excavations required will also increase and it is proposed that an updated PMP is prepared (**scoped in**).

10.4. Assessment Methodology

10.4.1. An updated Peat management Plan will be provided to demonstrate any comparative changes between the peat volume calculations presented for the Consented Development vs the Varied Development. This will be based on extensive existing peat depth data, supplemented, where required, with additional peat probing to be undertaken

at locations where insufficient data exists.

10.5. Mitigation Measures

10.5.1. The Applicant would adhere to all mitigation previously agreed for the Consented Development and would request similar conditions to those attached to the S36 to be applied to any new S36C consent. This would ensure all residual effects on peat, peat stability, soil and underlying geology would still be negligible and remain not-significant.

10.6. Summary and Conclusions

10.6.1. With the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures, all residual effects on peat, peat stability, soil and underlying geology would be negligible, i.e. **not significant** in terms of the EIA Regulations. This is expected to remain the same for the Varied Development, and therefore these effects will be scoped out.

10.6.2. Changes to peat volume calculations as a result of the increase in hardstand and turbine foundations and re-positioned infrastructure will be assessed via an updated PMP.

11. Noise

11.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

11.1.1. A noise assessment was undertaken to evaluate the potential operational noise impacts of the Consented Development and concluded that residual effects of operational noise would not be significant.

11.1.2. Background noise monitoring was carried out at two locations and analysed alongside on-site wind speed data to derive noise limits in accordance with ETSU-R-97 and the IOA Good Practice Guide. Where background monitoring was not conducted, the simplified ETSU-R-97 method was applied. Three representative Noise Assessment Locations (NALs) were selected for the assessment. The assessment was carried out in three stages:

- Setting Total Noise Limits (TNL) for all wind farms in the area
- Predicting cumulative noise impacts from the development
- Deriving Site Specific Noise Limits (SSNL) for the consented development, based on the proportion of the TNL used by other wind farms

11.1.3. The assessment found that cumulative noise from the Consented Development, combined with nearby wind farms, did not exceed the TNL at any NAL. SSNLs were derived by subtracting predicted noise from other developments from the TNL, ensuring the consented development's specific contribution could be clearly defined, measured, and enforced.

11.1.4. A representative noise assessment was conducted using the Vestas V150 5.6MW turbine. Predicted operational noise levels from the consented development met the SSNL at all NALs. Although the final turbine model would be selected through a competitive tendering process, it would be required to comply with the established SSNLs.

11.1.5. Due to the separation distances between the NALs and construction activities, a construction noise assessment was not required. Nevertheless, a range of good practice measures was detailed in the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and employed to minimise noise impacts.

11.1.6. The 2022 AIR submitted by the Applicant to assess any change in impacts resulting from the removal of three turbines found that both the effects of operational noise and cumulative operational noise remained unchanged and remained '**not significant'** in EIA terms.

11.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

11.2.1. The Highland Council's Environmental Health Officer (EHO) raised no objection to the original application or to the Additional Information Report (AIR) submitted in support of the Consented Development.

11.2.2. In their response to the original application, the EHO advised that, given the separation distances to the nearest noise-sensitive receptors and the commitment to implement a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), construction noise was not expected to give rise to significant effects. The EHO recommended a planning condition to control operational noise based on the simplified assessment methodology set out in ETSU-R-97.

11.2.3. In response to the AIR, the EHO recommended that the operational noise condition be updated to reflect the revised noise predictions provided in that submission. Due to the large distances between turbines and receptors, and the large margin between the SSNLs and predicted noise levels, rather than applying the SSNLs as limits in the conditions, noise limits which are independent of wind speed have been applied. These are based on a 2dB margin above the highest predicted level for each receptor to provide flexibility in the choice of turbine model for installation whilst ensuring that operational noise levels are well within those specified as acceptable in national planning policy and guidance. The current application is not seeking to change these conditioned noise limits.

11.2.4. As noted above, the Applicant has received confirmation from The Highland Council in 2024 that NatureScot and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) are satisfied with the submitted CEMP. Formal comment from the EHO is still awaited. All other noise-related planning conditions are compliance-based and do not require submission of documentation for formal discharge at this stage.

11.3. Issues scoped in / out

11.3.1. It is proposed that noise is **scoped out** of further assessment within the EIA Report for the Section 36C application on the basis that the Varied Development will not introduce any new or materially different noise sources compared to those assessed in the Consented Development. Importantly, there will be no change to the location or nature of noise-sensitive receptors in the surrounding area. As such, the baseline context for both construction and operational noise remains unchanged.

11.3.2. It is acknowledged that the change in proposed hub height of the turbines could alter the relationship between wind speed and background noise, and therefore the (theoretical) TNLs could in turn change. However, the conditioned noise limits are independent of wind speed and therefore unaffected by the proposed variation. The applicant is not seeking to vary these conditioned limits and is committed to ensuring that turbines will comply with these limits. In light of this commitment, receptors remaining the same, the limited nature of the design amendments, and the absence of significant construction or operational noise effects identified in the previous assessment, it is considered that further detailed noise assessment is not required as part of the EIA.

12. Traffic and Transport

12.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

12.1.1. The Proposed Varied Development will use the same transport and access routes as the Consented Development. The Consented Development's EIAR concluded that no significant adverse effects would arise and that mitigation throughout the construction period will be managed through the implementation of a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) to further minimise impacts on road users and road safety.

12.1.2. The delivery route assessed in the Consented Development's EIAR identified abnormal turbine loads originating from Kyleakin/Kyle of Lochalsh or Inverness, routed via the A82/A87 to the site access on the A887. The sole access point to the site will remain the existing wind farm access on the A887. No access is proposed from Allt Sigh.

12.1.3. The original assessment concluded that, during the peak construction period (months 7-9), an average of 34 heavy goods vehicle (HGV) movements and 45 car/minibus/light goods vehicle (LGV) movements per day are expected. Traffic volumes on the A82/A87/A887 would increase, but not by more than 30%, with users considered low sensitivity receptors. Although HGV traffic on the A887 between the development and Invermoriston was assessed to increase by more than 10%, the EIAR concluded that no further assessment was required.

12.1.4. A cumulative assessment was undertaken for the Consented Development, incorporating Dell, Cloiche, Glenshero and Millennium South Wind Farms. This concluded that construction periods for these projects were unlikely to overlap. Even in a conservative worst-case scenario, cumulative traffic increases on the A82, A87 and A887 were predicted to remain below 30%, with HGV traffic exceeding 30% only on the A82 north of Invergarry and south of Invermoriston. These effects were not considered significant

12.1.5. Overall, the EIAR concluded that **no significant** adverse effects would arise from construction traffic associated with the Consented Development.

12.1.6. Additional Information was submitted by SSER in March 2022 following a design revision that reduced the number of turbines. The accompanying assessment confirmed that while a reduction in turbine numbers would proportionally reduce the scale of traffic impacts during construction, the overall conclusions of the original EIAR remained valid. The residual effects remained unchanged and would continue to be appropriately mitigated through the CTMP and other standard measures previously proposed.

12.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

12.2.1. Transport Scotland, as advisors to the Scottish Government on potential traffic and transport impacts, did not object to the Consented Development subject to there being conditions relating to visibility splays from the access; a Construction Traffic Management Plan; details of the final abnormal road route; wheel washing facilities and a requirement

that any temporary traffic measures would be undertaken by a quality assured traffic management consultant.

12.2.2. Similarly, The Highland Council's Transport Planning Team did not object to the Consented Development. It recommended conditions to secure: a construction traffic management plan (CTMP), which will include a risk assessment for transportation during daylight and hours of darkness, proposed management and mitigation within any settlements along the access route, contingency plan prepared by the abnormal load haulier, monitoring of road conditions during the construction period, protocol for the delivery of abnormal loads, conclusion of a Section 96 wear and tear agreement under the Roads Scotland Act; a programme of notification of any maintenance which may involve HGV / abnormal load movements during the operational life of the development.

12.2.3. Three planning conditions were secured to ensure mitigations would be implemented during the construction phase. The subsequent S36C application will set out how the Applicant proposes to modify those conditions to address any additional impacts resulting from the Proposed Varied Development.

12.3. Issues scoped in / out

12.3.1. It is proposed that no further assessment of Traffic and Transport effects is required within the EIA Report for the Section 36C application and therefore this is **scoped out,** for reasons described below.

12.3.2. The Proposed Varied Development will utilise the same delivery routes, access points, and general construction approach as the Consented Development. The original EIAR concluded that construction traffic would not give rise to significant environmental effects, with increases in traffic volumes remaining below key thresholds on the strategic road network and appropriate mitigation secured through the Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP).

12.3.3. The increased turbine tip height will require more tower sections per turbine - rising from approximately four to six sections per tower. As a result, there will be a net increase of around 30 abnormal indivisible load (AIL) movements compared to the Consented Development. These additional movements will use the same delivery routes via the A82, A87, and A887 from Inverness and Kyleakin/Kyle of Lochalsh. At present, all tower components will be delivered from Inverness, while Kyleakin/Kyle of Lochalsh will continue to be used for blade deliveries. The increase in AIL movements applies only to deliveries from Inverness; blade deliveries from Kyleakin/Kyle of Lochalsh will remain unchanged.

12.3.4. The additional AIL movements would not increase the daily rate of turbine deliveries but are expected instead to modestly extend the turbine delivery programme. The nature of the local and strategic road network is such that no additional receptors would be affected and no changes to the conclusions of the previous assessments are anticipated. The previously identified mitigation and route management measures will remain effective.

12.3.5. In terms of general construction traffic, the original assessment identified an average of 34 HGV and 45 LGV movements per day during peak construction. While the proposed turbines and supporting infrastructure (e.g. hardstands) will be marginally larger, efforts to optimise deliveries (such as sourcing aggregate on site) are expected to broadly offset any potential increases in construction traffic. As such, overall vehicle numbers are anticipated to remain in line with the original EIAR assumptions.

12.3.6. It is acknowledged that precise traffic numbers are difficult to forecast at this stage, given that construction methodologies are subject to refinement through contractor engagement. Nonetheless, the conservative assumptions adopted in the original EIAR remain appropriate and robust for the purpose of assessing likely significant effects.

12.3.7. A revised CTMP will be submitted alongside the application to reflect the updated turbine specification and delivery programme, but no changes are proposed to the delivery routes or access strategy. On this basis, and considering that the anticipated change in construction and AIL traffic does not materially alter the nature or significance of effects previously assessed, it is considered that further detailed assessment of traffic and transport is not required for the Proposed Varied Development's EIA.

13. Socio-economics, tourism and recreation

13.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

13.1.1. The original baseline assessment identified that the Aird and Loch Ness ward has an older population profile and slower population growth compared to Highland and Scotland overall. While economic activity levels in Highland are above the national average and wages are comparable, the proportion of working-age residents is lower. Tourism, particularly around Loch Ness, is a key sector in the local economy, though it is highly seasonal with limited winter activity.

13.1.2. The Consented Development was expected to deliver notable economic benefits:

- During construction, it could generate up to £14.4 million in Gross Value Added (GVA) and support 196 job years in Highland, and £36.6 million GVA and 494 job years across Scotland.

- Operationally, it would result in £2.7 million in annual spending, supporting up to £0.8 million GVA and 11 jobs locally, and £1.6 million GVA and 26 jobs nationally.

13.1.3. Additional benefits included anticipated contributions to the existing Bhlaraidh Community Fund and approximately £1.3 million annually in non-domestic rates to support local public services.

13.1.4. The EIA report also stated that evidence indicates that wind farms have no adverse impact on tourism in Scotland. Site-specific assessment of potential tourism effects from the Proposed Development also found no expected negative impacts. Overall, the assessment identified a minor beneficial effect on the Highland economy during construction, with all other socio-economic, tourism and recreation effects assessed as **negligible**.

13.1.5. As a result of the reduction in turbines from 18, the economic impacts of constructing, operating, and decommissioning the 15-turbine Proposed Development were assessed using the same methodology as the original EIA Report. The socio-economic baseline was updated to reflect recent data, but only minor changes were identified and the sensitivity of receptors remained unchanged.

13.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

13.2.1. In considering the application for the reduced 15 turbine scheme, the Highland Council noted in its consultation response that: *'While there is a reduction in economic benefits, the level of assessment in EIA terms does not change. It is considered that a meaningful contribution to the economy is being made by the proposal despite the reduction in turbine number'*.

13.2.2. No planning conditions were attached to the consent

13.3. Issues scoped in / out

13.3.1. The Proposed Varied Development would not introduce significant changes to the socio-economics, tourism, and recreation baseline established for the Consented Development.

13.3.2. In fact, the impact on socio-economics is expected to be wholly positive. The increase in renewable energy output will allow for an enhanced community benefit package, ensuring greater financial contributions to local community initiatives and infrastructure improvements. This increased community investment will reinforce the positive socio-economic effects already identified in the original EIA.

13.3.3. Given that the Proposed Varied Development's socio-economic impacts will be wholly beneficial, it is proposed to **scope out** the Socio-economics, tourism and recreation chapter from the EIA.

13.3.4. The original assessment and AIR also assessed potential effects on tourism and found no evidence to suggest that wind farm development negatively affects visitor numbers or tourism revenue.

13.3.5. No changes to the Proposed Varied Development are expected to alter this conclusion, and therefore further assessment of tourism effects is also not considered necessary.

14. Climate change

14.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

14.1.1. The principle of the Consented Development's contribution to climate change mitigation has been firmly established. The carbon payback time is the measurement indicator to assess the influence of a project on climate change. The shorter the payback period, the greater the benefit the Proposed Development would have in displacing emissions associated with electricity generated by burning fossil fuels.

14.1.2. The original assessment stated that the development was expected to take around 30 months (2.5 years) to repay the carbon exchange to the atmosphere (the CO2 debt) through construction of the wind farm. It noted that there were no current guidelines about what payback time constitutes a significant effect but that this was a small percentage (5.0%) of the 50-year lifespan of the project

14.1.3. Further, it noted the development would have a very low carbon footprint and, after 2.5 years, the electricity generated is estimated to be carbon neutral and will displace grid electricity generated from fossil fuel sources. The Site would in effect be in a net gain situation following this time period and will then be contributing to national objectives of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and meeting the Scottish 'net zero' carbon targets by 2045. It was, therefore, evaluated to have an overall beneficial effect on climate change.

14.1.4. The 2022 AIR compared the effects of removing three turbines and concluded that the carbon balance assessment remained unchanged and that the Consented Development would have an overall beneficial effect on climate change.

14.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

14.2.1. In issuing its decision to consent the scheme, the Scottish Ministers stated that the Consented Development is sustainable development and that it would provide a contribution to renewable energy targets and carbon savings. The Scottish Ministers indicated they were satisfied that the Consented Development would provide carbon savings and that these savings will be of an order that weighs in its favour and would contribute to the Scottish Government's strategic priorities.

14.3. Issues scoped in / out

14.3.1. It is proposed that climate change is **scoped out** of detailed assessment within the EIA Report for the Section 36C Varied Development application.

14.3.2. The original EIA concluded that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with the construction phase of the consented development — including emissions from plant, machinery, and transportation of materials — would be 'very low' and would be outweighed by the long-term carbon savings generated during the operational phase, through the displacement of fossil fuel-based electricity generation.

14.3.3. Since the consent was granted, the Applicant has undertaken additional ground investigation works in 2023/2024 to inform the design process in the lead up to Financial Investment Decision. As a result, there is now a much more comprehensive understanding of peat depths across the site.

14.3.4. In refining the layout for the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant has sought to further minimise impacts on peat. Where practicable, tracks have been realigned into areas of shallower peat and out of deep peat. Some hardstandings have been located within the access tracks to further reduce the overall extent of peatland disturbance. Furthermore, excavated peat will be re-used onsite where possible, in accordance with a Peat Management Plan, to minimise off-site disposal and associated carbon impacts.

14.3.5. Together these refinements further reduce the carbon losses of the variation when compared with the consented scheme and therefore enhance its climate benefits.

14.3.6. The Proposed Varied Development does not introduce any new or materially different sources of GHG emissions compared to those previously assessed. As such, no significant climate change impacts are anticipated, and further detailed assessment is not considered necessary for the S36C variation.

14.3.7. Notwithstanding this, the Applicant proposes to update the Scottish Government's Carbon Calculator to reflect the final design of the Proposed Varied Development. The updated results will be submitted as part of the Planning Statement accompanying the Section 36C application, to demonstrate the continued carbon benefits of the development

15. Aviation and radar

15.1. Consented Development EIAR Baseline

15.1.1. The Consented Development is in uncontrolled airspace, beyond the Civil Aviation Authority recommended consultation distances from all aviation facilities.

15.1.2. The EIA Report assessed the potential significant effects of the 18 turbine Proposed Development on three aviation receptors:

- the primary surveillance radar at Inverness Airport;
- the primary surveillance radar at RAF Lossiemouth; and
- low flying aircraft.

15.1.3. Radar line of sight assessment has determined that the Consented Development will not be visible to Inverness Airport or RAF Lossiemouth radars due to intervening terrain. It was noted that the Consented Development has the potential to present an obstruction hazard to low flying aircraft but that this could be mitigated by sharing data on the locations and heights of the turbines on aeronautical charts and in aeronautical information publications. An aviation obstruction lighting scheme, consisting of infra-red lights to mark the perimeter of the Consented Development, has been approved by the Civil Aviation Authority. Critically, the CAA agreed that aviation warning lights are not required for any turbine. The basis of this was that, while the tip heights of the Consented Development are higher than the operational Bhlaraidh Wind Farm, the topography at the Proposed Development is lower and therefore the height above sea level is lower

15.1.4. The assessment found that all potential residual and cumulative effects to be **not significant.**

15.1.5. The 2022 AIR compared the effects of removing three turbines and concluded no change to the aviation assessment set out in EIA Report in that the 15 turbine Proposed Development would have no effect on any primary surveillance radar and will have an effect of negligible significance on low flying aircraft at night.

15.2. Consultation & Existing Planning Conditions

15.2.1. The Scottish Ministers in their decision notice highlighted that aviation lighting was one of the main determining issues for the application, however it did not then comment on its impacts. No statutory consultees objected to the Consented Development in relation to impacts of aviation lighting. This is because the applicant had prior agreement with the CAA that aviation warning lights are not required for any turbine for the reasons stated above.

15.2.2. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation ("DIO") did not object subject to:

- Condition 22 (Aviation Safety – Lighting) being attached which required infra-red lighting to be installed on each of the perimeter turbines prior. This pre-commencement condition was confirmed as being satisfied by THC in November 2024; and

- Condition 23 (Aviation Safety) being attached which required at least 14-day advance notification of: when turbines would be erected; the maximum height of all construction equipment used to erect the turbines; the date on which the turbines commence operation and the latitude and longitude and maximum heights of each wind turbine and any anemometer mast/s. This information was not submitted for discharge because Final Investment Decision was not reached.

15.2.3. CAA did not submit responses to either consultation, largely because agreement had already been reached on mitigation and the aviation lighting scheme prior to the application being submitted.

15.3. Issues scoped in / out

15.3.1. The Proposed Varied Development is looking to increase tip heights up to a maximum 230 metres. While the overall layout of the scheme is not substantially changed, due to the increase in tip height, and resultant change to wake zones and increased safety buffer for topple distance, some turbines will be repositioned.

Radar – scoped out

15.3.2. An initial radar assessment has been undertaken using the RIAT (Rapid Impact Assessment Tool) assessment software which identifies radar constraints. The assessment confirmed that Inverness Airport and RAF Lossiemouth are both located within 150km of the site boundary. The assessment identified direct radar line of sight to three turbines (T12, T15, and T17) from Inverness Airport's radar. No other turbines were directly visible to the radar.

15.3.3. For RAF Lossiemouth, the assessment concluded that no turbines would be visible and all turbines are located at least 50 nautical miles from the airfield. As such, no impacts on Ministry of Defence radar operations are anticipated.

15.3.4. The Applicant recognises that mitigation will be required for the three turbines within radar line of site from Inverness Airport. A radar blanking or similar infill solution is often used for developments with similar impacts and the Applicant is committed to engaging with Highlands and Islands Airport Limited (HIAL) to agree a suitable mitigation strategy, if required.

15.3.5. The Applicant recognises that the RIAT tool was not designed nor intended to replace direct engagement with aviation stakeholders to understand their views on potential impacts. The Applicant will consult directly with HIAL and the Ministry of Defence

and will provide evidence of the conclusions and agreements reached within the S36C application.

15.3.6. Given radar visibility is likely limited to three turbines, the Applicant is confident that mitigation is technically feasible and can be achieved through direct stakeholder engagement. Therefore, the Applicant proposes that further radar assessment be **scoped out** of the EIA report for the Proposed Varied Development.

Turbine lighting – scoped in

15.3.7. As noted above, turbine lighting was considered as part of the S36 application for the Consented Development but not progressed following agreement with the CAA.

15.3.8. Article 222 of the UK Air Navigation Order 2016 requires medium intensity (2000 candela) steady red aviation warning lights to be mounted as close as possible to the top of all structures at or above 150m above ground level. This lighting would be required to be visible at night.

15.3.9. As a result of the proposed increase to turbine tip heights, some of the turbines will exceed the heights of the existing operational turbines, triggering the requirement for visible aviation lighting in accordance with Article 222.

15.3.10. The Applicant is therefore committed to implementing a lighting scheme that complies with CAA requirements while also minimising potential landscape and visual impacts. The Applicant is proposing to conduct an Aviation Lighting Assessment as part of the Landscape and Visual Assessment chapter of the EIA to ascertain the exact aviation lighting requirements for the Proposed Varied Development. The Applicant will then seek approval from the CAA for the proposal that is taken forward and the result of this will be summarised within the S36C application.

Conclusion

15.3.11. It is proposed that Aviation as a standalone chapter is therefore scoped out of detailed assessment within the EIA Report for the Section 36C application. Any potential effects of turbine lighting will be addressed through the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment chapter of the EIA and through direct consultation with CAA.

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Figure 8.7b - VP7 B862 south of Foyers - Baseline Photo and Wireline (Consented Development).pdf
Figure 8.7c - VP7 B862 south of Foyers - Baseline Photo and Wireline (Varied Development).pdf
Figure 8.8a - VP21 Toll Creagach - Location Plan.pdf
Figure 8.8b - VP21 Toll Creagach - Baseline Photo and Wireline (Consented Development).pdf
Figure 8.8c - VP21 Toll Creagach - Baseline Photo and Wireline (Varied Development).pdf