A decorative collage on a teal background. It includes a white-bordered photo of a worker in a yellow safety vest on a wind turbine, a photo of a wind farm in rough seas, and several white line-art icons of wind turbines. A bright green vertical bar is also present.

Achany Extension Wind Farm Section 36C Variation

Socio-Economic Report

Document Classification | **Public**

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Executive Summary

- Maximising the socio-economic benefits of Achany Extension Wind Farm:** The ‘Applicant’ (SSE Generation Limited, part of SSE Renewables) is proposing to vary the existing consent for an extension to the operational onshore Achany Wind Farm to maximise the renewable electricity generation potential at the site. This socio-economic report, drafted in partnership with BiGGAR Economics, is accompanying its Section 36C application. The report details how the Applicant plans to maximise net socio-economic benefit for the Achany Extension Wind Farm, the ‘*Proposed Varied Development*.’
- Assessing how socio-economic impact is maximised using a new Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics framework:** To support transparency and consistency, the Applicant has used the ‘*Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy*’ Guidance and Report Framework created by Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics. This guidance can be used to assess whether the Proposed Varied Development is designed in such a way that will enable it to maximise net economic impact that is consistent with the goals set out in Scottish National Planning Framework 4, specifically Policy 11c and its aim to “*maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities.*”
- Considering the developer’s approach alongside net economic impact:** The new guidance draws out six principles that can be applied to assess whether the Proposed Varied Development is likely to enable the maximisation of net-economic impacts of the development. These principles, aligned with the Scottish Government’s best practice principles, are place-based; innovative; collaborative; transparent; flexible; and deliverable. These principles highlight that it is necessary to consider both the economic impacts associated with the Proposed Varied Development, as well as the **approach the Applicant** is taking to ensure those benefits deliver long-term outcomes, enabled by a collaborative and transparent approach between developers, public bodies and communities based on mutual trust and respect. The Applicant’s self-alignment with this approach is outlined in section 6 of this report.
- Supporting the aims of the Social Value Charter and Community Wealth Building:** The targeted, place-based commitments aimed at maximising socio-economic impact illustrated in this report are consistent with the **Highland Council’s Social Value Charter**, including but not limited to the Applicant’s Community Benefit Fund (Charter Principle 1, Principle 7); its commitments towards building the workforce of the future through skills development and championing the Fair Work Principles (Charter Principle 6). Areas of alignment with the aims of the Charter are embedded throughout this report. It also contributes towards both the national and regional ambitions to foster Community Wealth Building, including but not limited to supporting local supply chains (section 5.3).
- Maximising place-based impact in the Sutherland area for community priorities through inter-developer and community collaboration:** The Applicant has pursued an innovative and collaborative model to maximise the impact of the Achany Community Benefit Fund, which will continue for the fund associated with the Proposed Varied Development. The Achany Extension community benefit fund – which is committed to £5,000 per MW – will be administered using a multi-community and multi-developer collaborative model with RWE’s Rosehall Wind Farm. Working together, the two developers and the local communities have established an award-making panel with

representatives from each of the three community council areas to co-ordinate delivery of the funds and to maximise the impact they deliver for the area, while minimising the time required of local volunteers.

- Renewable energy brings competitive advantages and opportunities for economic development within the Highlands and an opportunity to create employment and attract investment:** The transition to net zero and the developments associated with it such as onshore wind - including the Proposed Varied Development - is a vital opportunity for the region to tackle demographic challenges – including rural depopulation. By creating high quality employment opportunities for local workforces and suppliers, the Proposed Varied Development can play a role in attracting and retaining people, including young people, in the Highlands and Sutherland area. The Applicant is committed to find opportunities to collaborate with its supply chain, in this instance the Wind Turbine OEM and the Civil contractor, on skills development, and encouraging its supply chain to work maximise local content and supply chain opportunities.
- Maximising impact through strategic regional collaboration:** The Applicant recognises it has a wider role to play in the regional ecosystem and that maximising socio-economic benefits through skills and supply chain development requires collaboration and regional solutions. The Applicant is committed to working with the relevant ecosystem and collaborating with education providers such as UHI or the Kyle of Sutherland apprenticeship scheme, or economic development actors such as HIE to advance development in the region, helping to retain more young people in the Highlands who can take advantage of opportunities within the onshore wind sector. The Applicant has initiated several discussions in this regard, including around enhancing local supply chain coordination as well as a potential regional apprenticeship scheme for wind turbine technicians. These are outlined in section 5 of this report. These discussions are in very early stages and ongoing, with the outcomes still to be understood. However, they evidence the Applicant's overall long-term commitment to help address regional challenges in a collaborative manner.
- With SSE Renewables' approach and commitments in the framework of the Proposed Varied Development, the project can create positive economic impact in the Highlands and for Scotland.** An economic impact assessment for the Proposed Varied Development was conducted by BiGGAR Economics which estimates the following total economic impact:

Total Economic Construction Impact (Gross)

	Highland	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	£18.0	£31.2
Total Job Years	220	420

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

Total Annual Operational Impact

	Highland	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	£1.9	£4.1
Total Jobs	15	40

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

Overview of Commitments to Maximise the Socio-Economic Benefits of the Proposed Varied Development

SSE Renewables has set out **12 commitments** within this report to demonstrate how it will maximise the net socio-economic benefits of the Proposed Varied Development. These commitments reflect the company's strategic approach to deliver long-term value for local communities, the regional economy, and the wider renewable energy sector. The table below consolidates the commitments set out in the Socio-Economic Benefits chapters across the four key areas of the Scottish Onshore Sector deal.

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
Supporting Community Empowerment (Principle 1 of the Highland Council's Social Value Charter)			
1	The Applicant will maintain its ongoing engagement with the community via a single point of contact throughout the development, construction and operations of the Proposed Varied Development. The Applicant will also remain flexible and responsive.	A positive and trusted relationship between the local community and SSE Renewables which enables the potential for long-term community priorities to be achieved through ongoing and effective collaboration.	The Applicant will be transparent and open on the outcomes of its engagement efforts. The Applicant logs and tracks the engagement with all of its stakeholders, including communities.
2	The Applicant will provide transparent, place-based funding opportunities through the Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund, with a contribution of £5,000 per MW. With the continuation of its impact-driven, multi-developer and multi-administrator collaboration approach, the Applicant seeks to ensure the legacy of the funds prevail.	The place-based funding can help to increase community resilience and empowerment through achieving identified local goals that are outlined in the community action plans.	SSE Renewables will continue to report on community investment annually through its Community Investment Reviews and in dedicated reports, such as the independent BiGGAR Economics report of the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds.
3	The Applicant commits to sharing lessons learnt on the Achany and Rosehall Community Benefit	Sharing lessons learnt with the wider industry on how the collaborative model has helped to	The Applicant will be transparent and open on the outcomes of its engagement. It will

	Fund's innovative collaboration model to enhance the legacy of the funds. This will include the continued distribution of the independent BiGGAR Economics report on the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds.	maximise impact could help to enhance the impact of future community benefit funding in the region and support a legacy of projects.	also continue to share lessons learnt through distributing the BiGGAR Economics report with key stakeholders, including trade bodies such as RenewableUK and Scottish Renewables.
Supporting Skills and Workforce Development (Principle 6 of the Highland Council's Social Value Charter)			
4	<p>The Applicant will encourage the Principal Contractor – the Civils Balance of Plant Contractor (CBoP), the Wind Turbine Generator Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and, if relevant, the Electrical Balance of Plant (EBoP) Contractor to support local skills development, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships; • Collaborative school and STEM engagement activities. 	Supporting the development of skills that are relevant for onshore wind, such as wind turbine maintenance, and inspiring careers in the wind and construction industries, through school engagement activities, play an important role in supporting the future development of the workforce. Fostering this inspiration could also, in the long-term, positively contribute to the regional economy and counter negative trends such as rural depopulation.	<p>Dependent on contract negotiations, and the outcome of the Applicant's tendering process (which includes key questions on social value), the Applicant could monitor and publish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of apprentices and trainees generated by the Proposed ¹Development²; • Number of STEM engagement sessions hosted by a contractor. <p>The Applicant will be able to collect this via its Social Value tool, Loop.</p>
5	The Applicant will continue to collaborate with regional actors including the University of the	Collaboration with key regional stakeholders plays a valuable role in bringing about system-level	The Applicant will be transparent and open on the outcomes of its collaborative efforts

² This can be captured on SSE's social value reporting platform Loop

	Highlands and Islands (UHI), the Kyle of Sutherland Apprenticeship Scheme and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to enhance workforce capacity in the Highlands region. This will include exploring a regional apprenticeship approach to wind turbine technicians with the wind turbine OEM and regional stakeholders.	changes to skills development and access in the Highlands, which, in turn, contributes to long-term socio-economic opportunities for the region.	and exploratory discussions with regional actors. It will prepare a proposed outline of the regional apprenticeship scheme to be shared with the Wind Turbine Generator OEM.
Developing the Supply Chain and fostering Community Wealth Building ambitions			
6	The Applicant maximise local supply chain opportunities by utilising its existing progressive procurement processes to actively engage and work with local contractors. This includes exploring a regional Meet the Buyers event with respective chamber of commerce.	Pursuing opportunities to work with the local supply chain will help to unlock socio-economic benefits in the local region, towards wider community wealth building ambitions. The intended outcome from this is detailed in the economic impact assessment of this report.	The Applicant will include a requirement to monitor and report on local content in its contracts with its suppliers, in line with the Onshore Wind Sector Deal.
7	The Applicant will encourage its Tier 1 suppliers to engage and maximise opportunities for the local supply chain through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing supply chain opportunities with delivery bodies and on the Pathfinder portal; • Attending information exchange sessions. 	This will support socio-economic benefits for the region, as detailed in the economic impact assessment of this report.	Depending on what is agreed with the supply chain, the Applicant could monitor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of supply chain that are regional and/or national; • Number of supply chain outreach communications.
8	The Applicant commits to continued exploratory discussions with regional stakeholders such as HIE on whether further intervention is needed to maximise benefits for local suppliers.	This could enable a greater number of local suppliers to benefit from the opportunities of the clean energy transition in the region.	The Applicant is committed to being transparent on the outcomes of this engagement.
9	The Applicant will ensure that all labour and working conditions for the Proposed Varied	Maximise economic benefits for those working on behalf of the Applicant, including through the	The Applicant will monitor and ensure SSE's Real Living Wage contractual clause is

	Development confirm to best practices, including its Real Living Wage commitment.	economic uplift and longer-term benefits associated with the Real Living Wage ³ .	included in its contracts and is cascaded down to sub-contractors.
Enhancing the Natural Environment			
10	The Applicant will ensure that, prior to the commencement works, access arrangements and appropriate warnings will be communicated to the local community via the community liaison group, wind farm website and local mailing list.	The community is fully informed to ensure that there is no lasting negative impact from the Proposed Varied Development on regional tourism, enabling future benefits from tourism to be realised.	The Applicant will ensure that the Outdoor Access Plan is discussed in Community Liaison meetings and information is communicated through the local mailing list and on the wind farm's website.
11	The Applicant will implement and manage enhancement measures as committed under the Habitat Management Plan, which includes, for example, the Peatland Management Plan.	The Peatland Management Plan aims to restore a greater area than that has been affected to provide additional enhancement of the landscape. Enhancement of the natural landscape increases natural capital value in the area, which provides increased benefits to the local community.	The Applicant will provide regular Habitat Management Plan Monitoring Reports during the operational lifetime of the Proposed Varied Development to NatureScot and the Highland Council. The Applicant will quantify the Biodiversity Net Gain from the Habitat Management Plan during the operation period using SSE Renewables' open access BNG Toolkit.
12	The Applicant will continue to provide upskilling opportunities to certified plant operators on peatland restoration techniques, in collaboration with NatureScot and Peatland Action, and will explore opportunities to roll out further peatland restoration training in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	Upskilling local contractors will enable them to better maximise the benefits of the industry's growing demand for peatland restoration in the region by gaining new skills.	The Applicant will monitor and provide regular updates through the Habitat Management Plan Monitoring Reports.

³ [For the real cost of living | Living Wage Foundation](#)

1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

SSE Generation Limited, '*the Applicant*', is proposing to vary the existing consent for an extension to the operational onshore Achany Wind Farm to maximise the renewable electricity generation potential at the site. The proposed Achany Extension Wind Farm – the '*Proposed Varied Development*' – is located on the adjoining land to the north-west of the operational Achany Wind Farm. The location of the proposed wind farm is approximately 4.5 kilometres (km) north of the village of Rosehall and 11km northwest of Lairg.

The Applicant is part of **SSE Renewables Limited**, a leading developer, owner and operator of onshore and offshore wind farms in the UK and Ireland. More information on SSE Renewables is in section 1.3.

The Proposed Varied Development comprises up to 18 Wind Turbine Generators (WTGs) and would be an extension to the 19 WTGs of the operational Achany Wind Farm. The installed generation capacity of the existing operational Achany Wind Farm is 38 megawatts (MW) and the total installed capacity of the Proposed Varied Development alone is anticipated to be circa 80 MW. Therefore, the combined capacity of Achany Wind Farm and the Proposed Varied Development is anticipated to be approximately 118MW. The final installed capacity at Achany Extension is dependent on the turbine selected.

The ground cover of the Proposed Varied Development is predominately rough grassland and heather moorland, which forms part of the Highland sporting estates of Glenrossal and Glencassley. The land is primarily used for fishing, with some deer stalking also taking place. A minor road runs through Glencassley, close to the operational Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms. Other wind, hydro and electrical infrastructure is present within the wider area.

For the purposes of this report, both the baseline and impact assessments define the regional area as:

- South Sutherland (the local area)
- The Highland Council (THC) area (as the planning authority),
- The country level area as Scotland (as the national planning authority)

1.2 Overview of Report

This report seeks to demonstrate compliance with Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Policy 11⁴. Specifically, this report focuses on fulfilling the requirements set in NPF4 Policy 11 Paragraph c, which states that:

*"Development proposals will only be supported where they **maximise net economic impact**, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities."* (p.53)

The Applicant has used the "*Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy*" Guidance and Report Framework⁵, produced by Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics, to develop this socio-economic report. This report framework is aligned to the key themes of the Scottish Onshore Wind Sector Deal⁶ and focuses on *how* a project will ensure that socio-economic benefits are maximised and

⁴ [Supporting documents - National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot](#)

⁵ [Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy Guidance and Reporting Framework](#)

⁶ [Onshore wind sector deal - gov.scot](#)

how they will be demonstrated. The report framework acknowledges that maximising benefits requires a long-term, collaborative and transparent approach between developers, communities and public authorities. The Applicant believes that this approach and its focus on regional collaboration also aligns closely with the ethos of the Highland Council's (THC) Social Value Charter for Renewables Development.

This report aims to demonstrate how the Applicant is committed to enabling long-term outcomes to amplify regional benefits by collaborating and engaging with regional partners and monitoring progress to ensure impacts are maximised. The Applicant's approach to the Proposed Varied Development is outlined in section 6. SSE Renewables welcomes feedback and comment on this report from THC so that it can steadily and consistently improve its approach.

1.2.1 A new way of working with BiGGAR Economics

The Applicant is evolving its approach to authoring socio-economic reporting under the updated NPF4 requirements, as detailed above. This report is authored by SSE Renewables (the Applicant). Authoring the report in-house has enabled flexibility and enhanced engagement with internal stakeholders. This collaborative approach provides the Applicant with opportunities to engage with relevant internal stakeholders across its company who are key in delivering socio-economic benefits.

SSE Renewables has engaged with BiGGAR Economics as a sparring partner and critical friend throughout the drafting of this report. To ensure third-party independence, BiGGAR Economics has provided their specialist expertise to conduct the economic impact assessment (section 4) and has – using its deep-rooted regional expertise – drafted the economic context section (section 3). BiGGAR Economics has also reviewed this report and assessed it according to the approach outlined in the Scottish Renewables guidance, referenced above.

1.3 About SSE Renewables

SSE Renewables is a leading developer and operator of renewable energy generation, focusing on onshore and offshore wind, hydro, solar and battery storage. Part of energy infrastructure company SSE plc, UK-listed in the FTSE100, it is delivering clean power assets to increase SSE's operational renewable generation capacity as part of a five-year clean energy plan to 2027, the ~£17.5bn Net Zero Acceleration Programme (NZAP) Plus. This includes delivery of the world's largest offshore wind farm in construction, the 3.6GW Dogger Bank Wind Farm. SSE Renewables has a team of around 2,000 renewable energy professionals with a passion for championing clean energy delivery, each based across the markets in which it operates. It operates across its core UK and Ireland markets, as well as in carefully selected international markets in Continental Europe and Japan.

2. Project Context

The following chapter outlines the relevant regional and national political and socio-economic context for the country level area and the regional level area, as the planning authority. Chapter 3 then provides an overview of relevant socio-economic characteristics and context for the local area.

- South Sutherland (the local area)
- The Highland Council (THC) area (as the planning authority),
- The country level area as Scotland (as the national planning authority)

2.1 National Policy Context

2.1.1 National Performance Framework

Aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF)⁷ aims to create a more successful Scotland by enhancing wellbeing and promoting sustainable, inclusive growth. All Scottish policies and strategies are designed to align with the NPF's purpose and outcomes.

NPF emphasises 'increased wellbeing' and combines economic measures with broader wellbeing indicators to provide a comprehensive view of Scotland's progress.

It aims to:

- Build a more successful Scotland;
- Provide opportunities for all residents;
- Enhance the wellbeing of people in Scotland;
- Foster sustainable and inclusive growth; and
- Reduce inequalities, giving equal importance to economic, environmental, and social progress.

NPF outlines 11 national outcomes supported by 81 indicators, offering a holistic picture of the country's advancement. These outcomes cover various aspects such as gross domestic product (GDP), employment, community fabric, culture, education, environment, health, and poverty alleviation. The Scottish Government focuses its activities and spending on these indicators to achieve the national outcomes.

The 11 national outcomes are:

1. **Children and young people:** Ensuring they grow up loved, safe, and respected to reach their full potential;
2. **Communities:** Promoting inclusive, empowered, resilient, and safe communities;
3. **Culture:** Encouraging creativity and the widespread enjoyment of diverse cultures;
4. **Economy:** Developing a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive, and sustainable economy;
5. **Education:** Providing quality education and skills for societal contribution;
6. **Environment:** Valuing, enjoying, protecting, and enhancing the environment;
7. **Fair work and business:** Supporting thriving businesses with quality jobs and fair work for all;
8. **Health:** Promoting healthy and active lifestyles;
9. **Human rights:** Respecting, protecting, and fulfilling human rights, and eliminating discrimination;
10. **International:** Being open, connected, and making positive international contributions; and
11. **Poverty:** Addressing poverty by equitably sharing opportunities, wealth, and power.

⁷ [National Performance Framework - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/national-performance-framework)

2.1.2 National Planning Framework 4

In September 2023, the Scottish Government published the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)⁸. NPF4 is designed to guide Scotland's spatial development until 2045 and integrates national planning policies with the spatial strategy to address issues such as climate change, biodiversity, housing and economic development. It aims to create sustainable, liveable, and productive places, and opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing and sustainable economic growth.

NPF4 is built around six overarching principles designed to play a key role in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Scotland's national outcomes outlined above.

This includes:

- Achieving a fair and just transition to net zero;
- Conserving and recycling assets;
- Local living and improving community health and wellbeing;
- Compact urban growth to optimise use of land;
- Rebalanced development to create opportunities for communities; and
- Rural revitalisation and encouraging development in rural areas.

NPF4 is built around 33 national planning policies. These policies cover a wide range of areas, from housing to water management. Particularly relevant to this Application are **Policy 11 and Policy 25**.

2.1.3 National Planning Framework 4: Policy 11

As noted above, the Proposed Varied Development is required to demonstrate compliance specifically with NPF4's **Policy 11 'Energy'**.

Policy 11's intent is:

"To encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low-carbon and zero emissions technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage (CCUS)" (p.53)

Then, further, Policy 11 Paragraph C states that:

*"Development proposals will only be supported where **they maximise net economic impact**, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities" (p.53)*

This report, therefore, seeks to demonstrate how the Applicant will seek to maximise net economic benefits across the lifespan of the Proposed Varied Development.

2.1.4 Community Wealth Building and National Planning Framework 4: Policy 25

The Scottish Government has adopted the internationally recognised Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach to economic development. The primary aim of CWB is to keep wealth circulating locally.

CWB is based around five principles:

- Plural ownership of the economy;

⁸ [National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/pages/1-4-introduction.aspx)

- Ensuring financial power works for local places;
- Fair employment and just labour markets
- Progressive procurement of goods and services; and
- Socially productive use of land and property.

CWB is also explicitly recognised in **NPF4's Policy 25 'Community Wealth Building'**. This states that:

"Development proposals which contribute to local or regional community wealth building strategies and are consistent with local economic priorities will be supported" (p.79)

This might involve enhancing community resilience, addressing inequalities, boosting local spending, prioritising local supply chains and services, creating jobs within the community, backing community-driven initiatives, and facilitating community ownership of buildings and assets.

This report also, therefore, seeks to highlight how the Proposed Varied Development will contribute to wider CWB aims, including NPF4's Policy 25, by supporting local supply chains, skills and workforce development, and community empowerment.

2.1.5 Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation

Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)⁹, published in March 2022, outlines the priorities and actions necessary to achieve a wellbeing economy over the next decade.

The strategy focuses on five key transformational programmes: stimulating entrepreneurship, opening new markets, increasing productivity, developing essential skills, and ensuring fairer and more equal economic opportunities.

Section 1, "*Our Future Economy*", highlights Scotland's ambition to become a greener economy by 2032, demonstrating global leadership in transitioning to a net zero, nature-positive economy, and rebuilding natural capital. Section 1.6 identifies the just transition to net zero as the most significant economic opportunity for Scotland in the coming decade.

Additionally, CWB is recognised as a practical approach to local economic development that supports a wellbeing economy.

2.1.6 Scotland's Onshore Sector Deal

The Scottish Government's Onshore Wind Policy Statement (2022) and the Sector Deal (2023) set out commitments from the Scottish Government and the onshore wind industry to deliver on the collective ambition of 20GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 whilst maximising benefit to Scotland.

The sector deal encapsulates the collective vision to use the development of the onshore wind sector to drive economic growth, create high-quality jobs, reduce carbon emissions, and ultimately benefit the communities of Scotland.

The framework developed by Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics, on which this socio-economic report is based on, is informed by the key themes of the Scottish Onshore Sector Deal, namely:

- Supporting Skills and Workforce Development;
- Developing the Supply Chain;
- Supporting Community Empowerment; and
- Enhancing the Natural Environment.

⁹ [Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/nset/pages/1-introduction-to-the-strategy.aspx)

2.2 Regional Policy Context

2.2.1 The Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIREP)'s Regional Economic Strategy 2025-2035

HIREP's Regional Economic Strategy 2025-2035¹⁰, published in April 2025, presents a bold ten-year strategy to deliver sustainable economic growth across the Highlands and Islands to achieve the vision for a thriving, resilient and inclusive region by 2035.

The 6 strategic goals outlined are:

- Increase the profile and understanding of the Highlands and Islands to support effective policy and unlock regional investment;
- Become a region which delivers high quality and affordable housing for residents;
- Enhance the region's transport and digital infrastructure to become an exemplar of efficient rural connectivity;
- Build resilience and competitiveness through place-based opportunities and stimulating an active culture of entrepreneurship and innovation;
- Maximise the economic and community benefits from renewable energy investments and drive the region's move to net zero and climate resilience/adaptation; and
- Develop a coordinated response to skills and labour requirements across the region.

The strategy is aligned with Scotland's NSET and emphasises regional-scale collaborative actions to unlock "once-in-a-generation" opportunities.

2.2.2 Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal

The Inverness and Highland 'City-Region Deal'¹¹ is a transformative initiative aimed at positioning Inverness and the Highlands as a leading region of digital opportunity. The deal secures £315 million in funding, with contributions from the Scottish Government (£135 million), the Highland Council and its partners (£127 million), and the UK Government (£53 million). This investment focuses on enhancing digital connectivity, including superfast broadband and mobile coverage, to make the Highlands the most digitally connected rural region in Europe. The deal also supports various projects to boost economic growth, infrastructure, and innovation across the region.

The City-Region Deal is designed to deliver the following outcomes:

- Over 1,000 direct jobs as a result of City-Region Deal projects, with a further 2,200 additional jobs in the construction sector;
- A skilled labour market moving towards a high skilled, high wage economy;
- A centre of excellence in rural and digital healthcare with sufficient mass to attract research and investment and fully exploit the commercial opportunities;
- Business growth through effective digital connectivity and promotion of innovation;
- Improved productivity and real wages, which are estimated to increase by almost 1.3% and bring £100 million per annum to the regional economy;
- A rebalanced population with the aim of retaining and/or attracting 1,500 young people in the 18-29 age group over the initial 10-year deal period;
- 6,000 new houses over 20 years of which 1,800 will be affordable homes; and

¹⁰ [hirep-strategy-2025-2035.pdf](#)

¹¹ [City Region Deal | The Highland Council](#)

- Private sector leverage from housing building and, through opening up land for commercial development, would see a return over a 20-year period of around £800 million being invested in the economy of the city and region.

2.2.3 Highland Outcome Improvement Plan

The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan is the strategic framework developed by the Highland Community Planning Partnership to improve outcomes for communities across the Highlands. The most recent version, published in June 2024, covers the period 2024-2027 and reflects updated priorities in response to evolving social and economic challenges.

The three overarching priorities of the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan are:

- **People:** enhancing wellbeing, reducing inequalities and supporting vulnerable groups;
- **Place:** strengthening communities, infrastructure and the environment; and
- **Prosperity:** promoting inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.

2.2.4 Highland Area Tourism Partnership Plan

The Highland Area Tourism Partnership Plan¹² is a collaborative effort designed to enhance and sustain tourism across the Highlands. It brings together various stakeholders, including the Highland Council, VisitScotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NatureScot, and several destination management organisations. The plan focuses on developing a cohesive tourism strategy that promotes the region's unique attractions while balancing community expectations and environmental sustainability. Key initiatives include improving visitor experiences, supporting local businesses, and influencing national tourism policies to ensure long-term benefits for the area.

The overarching vision of growing the visitor economy across the Highlands has a number of key aims, these being:

- Position the Highlands as a prime destination within Scotland that competes successfully with other countries in the global marketplace;
- Develop the Highlands as a world-class product that delivers a consistently high-quality visitor experience at value for money prices, with high standards of facilities, customer service, career opportunities and income levels;
- Develop a competitive industry that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and that supports and builds on the history, culture, environment and hospitality of its people and communities;
- Encourage the dispersal of visitors throughout the Highlands, so that communities in remote rural areas can share in the benefits of tourism; and
- Ensure that everyone living and working within the Highlands understands the value of tourism to the local economy and actively get involved in growing tourism.

2.2.5 Highland Council's Net Zero Strategy

THC's Net Zero Strategy¹³ outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing the climate emergency by significantly reducing emissions and preparing for the impacts of climate change. The strategy aims to

¹² [Highland Tourism Partnership | Tourism | The Highland Council](#)

¹³ [Net Zero Strategy | Climate change | The Highland Council](#)

achieve net zero emissions by 2045, with interim targets to reduce emissions by at least 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040.

Key areas of focus for the strategy include:

- Improving energy efficiency across its estate;
- Identifying and developing opportunities arising from renewable energy generation;
- Rationalising its fleet and replacing vehicles with low-emission alternatives;
- Reducing waste;
- Embedding circular economy principles into the Council's operations;
- Embedding climate change into decision-making processes; and
- Delivering an internal Communications and Engagement Strategy to support the delivery of the Net Zero Strategy.

2.2.6 Highland Council's Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024

THC's Community Wealth draft strategy¹⁴ sets out a three-year vision for taking forward and embedding the Council's approach to CWB and is aligned to Scotland's CWB Approach to Economic Development and NPF4 Policy 25.

The strategy's approach to economic development aims to retain wealth within local communities and ensure widespread participation in economic activities. The strategy, spanning from 2024 to 2027, focuses on embedding CWB principles into the council's operations and activities.

It is proposed that the vision of the strategy is delivered through five key objectives that align with the 5 pillars of CWB:

- **Spending:** using public spend to deliver community benefit, fair work and build local supply chains;
- **Fair Employment:** ensuring the workforce are in well paid jobs that benefit from an effective voice, security and flexibility;
- **Land and Property:** ensuring that communities maximise benefit and generate wealth from local land and property;
- **Financial Power:** ensuring that the flows of wealth generated within the local economy works for the wellbeing of communities and businesses; and
- **Inclusive Ownership:** stimulating the development and growth of locally owned enterprises that generate community wealth.

2.2.7 Highland Council's Social Value Charter

Building on the community wealth building strategy and approach to economic development, THC launched a 'Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment'¹⁵.

This is a strategic framework designed to ensure that communities across the Highlands benefit fairly from renewable energy developments

Launched in June 2024, the Charter consists of nine principles, and aims to:

- embed an approach to community wealth building into the Highlands;
- maximise economic benefits from its natural environment and resources;

¹⁴ [Community Wealth Building Strategy | Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024](#)

¹⁵ https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/83522/item_10_social_values_charter_for_renewables_investment

- engage and involve relevant stakeholders to understand how it can continually improve its impact; and
- unlock economic opportunities for the area.

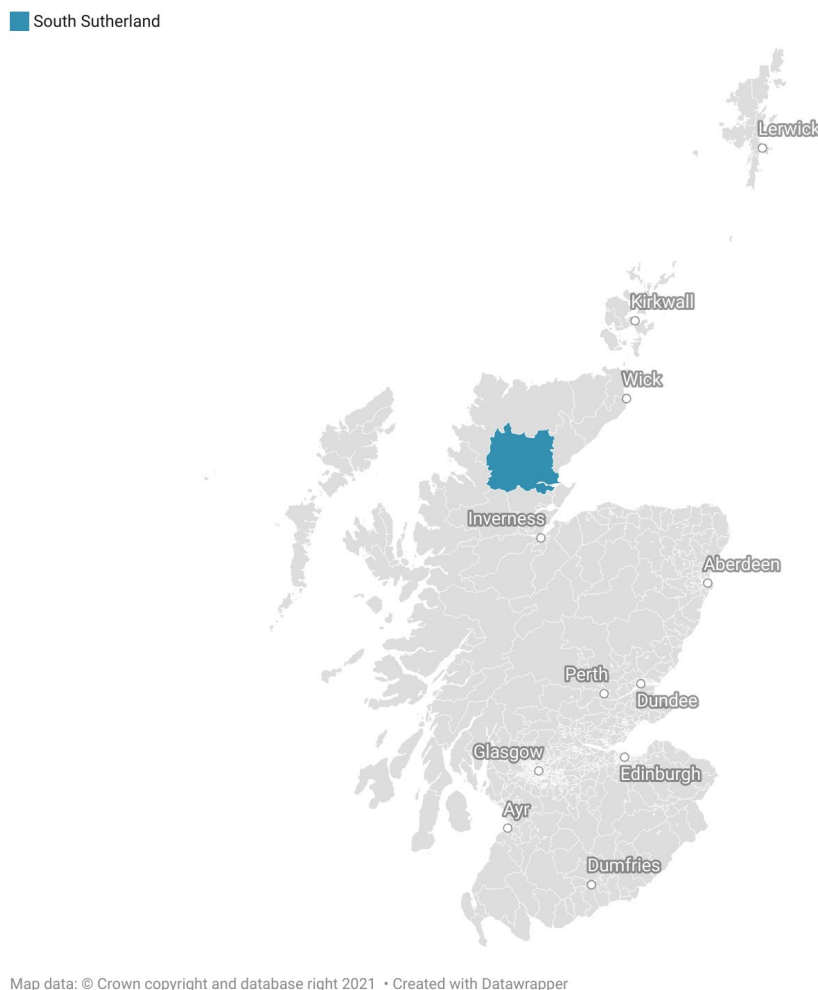
3. Economic Context

3.1 Socio-Economic Context

The local area relevant to the Proposed Varied Development - South Sutherland in Highland - stretches from the coastal towns of Tain and Dornoch, which are around an hour's drive north of Inverness, inland to the settlements of Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Lairg. Much of the inland area is bypassed as people travel north or south on the A9 via the Dornoch Bridge. The area closest to the Achany Wind Farm Extension is predominantly rural in character and is formally classified as “very remote rural”¹⁶ under the Scottish Government’s urban/rural classification system.

The data provided in this section has been provided for the geography of South Sutherland which covers the Data Zones of Sutherland South – 01 to 09. This area covers the community councils of Tain, Edderton, Ardgay and District, Creich, Lairg, Rogart and Dornoch.

Figure 1: A map of South Sutherland



¹⁶ Scottish Government (2022), Urban Rural Classification 2020. Eight fold OS maps accessed via <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-urban-rural-classification-2020/documents/> December 2024

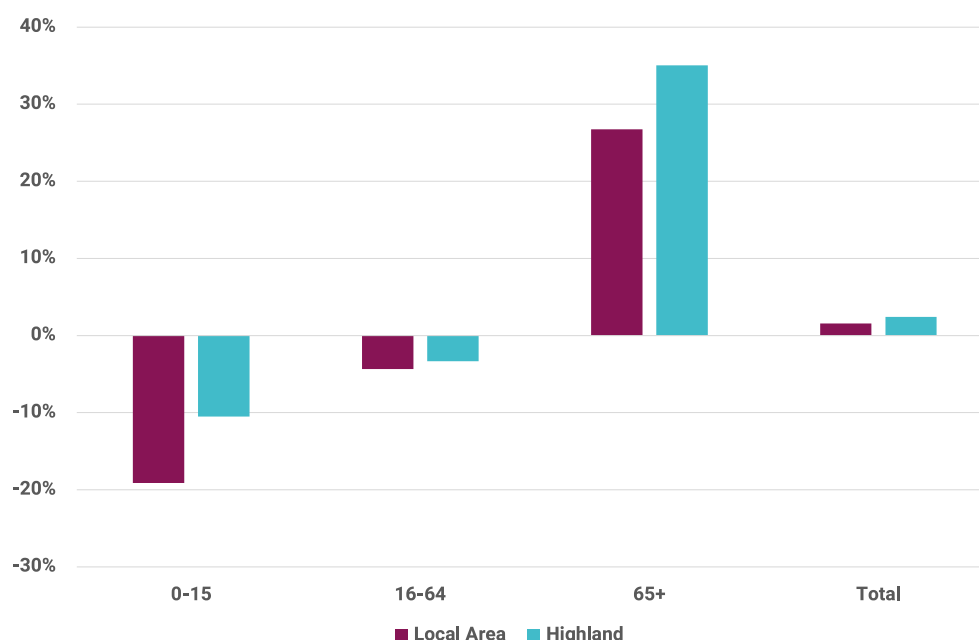
3.1.1 Population

Overall, the Highlands has an older population profile than Scotland as a whole, with a smaller proportion of young people and higher proportion of older people. South Sutherland accounts for 2.6% of the total population of Highland.

Since the commissioning of Achany Wind Farm in 2010 the total population of South Sutherland and Highland has increased marginally (1%). However, this masks more dramatic changes in the composition of the population. In South Sutherland there has been a large drop in young people aged 0-15 (19.1%), a notable decrease in the working age population (4.3%) and a large increase in the older population (26.7%).

This mirrors the trend in Highland, but the decrease in the number of children in the area is almost twice that of Highland.

Figure 2: Change in Population Structure between 2010 and 2022/23



Source: Public Health Scotland (2025), Intermediate Zone Population Estimates 2022. National Records of Scotland (2025), Mid-2023 population estimates. Office for National Statistics (2025), Population estimates – local authority based by single year of age.

Over time, if nothing changes, this will mean the ratio of older adults to younger working age people will increase. This matters because older people tend to have greater need of social support services like health care, whilst the revenues needed to pay for these services are generated by the tax contributions of working people. Attracting and retaining younger people is therefore an important priority for Highland region, and an even greater priority for South Sutherland.

The falling number of children means schools, and the jobs and social infrastructure surrounding them, will become less viable. Fewer schools and services for young people are likely to make the area less attractive to families, which will exacerbate the trend.

There can be several reasons for outmigration and lack of inwards migration, however, lack of work opportunities or opportunities that do not offer stable or rewarding employment are often important factors.

If the Proposed Varied Development helps create long-term, high-quality work opportunities for local people, it could help mitigate these population trends by attracting young working families to the area.

This would in turn help to strengthen local social infrastructure, making the area more attractive to families and helping to create a reinforcing cycle.

3.1.2 Industrial Structure

The composition of Sutherland South's industrial structure has also changed between 2015 and 2023. Employment in accommodation and food service activities increased by 6.1 percentage points, which is suggestive of growth in tourism related activities. Whilst this growth will have generated economic activity for the local area, it should be noted that tourism is a relative low productivity sector, and low productivity is often associated with low wages. This could have implications for maintaining long-term standards of living in the area.

Tourism in South Sutherland is heavily dependent on the surrounding natural environment and activities such as hiking, cycling and bird watching. This is illustrated by the number of different paths nearby the Proposed Varied Development, for example within 15km of the Proposed Varied D¹⁷₁₀₀₁.¹⁸ as noted in the Outdoor Access Plan, there are no recreational routes or paths in the vicinity of the Proposed Varied Development¹⁹.

Employment in human health and social work activities fell by the same amount (6.1%) between 2015 and 2023. This is concerning given the aging population profile and increasing need for these sectors.

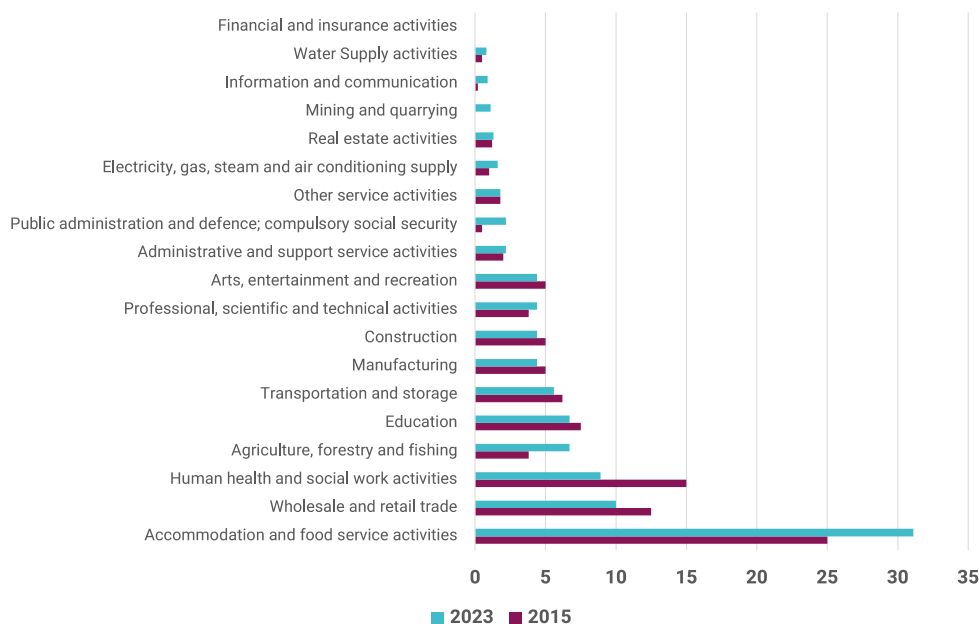
Over the same period, construction employment declined marginally in South Sutherland whereas construction employment increased by 14.3% in Highland overall.

This indicates that the local area has less capacity to engage in construction related opportunities that might be created by the Proposed Varied Development.

¹⁷ Scottish Government SpatialData (2025), Core Paths – Scotland, and Highland Council (2025), Core paths. Available at: <https://map-highland.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/Highland::core-paths/explore?location=58.015536%2C-4.389812%2C10.00>

¹⁹ [volume-4-technical-appendix-14-2-outdoor-access-plan.pdf](#)

Figure 3: Local Area - Industrial Structure



Source: Office for National Statistics (2025), Business Register and Employment Survey, 2015 and 2023.

3.1.3 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

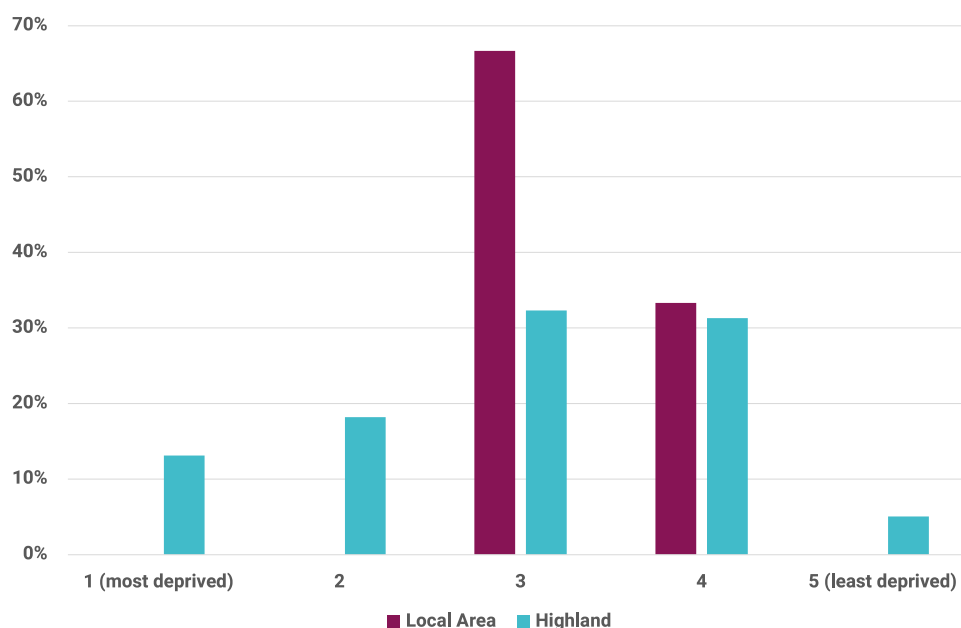
The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government's official tool for identifying areas in Scotland with a high concentration of different types of disadvantage, such as low income, poor health, or limited access to services. It ranks areas on a scale of one to five according to how deprived they are across several dimensions.

Two thirds (67%) of the data zones within Sutherland South rank at deprivation level three indicating a moderate level of deprivation. However, recognised limitations²⁰ in applying the SMID to rural areas means this conclusion should be treated with some caution. This is because the SIMD tends to mask income and employment deprivation in remote, rural and island areas as individuals experiencing these types of deprivation may be more dispersed, leading to greater heterogeneity in the population.

South Sutherland is likely to suffer deprivation across the index parameters of income, employment, access to services and housing. Challenges related to economic opportunities and an aging population contribute to deprivation in South Sutherland.

²⁰ McCartney, G and Hogget, R, 2023. How well does the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation identify income and employment deprived individuals across the urban-rural spectrum and between local authorities?

Figure 4: Deprivation levels in Local Area and Highland



Source: Scottish Government (2025), Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020.

3.2 Development Context

South Sutherland is rapidly becoming a prime location for onshore wind farms. The local area has five operational wind farms and seven either under construction or in the planning system (Figure 5)

SSE Renewables already has a portfolio of projects in the Sutherland region:

- Achany Wind Farm
- Strathy North Wind Farm
- Strathy South Wind Farm
- Gordonbush and Gordonbush Extension Wind Farms

Some of those planned or under construction include:

- Sallachy Wind Farm, Boralex
- Lairg Wind Farm, WPO/Encavis
- Lairg II Wind Farm, Energie Kontor

Others are still in the design phase:

- Acheilidh Wind Farm (formally known as Lairg III), Energie Kontor
- Shinness Wind Farm, RSK Environment Ltd

The Applicant already collaborates with some of the other developers in the region. For example, SSE Renewables has a long-standing collaboration with RWE's Rosehall Wind Farm in relation to community benefit funding (this is further outlined in section 5.1).

Figure 5: Wind Farms in Operation and Planned in South Sutherland



Created with Datawrapper

3.2.1 Economic Benefits of Existing Operations

As noted above, four of these developments are owned by SSE²¹. Research from 2020²² estimated these projects generate around £4 million GVA/year for the Highland economy and support around 50 jobs in the Sutherland region. Over the full lifetime of the four projects, from development to the end of 25 years of operational life, £485m is expected to be generated for the UK economy, of which £327m will be in Scotland. Within Scotland, £131m is estimated to be added to the Highland economy. The majority this economic contribution is expected to come during the operational phase, driven by the high proportion of this expenditure which is expected to be with Highland, Scotland and UK businesses. 45% of operational expenditure is expected to be with Highland companies and 88% is expected to be Scottish companies.

²¹ Strathy North, the existing Achany site and the Gordonbush wind farm and extension west of Brora.

²² BiGGAR Economics (2020), Economic Impact of SSE Renewables Projects in Sutherland, a report for SSE Renewables.

²³ Limitations in the underlying data mean it is not possible to estimate precisely how much of this impact could be retained within the local area.

However, SSE Renewables is confident it was able to ensure a high level of local content by using Dingwall-based RJ McLeod as the main civil contractor on all four wind farms. The construction of Achany Wind Farm in 2009 was the first onshore wind project that RJ McLeod was involved with. RJ McLeod has a strong relationship with its supply chain and subcontractors within Caithness, Sutherland and the wider Highland region. It considers itself to be a Highland contractor and aims to only procure subcontractors from outside of Highland if there is no capacity within the area to meet their demands.

3.2.2 Impact of Existing Community Benefit Funds

The Community Benefit Funds from SSE Renewables' Achany Wind Farm, alongside RWE's Rosehall Wind Farm, have contributed a total of £2.8 million in community benefit since 2010. Between 2010 and 2034, SSE Renewables expects to invest around £2.9 million in local projects from the Achany Wind Farm. To date, this funding has generated a wide range of impacts across the three rural community councils of Ardgay and District, Creich, and Lairg, all of which are within South Sutherland. The aim of these funds is to support activity designed to help build a vibrant local economy, support and encourage thriving communities, and make the area an attractive place to live, work, and visit, for people of all ages.

A report published in 2025²⁴ found that, for every £1 of community benefit funding generated, between £3.56 and £5.12 in wellbeing benefits had been generated for the local area and around £4.18 in economic value. The fund currently supports 13 core staff across the main delivery organisations and these staff have been instrumental in developing the capacity of these organisations to support social and economic development. More information on this is outlined in section 5.1.

3.2.3 Evolving Relationships between Communities and Wind Farms

The number and scale of wind farms in Sutherland South is considerable and communities within the area are increasingly expecting to experience a corresponding positive impact in the area. Whilst community benefit funding associated with operational wind farms (including Achany) is generating substantial benefits, an assessment²⁴ of these benefits published in 2025 revealed awareness of how this funding is used and the activities it enables is sometimes limited. Some stakeholders who contributed to the study reported that this has resulted in some residents feeling disconnected with local wind farm developments and believing they do not benefit directly from their presence. This sentiment was also reflected in recent exhibitions held by the Applicant in the area.

There is therefore scope to increase connections between local communities and wind farm developments in South Sutherland, particularly via projects that address regionally important priorities like depopulation and skills development.

3.3 Local Delivery Capacity

Over the past 15 years, community bodies in South Sutherland have built capacity and resilience. They are in a good position to build upon what they have learnt and look outwards for opportunities as well as within.

²³²³ [understanding-the-socio-economic-value-from-sse-renewables-projects-in-sutherland-april-2021.pdf](#)

²⁴ BiGGAR Economics Report to RWE, Foundation Scotland and SSE, 2025. Impact Assessment of SSE Renewables Achany and RWE Rosehall Wind Farms Community Benefit Funds

However, as important as these organisations are, they remain fragile and (in most cases) critically dependent on third party funding. A major challenge for their future is to maintain the capacity embedded within them in the longer term. The Applicant is fully committed to support the communities to enhance their resilience and ensure that they have robust long-term delivery plans. The Applicant and SSE Renewables will continue to work with the local authority ward managers and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to ensure that local communities have the capacity and expertise to meet their current and future needs.

3.3.1 Collaborative Approach

Since 2012, the Applicant has developed a collaborative approach to managing its community benefit funds in South Sutherland. Managing the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds together involves an independent panel of local people deciding how the funds are spent.

The panel comprises 12 people, made up of four representatives from each of three community council areas. Two of these are nominated from the respective community council and two from the wider community. This collaborative model has supported the development of a civic ecosystem that supports meaningful social relationships and structures that are building social and human capital in the area. This is further outlined in section 5.1.

3.3.2 Addressing Local Needs

In 2022, local community organisations came together to review existing community action plans for the community council areas of Ardgay, Creich and Lairg. The review, which was commissioned by the Applicant, involved an intensive community engagement exercise that ensured every household had the opportunity to contribute. A new action plan was developed to provide local organisations with a strong mandate for taking forward projects designed to help achieve local priorities within four themes. See Figure 6 below.

There are at least five main delivery organisations in the area that provide services that directly address these community themes: Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust; The Bradbury Centre; Lairg Learning Centre; Lairg and District Community Initiative; and Kyle of Sutherland Hub. Further information on these services is provided in section 5.1.

The social and community services provided by community organisations and development trusts align well with the needs of the local community given that they are run by local people with direct lived experience of the issues involved. However, there are already concerns that some funded activities may not be sustainable in the long-term.

More detail on how the community benefit fund addresses local needs is outlined in section 5.1.

3.3.3 Strategic Projects

The Achany Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund has supported a wide range of activity. Some of this is typical of the type of activity supported by other wind farms elsewhere but there are also examples of more strategic projects and initiatives that are less common.

The delivery of affordable housing, in partnership with regional social housing providers, and the support provided for apprenticeships through the Kyle of Sutherland Apprenticeship Scheme are both examples of these kinds of projects.

Both models have the scope to be developed and expanded within the region subject to the decision of the communities. Given, however, that both issues have been identified as key priorities in the local action plans outlined above, it is likely these models will be continued.

3.4 Summary of Socio-Economic Profile

Between 2010 and 2022, the population of South Sutherland grew by 1%. However, this growth was skewed by an increase in people over the age of 65 and a fall in the number of young people. Health issues, poverty and social isolation, all tend to increase with age and are compounded by lack of transport and the means to make social connections. This, coupled with limited economic opportunities exacerbates economic and social decline.

The only way to counter this is to find ways of attracting and retaining more young people to the region and doing that requires attractive employment prospects. The transition to net zero and all the developments associated with it (including the Proposed Varied Development) is the most important opportunity the region has had in generations to change this.

Future wind farm developments, including the Proposed Varied Development, could help to change this by developing synergies with local communities that address regionally important priorities like depopulation and skills development.

4. Economic Impact Assessment

4.1 Approach and Method

The construction and operation of Achany Wind Farm Extension – the Proposed Varied Development - will generate economic impacts for the regional and national economy, supporting business activity and employment. The Applicant is working to maximise the local benefits that could arise from /the project as a result of expenditure with local businesses. The estimates provided in this section reflect the potential scale of economic impacts that could be generated.

The approach used to assess the economic impact assessment was based on BiGGAR Economics' previous experience working on similar projects and includes the assessment of the projects:

- **Gross Value Added (GVA)** - a measure of economic activity expressed as the difference between an organisation's turnover and its non-staff operational expenditure;
- **Job Years** – representing the number of years of employment supported in the construction phase, given the temporary nature of construction contracts; and
- **Jobs** – representing the ongoing number of jobs supported during operation.

To avoid spurious accuracy, GVA estimates have been rounded to the nearest £0.1 million and employment estimates have been rounded to the nearest five jobs/job years throughout this assessment.

Impacts presented are inclusive of the full scale of economic activity the development and operation of Achany Wind Farm Extension could support. This includes:

- **Direct impacts** - associated with Tier 1 suppliers, including from employing and paying staff, and generating profits. The direct impact is estimated by dividing the expenditure on a contract by the turnover/GVA and turnover/employee ratios for the relevant sectors to estimate the direct GVA and employment impacts;
- **Indirect impact** - associated with spending in the supply chain of Tier 1 suppliers. This is captured by applying Type I economic multipliers to the direct economic impacts; and
- **Induced impact** - associated with staff spending their wages in the wider economy and is captured by subtracting Type I multipliers from Type II multipliers and applying this to the direct impact.

The economic analysis is based on BiGGAR Economics' assumptions regarding expenditure and how this could be distributed between study areas based on the expected nature of sub-contracts and the ability of available sub-contractors in these areas.

The economic assessment was carried out for economies of:

- Highland; and
- Scotland.

Limitations in the underlying data mean it is not possible to estimate economic impacts at the local level.

4.2 Development and Construction Impacts

Based on the current capacity and number of turbines of Achany Wind Farm Extension, it was estimated that the development and construction expenditure could be **up to approximately £145.0 million**. The expenditure was split according to the following component contracts:

- development and planning;
- turbine;
- balance of plant; and
- grid connection.

To estimate the economic impacts from the development and construction of Achany Wind Farm Extension, it was necessary to make assumptions on the ability of businesses within each study area to carry out contracts.

Based on evidence from similar developments elsewhere, and SSE's previous work with contractors, it was estimated that approximately 25% of the contracts (by value) could be carried out by Scottish businesses, with a value of £35.6 million. It was estimated that spending on businesses based in Highland could be approximately £26.1 million equivalent to 18% of total development and construction expenditure.

The largest opportunity for Scottish businesses would be in contracts associated with balance of plant, which could be worth £22.2 million. Balance of plant contracts would also be the largest opportunity for businesses in Highland and could be worth up to £18.1 million.

4.2.1 Development and Construction Expenditure by Study Area

	Highland		Scotland	
	%	£m	%	£m
Development and Planning	34%	3.0	59%	5.3
Turbines	2%	1.7	5%	4.3
Balance of Plant	40%	18.1	49%	22.2
Grid Connection	36%	3.3	43%	3.9
Total	18%	26.1	25%	35.6

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis. Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

The economic impact assessment estimated GVA and short-term employment by analysing contract categories, assigning them to an appropriate Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)²⁵ code, and applying turnover-to-GVA and turnover-to-job ratios from the Scottish Annual Business Survey (ABS)²⁶. It was estimated that the development and construction of Achany Wind Farm Extension is likely to generate

²⁵ Office for National Statistics (2009), Standard Industrial Classification of industrial Activities (SIC 2007).

²⁶ Scottish Government (2024), Scottish Annual Business Statistics.

£13.6 million direct GVA and 180 years of employment in Highland and £18.7 million direct GVA and 250 years of employment in Scotland.

4.2.2 Development and Construction Direct GVA and Employment Impact by Study Area

Expenditure Type	Highland		Scotland	
	GVA (£m)	Years of Employment	GVA (£m)	Years of Employment
Development and Planning	2.1	7	3.5	30
Turbines	0.9	20	2.1	40
Balance of Plant	9.2	120	11.4	150
Grid Connection	1.4	30	1.6	30
Total	13.6	180	18.7	250

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis. Note: Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Indirect and induced effects, which capture wider supply chain activity and employee spending effects, were estimated using Type I and Type II multipliers from the Scottish Government Input-Output Tables²⁷. Adding up direct, indirect and induced impacts, it was estimated that the construction and development of Achany Wind Farm Extension could support:

- £31.2 million GVA and 420 job years across Scotland; of which
 - £18.0 million GVA and 220 jobs years could be retained in Highland.

4.2.3 Total Economic Impact (Gross)

	Highland	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	£18.0	£31.2
Total Job Years	220	420

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

Employment impacts will peak during the construction phase when up to 260 jobs could be supported in Scotland, including around 170 in Highland.

²⁷Scottish Government (2024), Supply, Use and Input-Output Tables.

4.2.4 Opportunities in Highland

There are a number of local opportunities associated with the construction of Achany Wind Farm Extension. In particular, there will be opportunities related to balance of plant contracts, including:

- provision of stone and aggregate;
- plant hire;
- civil engineering;
- road/bridge surfacing works;
- fencing;
- drainage;
- cleaning;
- and other trades activities (plumbing, metal fabrication, electricals, joinery, painting and scaffolding).

In Highland, the development and construction contracts associated with the Proposed Development represent a significant opportunity for employment in the 'Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis', 'Other professional, scientific and technical activities' and 'Civil Engineering' sectors. This could directly generate 40 job years in the first sector, 30 job years in the second and about 20 in the latter.

4.3 Annual Operational Impact

The initial stage in determining the economic impact stemming from the operations and maintenance of the Achany Wind Farm Extension involved assessing the annual total expenditure necessary when the Site is fully operational. Based on the number of turbines and the installed capacity, it was estimated that the annual cost of operations and maintenance (OPEX) is likely to amount to **around £5.4 million**.

It was further assumed that businesses in Highland could benefit from a total £2.7 million in operations and maintenance contracts (50% of OPEX) annually and that annual expenditure in Scottish contractors could be up to £4.8 million (89% of OPEX).

The total turnover generated in each study area was then divided by the turnover per GVA and turnover per job ratios of the sectors expected to carry out operations and maintenance contracts. In this way, it was estimated that Achany Wind Farm Extension is likely to generate:

- £2.4 million GVA and 25 jobs in Scotland; of which
 - £1.4 million GVA and 10 jobs would be in Highland.

Accounting for multiplier effects, the total impact associated with operations could be around:

- £4.1 million GVA and 40 jobs across Scotland; of which
 - £1.9 million GVA and 15 jobs would be retained in Highland.

4.3.1 Total Annual Operational Impact

	Highland	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	£1.9	£4.1
Total Jobs	15	40

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

5. Socio-Economic Benefits

This section outlines the socio-economic benefits that the Proposed Varied Development will deliver under the four broad categories identified in the Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics *Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy* Framework referenced in section 1, aligned to the Onshore Sector Deal:

- Supporting Community Empowerment;
- Supporting Skills and Workforce Development;
- Developing the Supply Chain; and
- Enhancing the Natural Environment.

Each section provides an overview of the planned approaches and focuses on how the Applicant will maximise long-term socio-economic benefits for the community and the region.

In summary, the Applicant is committed to:

- Creating a legacy that empowers the community through the Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund through multi-developer collaboration and the collective administration of funds.
- Work with its supply chain and regional actors to explore the provision of opportunities to support skills and workforce development for professions where there are known skills shortages and attraction challenges.
- Utilise progressive procurement processes to engage the local supply chain and monitor the amount of local content procured for the Proposed Varied Development.
- Deliver environmental enhancement, when appropriate, to a high standard whilst ensuring that construction related environmental impacts are effectively mitigated or eliminated entirely.

5.1 Supporting Community Empowerment

The Applicant is committed to empowering local communities through recognising and responding to their unique needs, priorities, and aspirations. By using a range of community engagement and investment initiatives that are grounded in a place-based approach, the company seeks to maximise socio-economic benefits that are community-led and locally meaningful. The following section details activities relating the Proposed Varied Development.

5.1.1 Understanding Local Needs, Aspirations and Opportunities

The Applicant actively identifies and supports initiatives that align with the evolving needs and priorities of local communities through sustained engagement with community stakeholders.

In relation to the Proposed Varied Development, SSE Renewables commissioned a review of existing community action plans for the community council areas of Ardgay, Creich and Lairg in 2022. This is an example of the Applicant going above what is currently standard practice. The review helped to provide the Applicant with an overview of the core strategic priorities of the community - ensuring it can respond to the needs of the local area and place.

The review also involved an intense community engagement exercise that ensured every household in the local area had the opportunity to contribute and resulted in an engagement rate of over 16% of the local population. The output from the review was a new action plan that was intended to provide organisations operating in the area with a strong mandate for taking forward projects designed to help

achieve local priorities. The plan articulates a shared community vision and provides a clear mandate for future action. All of this has served to instil a positive sense of purpose and independence within the local community and a powerful belief in the capability of local people and organisations to deliver change.

These priorities are detailed in the table below, taken from an independent BiGGAR Economics report²⁸.

The Applicant remains committed to working with the community on these priorities to support them to realise their ambitions. It is likely – pending community panel decision-making – that these priorities will remain the focus of the Proposed Varied Development’s Community Fund – the Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund.

Figure 6: Local Priorities

Table 3-4: Local Priorities

Climate Conscious Communities	Culturally Vibrant Communities	Economically Thriving Communities	Socially Connected Communities
Priority: Community resilience Actions: develop local food provision initiatives and a support scheme to help people and businesses insulate their properties and reduce energy bills.	Priority: Lairg Actions: improve water sports infrastructure at Little Loch Shin, develop Ferrycroft’s attractions, improve visitor information, support local shows and galas.	Priority: Strategy for local jobs and businesses Actions: develop a working group to create local jobs strategy and provide assistance to help keep local shops and hospitality businesses open.	Priority: Support young people Actions: improve access to community owned affordable housing, improve regular and accessible transport and upgrade play areas.
Priority: the Natural Environment Actions: improve active travel infrastructure and enhance support for the maintenance of community woodlands.	Priority: Creich Actions: support Bonar Bridge FC with infrastructure, improve land and access areas in Bonar Bridge, maintain flower displays and make a feature of the bridge.	Priority: Increase tourism opportunities Actions: keep Falls of Shin open, invest in new accommodation offerings, invest in public toilets and improve digital connectivity.	Priority: Sustainable community spaces Actions: Develop KoS Hub, support and maintain Bradbury Centre, provide financial support to village halls.
	Priority: Ardgay Actions: develop a community market and a path to Bonar Bridge.	Priority: Cross-community cooperation Actions: operate cross community group to administer windfarm monies.	Priority: Access to local provision of quality social care Actions: explore delivery options and opportunities to improve training provision.

Source: Ardgay, Creich and Lairg Community Action Plan

Source: BiGGAR Economics: [Community Benefit Funds: Creating a Legacy - BiGGAR Economics](#)

5.1.1.1 Flexible and Continuous Engagement

The Applicant has, through consultation and engagement with the community and other stakeholders, ensured that the evolution of the extension to Achany Wind Farm has been designed to minimise environmental impact. Furthermore, through ongoing consultation with local groups and people, the Applicant has communicated its commitment to working collaboratively with communities throughout the development, construction and operational phases of the project to minimise disruption to host communities and maximise social and economic benefits for them.

The Applicant has been actively engaging and consulting with stakeholders since the early stages of the development process. A website²⁹, which includes FAQs and news, has been developed to allow the community and the public to access information easily and transparently, keeping them updated on the project’s progress. The Applicant has also held two exhibitions for the Proposed Varied Development, one in June 2025 and the other in August 2025. The most recent one in August was extended to two locations – Rosehall and Lairg – to reflect community feedback, despite not being required from a statutory perspective.

²⁸ [Community Benefit Funds: Creating a Legacy - BiGGAR Economics](#)

²⁹ [Achany Extension onshore wind farm, Scotland | SSE Renewables](#)

In line with SSE Renewables' stakeholder engagement principles³⁰, the Applicant will ensure the community has a single point of contact throughout the Proposed Varied Development and will ensure that the community has a consistent counterpart. It will also establish a Community Liaison Group, which will be set up ahead of construction, with representatives from the community council and other interested stakeholders. The company will also host information days during the construction period, so that the community is kept closely informed on the Proposed Varied Development.

The Applicant will remain flexible in its approach to engaging with the community and will continue its collaboration throughout the development, construction and operation phases.

5.1.2 Delivering community benefit funding which maximises place-based impact

The Applicant is committed to continuing to **provide £5,000 per MW of community benefit funding through the Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund**, the Fund associated with the Proposed Varied Development. This is aligned with the Highland Council's Social Value Charter's Principle 1. The Applicant is committed to enhancing the impact of this investment through collaboration with developers.

5.1.2.1 Collaboration between Developers

As outlined in section 3, the Achany Community Benefit Fund is administered using a multi-community and multi-developer collaborative model with RWE's Rosehall Wind Farm. Applications for both funds are assessed by a single award-making panel, with representatives from each of the three community council areas. Working together, the two developers and the local communities established the panel to co-ordinate the delivery of the funds and to maximise the impact they deliver for the area, while minimising the time required of local volunteers.

The priorities for the funds have been developed through local consultation and, as outlined in the section above, the funds support projects that are identified in the Ardgay, Creich & Lairg Community Action Plan. To date, the Rosehall and Achany funds have contributed over £2.8 million across the three communities. This has delivered a wide range of benefits for the communities and are well aligned with the priorities identified by the local community.

Two examples of initiatives are outlined in the case study box below, as well as in the above-referenced independent BIGGAR Economics report, which provides a comprehensive overview of the initiatives supported by the funds and their alignment to the priorities of the communities. The Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund is expected to follow this same model of inter-developer and community collaboration to continue maximising impact.

Case Studies: Community Impact in Focus

The Bradbury Centre: Supporting an Aging Population

Part funded by NHS Highland, the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms contribute approximately 9% of the Creich Croick & Kincardine District Day Care Association's ("The Bradbury Centre") costs supporting the three general assistants who work a combined total of 50 hours per week.

The Centre was established in 1998 and is a purpose-build health and wellbeing centre for the over 60s and those with special needs. It is a vital part of the community and enables an elderly population to continue to socialise and be part of the community. It provides transport to the

³⁰ [sse-principles-of-engagement-final.pdf](#)

Case Studies: Community Impact in Focus

Centre, activities, lunch and outings; it can also provide personal care which opens access to elderly people who would otherwise be unable to attend. Being co-located with the Creich Surgery and the Migdale Hospital makes it ideal for supporting local older people in recovery from illness or those receiving rehabilitation and reablement. The Centre is oversubscribed with a long waiting list and referrals from the NHS.

Kyle of Sutherland Hub: Enhancing Regional Recreation

The Kyle of Sutherland Hub is a charity and social enterprise providing access to leisure and recreational activities. After years of planning by a group of volunteers, the Hub opened its doors in August 2017. At that time there were no indoor play or leisure facilities in the local area. The Hub now provides a café, soft play area, a gym, and rooms for hire, as well as a free activity programme for the community.

The Hub has six full time and one part time members of staff. It receives annual funding from the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds, representing around 20% of total income. These funds directly support the salaries for two core staff and play a foundational role for the Hub by underpinning their ability to deliver other projects.

5.1.2.2 Maximising Impact through the Collective Administration of Funds

Ardgay, Bonar Bridge and Lairg are traditionally district communities with little collaboration or co-development of community projects. The administration of the funds across these communities has meant they have had to collaborate to maximise impact.

One advantage of this is that it enables a more strategic approach to be taken, which encourages partnership working and has enabled some services to be expanded across all three communities. The apprenticeship scheme, further detailed in the skills and workforce section below, is a good example of this. Other advantages of the collective administration of funds include reduced volunteer burden, scale and improved coordination of support, and a smoother funding distribution. This is further outlined in detail in the above-referenced report undertaken by BiGGAR Economics.

The Community Benefit Funding from the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms has sustained and built capacity in five key delivery bodies:

- Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust;
- The Bradbury Centre;
- Lairg Learning Centre;
- Lairg and District Community Initiative; and
- Kyle of Sutherland Hub.

The long-term funding provided by the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds has been critical to the existence and continued operation of these organisations as it has delivered the necessary resources to leverage an additional annual investment of nearly £1.0 million (2023/24).

Providing long-term support of up to four years is an unusual approach in the third sector. This support has enabled job security, reduced time required to be spent on applications for further funding, and has enabled the pursuit of more longer-term projects. These resources have allowed for financial stability and professional development to take place within these organisations, enabling them to undertake more

impactful and more ambitious projects such as developing capital assets and re-generating local communities.

The Proposed Varied Development will play a key role in securing further support and ensuring that long-term funding is available. It will also play a key role in maintaining this level of commitment to the community. The Fund will enable the communities to achieve their increased ambition around implementing community wealth building, including increased support for local jobs and the enhancement of community owned land and assets.

5.1.2.3 Sharing Learnings and Measuring Socio-Economic Impact

The Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds are unusual in that they are administered using a multi-community and multi-developer collaborative model. This, as noted by BiGGAR Economics in its independent report, is believed to be a completely unique approach in Scotland.

This collaborative model has multiple benefits, as outlined above. The model has the potential to be replicated elsewhere, which could help maximise the benefits and help to enhance the legacy of other funds.

The Applicant is committed to continuing to share its lessons learnt with peers and the various industry working groups it is part of, including with Scottish Renewables and Renewable UK. The Applicant also regularly shares its learnings in its annual Community Investment Review, and its recently published Community Impact brief³¹.

5.1.2.4 Demonstrated Socio-Economic Impact

The Applicant is committed to measuring the impact of its community benefit funds.

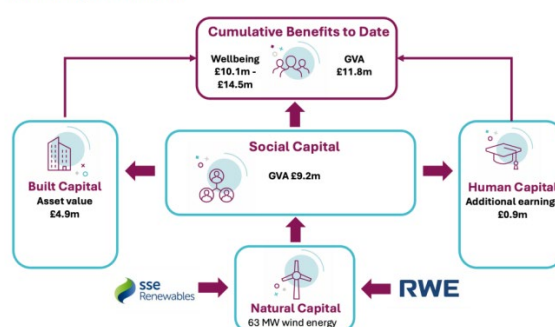
The BiGGAR Economics report found that the funds have generated wellbeing benefits valued at between £10.1 and £14.7 million. This implies each £1 of funding invested has generated between £3.56 and £5.12 in wellbeing benefits for the local area.

In addition to this, it is also estimated that the funds support more than 18 long term jobs in the local area and several temporary positions.

Furthermore, around £11.8 million in GVA has been generated since 2010 due to the contributions the funds have made to social capital in the local area. This equates to an impact of around £4.18 GVA for every £1 invested. This economic impact is directly linked to the key role the five delivery bodies have played and are expected to continue playing. Their collaboration and unique way of working has enabled the funding to be maximised, providing a legacy and social capital development in the area.

It should be noted that these benefits relate only to those generated by the community benefit funds, they do not include the additional economic or environmental benefits of the wind farms themselves.

Figure 9-1 Summary of Benefits Generated by the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms Community Benefit Funds



Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

³¹ [100m-sharing-value-final.pdf](#)

5.1.3 Continued Engagement and Collaboration with Third Sector and Regional Bodies

The Applicant engages extensively with key regional stakeholders. An example of this is its ongoing engagement and dialogue with the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE). This collaboration has included senior-level discussions, regular information exchanges, and joint workshops aimed at identifying opportunities for strategic partnership. It also includes regular quarterly meetings enabling the exchange of information on community investment priorities and how they can enhance and contribute to other ongoing work on a regional level.

The Applicant also engages regularly with the Highland Council, including with Ward Managers, to ensure that funding provided in local areas meet local action plans and priorities. The joint working ensures that community groups gain consistent and complementary support to meet local needs and ambitions. The Applicant also has regular touchpoints with Council stakeholders at a director-level.

5.1.4 Shared Ownership

The Applicant recognises the principle of shared ownership as a key pillar of community wealth building and offers shared ownership on all its new onshore wind development projects. However, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding access to affordable finance. These barriers are particularly pronounced for large-scale projects. It should be noted that SSE Renewables is already in separate and ongoing discussions with the Highland Council on issues relating to shared disbursement with onshore wind farms. This is also aligned with the Highland Council's Social Value Charter, Principle 5.

5.1.5 Commitments set out to support Community Empowerment

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
1	The Applicant will maintain its ongoing engagement with the community via a single point of contact throughout the development, construction and operations of the Proposed Varied Development. The Applicant will also ensure that its approach remains flexible and responsive.	A positive and trusted relationship between the local community and SSE Renewables which enables the potential for long-term community priorities to be achieved through ongoing and effective collaboration.	The Applicant will be transparent and open on the outcomes of its engagement efforts. The Applicant logs and tracks the engagement with all of its stakeholders, including communities.
2	The Applicant will provide transparent, place-based funding opportunities through the Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund, with a contribution of £5,000 per MW. With the continuation of its impact-driven, multi-developer and multi-administrator collaboration approach, the Applicant seeks to ensure the	The place-based funding can help to increase community resilience and empowerment through achieving identified local goals that are outlined in the community action plans. This is in line with the Highland Council's Social Value Charter Principle 1.	SSE Renewables will continue to report on community investment annually through its Community Investment Reviews and in dedicated reports, such as the independent BiGGAR Economics report of the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds.

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
	legacy of the funds prevail and support the local community.		
3	SSE Renewables commits to sharing lessons learnt on the Achany and Rosehall Community Benefit Fund's innovative collaboration model to enhance the legacy of the funds. This will include the continued distribution of the independent BiGGAR Economics report on the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds.	Sharing lessons learnt with the wider industry on how the collaborative model has helped to maximise impact could help to enhance the impact of future community benefit funding in the region and support a legacy of projects.	SSE Renewables will be transparent and open on the outcomes of its engagement. It will also continue to share lessons learnt through distributing the BiGGAR Economics report, especially with trade bodies such as RenewableUK and Scottish Renewables.

5.2. Supporting Skills and Workforce Development

Section 3 highlights that the region of the Proposed Varied Development is characterised both by an aging population and a decline in young people. This aging population, coupled with limited or low paying economic activities for working-aged people, intensifies the area's risk of economic and social decline. A key initiative to counter this risk is to find ways of attracting and retaining more young people to the region. Doing this requires attractive employment prospects. The transition to net zero, and all the developments associated with it, including onshore wind projects such as the Proposed Varied Development, is the most important opportunity the region has had in generations to tackle this risk of out migration. The onshore wind sector workforce is expected to increase from 6,900 FTE in 2024 to a peak of around 20,500 FTE in 2027. Over 90% of these roles will be in the construction and installation of wind farms and there will be a significant shortage for skilled personnel in technical roles, particularly high voltage engineers and wind turbine technicians³².

As part of the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant is committed to contributing towards regional workforce development that focus on unlocking relevant skills for onshore wind farms which, in turn, could contribute to an onshore wind workforce in the Highlands that is able to participate in future onshore wind project developments. This could also help to create further synergies between the Proposed Varied Development and the community.

5.2.1 Working with our Supply Chain on Skills

The Applicant has longstanding relationships with its Tier 1 supply chain (i.e. supply chain partners with whom the Applicant has direct contract with) and has demonstrable areas of supply chain collaboration,

³² Workforce and skills requirements in Scotland's onshore wind industry | ClimateXChange

including through its Powering Net Zero Pact Initiative – a collaborative initiative with 27 of SSE’s strategic suppliers³³.

The relevant Tier 1 supply chain partners for the Proposed Varied Development will be the Wind Turbine Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) and the Civils Balance of Plant (CBoP) Contractor, who will be the Principal Contractor. There are still ongoing discussions on the contracting strategy for the Electrical Balance of Plant (EBoP) Contractor. The Applicant anticipates that the CBoP will likely be Highlands-based or have a Highlands-presence. The Applicant is open and committed to working and engaging with its Tier 1s to explore several skills related opportunities and engagements which could play a role in supporting workforce development in the Highlands.

It should be noted that, due to the current stage of supply chain engagement with the above-referenced Tier 1 partners, the below benefits must be taken as a commitment that the Applicant will undertake best efforts to encourage their deliverability.

5.2.1.1 Local Apprentices and Traineeships

Apprenticeships and traineeships can help people secure well-paid, high-skilled employment. They offer an opportunity for on-the-job training that results in skills that can bring a lifetime of income and wellbeing benefits. The Applicant will, therefore, actively encourage discussions with the Wind Turbine OEM and the CBoP (and, if relevant, the EBoP) to understand possibilities of local apprentices or trainees to be involved both at the construction stage of the Proposed Varied Development and the operation and maintenance phase. This could help to support wider long-term career opportunities in the area for young people and could play a role in contributing to repopulation ambitions on a regional and local level.

5.2.1.2 Exploring a Regional Approach to Wind Turbine Apprenticeships

The Applicant also actively recognises that it, alongside other developers, has an existing operational and future pipeline of projects in the region, some of which may be using similar suppliers. The scale of other developments in the area has been previously outlined in section 3.

The Applicant recognises that a collaborative effort between those projects is important and is interested in exploring a more regional approach to apprenticeships for wind turbine technicians, a key skills gap Scotland needs to address to capitalise on the economic benefits of onshore wind as noted in this chapter.

Through its engagement with the Achany Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund and the Kyle Sutherland Apprenticeship programme, coupled with its long-standing relationships with UHI and HIE, the Applicant recognises it is well-placed to explore whether a more collaborative, cross-project apprenticeship programme could be possible. This would also help to further strengthen the relationship between the wind farm and the community and help to provide attractive career opportunities to young people, supporting the Highland’s retention goals and combatting challenges such as rural depopulation.

The Applicant is thus committed to undertake initial exploratory discussions with relevant regional stakeholders, including the Kyle Sutherland Apprenticeship programme, and UHI and HIE to gauge the need, value and feasibility of a regional wind turbine technician apprenticeship programme, leveraging the Proposed Varied Development, future developments, and existing operational sites. In a second step, the Applicant commits to working on an outline of what this apprenticeship programme could look like and will share it with the Wind Turbine OEM.

The Applicant has internally discussed the value of including the CBoP in this regional approach. However, it has at this stage decided against it. This is because the Applicant believes that the Wind

³³ [Powering Net Zero Pact | SSE](#)

Turbine Technician approach is more within its sphere of influence and is cognisant of the specific skills gap relating to wind turbine technicians. Furthermore, the Applicant participates in ongoing discussions with civil contractors within SSE's Powering Net Zero Pact Social Value and Skills Working Group. These discussions have highlighted that school engagement and raising awareness for opportunities with young people in the construction sector are most needed. The Applicant will however remain open to facilitating connections between the CBoP and relevant regional stakeholders, including the KSA programme.

5.2.1.3 Individual and Collaborative School Engagement

In line with its active science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) engagement approach, the Applicant will continue to pursue school engagement activities in the region. Over the last year (2024/25), the Applicant delivered 23 STEM school engagements with 3539 pupils across the Highlands.

The Applicant will encourage its Tier 1 suppliers via the tendering process to also undertake STEM and school engagement. As alluded to in the section above, the Applicant notes that this is particularly relevant for civils and construction, where awareness of opportunities in the sector, including apprenticeships, remains a challenge. This is why several construction companies are already working on initiatives such as the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Construction Aware Programme, currently being piloted in Glasgow.

As part of its existing approach to social value and sustainable procurement, the Applicant will communicate school and STEM engagement as a key social value theme during the tendering stage to solicit ideas and feedback on how to collaborate on this issue and what activities this might involve. This would have the overall strategic aim of raising awareness of careers in construction in the region.

The Applicant is also cognisant of an ongoing piece of work supported by SSE's Hydro Community Fund which is helping University of the Highlands and Islands, The Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to undertake an assessment of STEM provision in the Highlands and take stock on gaps and opportunities. The Applicant hopes it can take the outcomes of this work into consideration when it designs the social value component of the tender for the Proposed Varied Development.

5.2.2 Building Relationships with Local Training and Education Providers

Recognising the need for a regional approach to addressing skills gaps, the Applicant has already invested £1 million into collaborative efforts with key regional stakeholders—including Skills Development Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and the Highland Council—to address critical skills gaps and enhance workforce capacity across the Highlands.

Since December 2023, SSE has maintained a formal partnership with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), with the shared objective of ensuring that the economic and employment opportunities generated by renewable energy developments in the region directly benefit local people and communities. This partnership is underpinned by a commitment to environmentally sustainable economic growth while safeguarding the globally significant ecosystems of the Highlands and Islands. This includes ongoing work with UHI on ornithological conservation and monitoring in relation to onshore wind energy.

As part of its commitment to undertaking exploratory discussions on a regional approach to wind turbine technician and maintenance apprenticeships, the Applicant is initiating a discussion with UHI as part of its existing partnership to solicit feedback and potential engagement. Furthermore, as part of this commitment and as noted above, the Applicant will engage with the Lairg and District Learning Centre (which delivers the Kyle of Sutherland Apprenticeship scheme).

The Applicant is also a regular supporter of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), the Scottish Government's youth employment strategy aimed at reducing youth unemployment. Through this partnership, the Applicant actively promotes careers in the renewable energy sector, with the goal of maximising opportunities for young people in the region.

5.2.3 Community Funding and Skills Development

The above-discussed Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms have also played a critical role in fostering local and regional skills development, in turn, contributing to attracting and retaining young people in the region. Approximately £400,000 of the Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funding has been used to support skills and development.

5.2.3.1 Kyle of Sutherland Apprenticeship Scheme

The Kyle of Sutherland apprenticeship scheme, established in 2010, aims to enable participants to achieve a nationally recognized SVQ level 3 qualification. The apprenticeship scheme directly seeks to address this by supporting local businesses who might struggle to take on apprentices and alleviate challenges for employees who might face geographical constraints, including issues around transport. The apprenticeship scheme also has the potential to encourage participants to stay in the local area by providing them with opportunities for progression.

Young people residing in Ardgay, Creich and Lairg who don't have an apprenticeship offer but would like to find one can contact the scheme coordinator at Lairg and District Learning Centre to help to match them with a local organisation that may consider taking on an apprentice. Examples of apprenticeships that have been supported in the past include joinery, plumbing, butchery, mechanical, equine, heavy plant, business, electrical and personal training. Many of these apprenticeship types are directly relevant to the Proposed Varied Development – such as mechanical and heavy plant businesses. In 2024, there were four apprentices on the scheme gaining experience in butchery, construction, bricklaying and administration. To date, there have been 36 apprenticeships, supported by over £400,000. The scheme remains an ongoing success, generating economic and wellbeing benefits to individuals and the local communities.

The Applicant is confident that the apprenticeship scheme will continue to be supported by the Achany Extension Wind Farm and will support 5-10 apprentices each year, which could aid the retention of young people in the local area in a variety of careers.

5.2.3.2 Supporting Training and Development

Approximately £60,000 of the existing Wind Farms' Community Benefit Funds has been used to support various training events and workshops across the community, including the delivery of science workshops in rural schools, the development of training and adult education classes, and the enhancement of career prospects.

The Lairg and District Learning Centre provides learning opportunities for the community through the funding provided. Between August 2022 and August 2023, the Learning Centre delivered 342 learning opportunities for 1,150 learners. Lairg and District Learning Centre's offerings ranged from one off engagements to courses across multiple weeks ranging from language classes, IT & digital skills, woodworking, sewing, art, music, meditation, creative writing, film making, cooking, foraging, walking, growing, composting, first aid, upcycling, food fermentation, paddle boarding, employability skills, storytelling, and more. This will have enhanced skills and improved employment prospects, as well as resulted in wellbeing benefits.

Given that skills and workforce development remain a key priority for the communities, as identified in their local action plans outlined in section 5.1 - pending the outcomes of community council discussions, the Applicant believes the Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund is likely to continue to support these important training and skills initiatives.

5.2.4 Commitments set out to support Skills and Workforce Development

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
4	<p>The Applicant will encourage the Principal Contractor – the Civils Balance of Plant Contractor (CBoP), the Wind Turbine Generator Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM), and, if relevant, the Electrical Balance of Plant (EBoP) Contractor to support local skills development, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing opportunities for apprenticeships and traineeships; • Collaborative school and STEM engagement activities. 	<p>Supporting the development of skills that are relevant for onshore wind, such as wind turbine maintenance, and inspiring careers in the wind and construction industries, through school engagement activities, play an important role in supporting the future development of the workforce. This could also, in the long-term, positively contribute to the regional economy and counter negative trends such as rural depopulation. This also supports the Highland Council's Social Value Charter, Principle 6.</p>	<p>Dependent on contract negotiations, and the outcome of the Applicant's tendering process (which includes key questions on social value), the Applicant could monitor and publish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of apprentices and trainees generated by the Proposed ³⁴Development³⁵; • Number of STEM engagement sessions hosted by a contractor. <p>The Applicant will be able to collect this via its Social Value tool, Loop.</p>
5	<p>The Applicant will continue to collaborate, exchange, build relationships, and engage with regional actors including the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), the Kyle of Sutherland Apprenticeship Scheme and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to address critical skills gaps and enhance workforce capacity in the Highlands region. This will include exploring a regional apprenticeship approach to wind turbine technicians with the wind turbine OEM and relevant regional stakeholders.</p>	<p>Collaboration with key regional stakeholders plays a valuable role in bringing about system-level changes to skills development and access in the Highlands, which, in turn, contributes to long-term socio-economic opportunities for the region.</p>	<p>The Applicant will be transparent and open on the outcomes of its collaborative efforts and exploratory discussions with regional actors.</p> <p>The Applicant will prepare a proposed outline of the regional apprenticeship scheme to be shared with the Wind Turbine Generator OEM.</p>

³⁵ This can be captured on SSE's social value reporting platform Loop

5.3 Developing the Supply Chain

The Applicant is committed to fostering a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable supply chain that supports the long-term growth of the renewable energy sector. The Applicant prioritises early and transparent communication with contractors and stakeholders to ensure that procurement processes are accessible and aligned with industry best practice. With respect to the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant is primarily focused on maximising benefits for developing the supply chain in the following areas:

5.3.1 Maximising Supply Chain Opportunities with Local Businesses

Sections 3 and 4 highlight that there is an opportunity for local businesses associated with the construction of the Proposed Varied Development. There will be opportunities related to balance of plant contracts which could be worth £38.8 million for Scottish businesses, or £34.6 million specifically for businesses in Highland. In Highland, the development and construction contracts associated with the Proposed Varied Development represent a significant opportunity for employment in the 'Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis', 'Other professional, scientific and technical activities' and 'Civil Engineering' sectors. As noted in section 4, this could directly generate 80 job years in the first sector, 50 job years in the second and about 30 in the latter.

The Applicant will seek to maximise the benefits from this opportunity through the following measures:

5.3.1.1 Encouraging Local Supply Chain Engagement

Contractual negotiations are not expected to commence until September 2025 at the earliest for the Proposed Varied Development. However, initial supply chain engagement has already commenced. The Principal Contractor for the civils work is either expected to be a long-standing established player in the Highlands, or UK-based with a significant presence in the Highlands. The Applicant is still exploring contracting strategies for the electrical package of works - but it is likely they will have a presence in Scotland.

The proposed contractual terms will be SSE Renewables' standard terms which reflect its commitment to maximising socio-economic benefit.

To ensure continued local engagement and that there are local opportunities, including for local balance of plants contracts, the Applicant will encourage the civil and electrical contractors to:

- Attend and be involved in any local information exchange sessions hosted by the Applicant to outline the scope of works and share technical knowledge with local suppliers;
- Share any opportunities through the Scottish Renewables Pathfinder Portal;
- Prioritise local supply chain actors, in particular for Balance of Plant local contractors where there is existing capacity in the Highlands; and
- Engage with the five local delivery bodies to raise awareness for local supply chain opportunities.

5.3.1.2 Utilising the Applicant's Own Processes to Maximise Local Opportunities

The Applicant is also committed to using its own processes to engage local contractors and services and is already engaging with a number of local contractors for its other projects in the area. The Applicant has an internal process which requires it to engage with local contractors in order to maximise opportunities. This includes balance of plant activities, for example: maintaining site access tracks/bridges, maintaining drainage ditches and repairing gates and fences. Local businesses are also expected to participate in tenders for pre-construction engineering services and the supply of materials.

The Applicant is also committed to exploring regional meet the buyer's event to maximise the supply chain opportunities locally of its several projects in the Highlands. The Applicant will engage with the Achany Extension Wind Farm S36C Application

Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Inverness Chamber of Commerce, of which it is a member, to understand whether there could be opportunities to collaborate on such an event.

5.3.1.3 Regional collaboration on supporting local supply chains

The Applicant recognises there could be a need for regional collaboration and potential enhanced coordination on supply chain to ensure local suppliers can maximise the opportunities of the net zero transition and are not overloaded during peak construction periods. The Applicant recognises that it is well-placed to initiate discussions with key regional stakeholders in terms of what kind of collaboration or intervention might be useful. The Applicant therefore commits to initiate discussions on this topic with HIE, its own supply chain, and the electricity network operator (SEN). It has already engaged with Scottish Renewables and a Highlands-based contractor on this issue.

The Applicant is committed to continuing the initiation of such discussions with a view to understanding:

- What kind of collaborative forum or initiative – if any - would be useful in the i) Highlands and / or the ii) Great Glen Area to support the local supply chain to maximise the benefits of the clean energy transition;
- What are the challenges that this local supply chain faces? (e.g. access to skilled workforce, enhanced coordination?); and
- Which organisation(s) are best placed to help lead any potential initiative or intervention? Noting the Applicant's experience with clusters/forums and that these tend to work best if:
 - Led by a third-party
 - Dedicated resource

Pending the above, there could be a potential next step to partner with an appropriate organisation to help assess this, if the information isn't already out there or emerges in stakeholder discussions. As noted already, the Applicant is also cognisant of other relevant processes which are ongoing which will help to inform this further, including a new piece of work funded by SSE's Hydro Community Fund convening HIE, UHI and Highland Council to assess STEM and skills provision in the region.

5.3.2 Regularly Reporting Data on Local Content

As per its commitments under the Onshore Wind Sector Deal, the Applicant is committed to monitoring and reporting on local content. To support this objective, the Applicant has been working in collaboration with Scottish Renewables to develop a consistent and streamlined approach to tracking local content across the onshore wind sector.

Informed by this collaboration, the Applicant has established a mechanism for collecting data from the supply chain. This tool is already embedded within the company's contractual framework and a defined reporting schedule will be incorporated into all relevant contracts for the Proposed Varied Development. This will enable the Applicant to monitor local content contributions throughout the lifecycle of this project.

Regular and structured reporting will not only support the company's own transparency commitments but will also contribute to national efforts to enhance understanding of the renewable energy supply chain in Scotland. This data will be instrumental in informing evidence-based public policy and guiding targeted interventions to support the long-term development and resilience of the domestic supply chain.

5.3.3 Utilising Progressive Procurement and Employment Practices

The Applicant's existing policies and strategies provide a robust framework for advancing responsible business practice, including safe working environments³⁶, mitigating human rights risks³⁷, fostering inclusivity and diversity³⁸, and addressing workforce considerations in the transition to net zero³⁹.

SSE's Sustainable Procurement Code⁴⁰ outlines the expectations and obligations placed upon its suppliers, contractors and their respective supply chains. Since 2020, the Applicant has been actively developing and embedding a comprehensive sustainable procurement strategy, aligned with ISO 20400 Sustainable Procurement standard. This approach ensures that the company's procurement practices contribute to environmental, social and economic sustainability. Further details regarding SSE Renewables' sustainable procurement approach are available on its website⁴¹.

Furthermore, SSE Renewables' Supplier Diversity Strategy⁴² seeks to provide equal work opportunities for diverse suppliers. This approach is underpinned by the notion that supplier diversity should reflect the diversity of the local area and jurisdiction that the supplier operates in.

The Applicant is committed to ensuring that labour and working conditions for its workforce and its supply chain conform to best practices. By maintaining SSE's Real Living Wage commitment, and strong human resources policies, the Applicant ensures that all workers involved in the Proposed Varied Development are fairly compensated and work under safe conditions. SSE Renewables' Real Living Wage commitment expands to its supply chain, meaning that regional sub-contractors working for the Proposed Varied Development will benefit from a Real Living Wage. This is higher than the current National Living Wage, which is £12.21 compared to the Real Living Wage which is £12.60. T

These practices contribute towards ensuring the jobs created by the Proposed Varied Development are also high-quality jobs, maximising socio-economic benefits in the wider region.

As stated in SSE's Sustainable Procurement Code⁴³, suppliers and contractors are:

- Required to pay the enhanced voluntary real Living Wage rate as set by the UK's Living Wage Foundation to relevant employees contracted or subcontracted in the UK, subject to the conditions detailed within SSE's Living Wage Clause.
- Required to resolve any instances of non-compliance in accordance with SSE's instructions, where these are issued, which shall include backdating any applicable payments.
- Required to provide Living Hours to all employees working on SSE projects.
- Encouraged to become Living Wage accredited employers through the UK's Living Wage Foundation.

³⁶ <https://www.sse.com/media/vjncnvs4/po-grp-015-1.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.sse.com/media/ikycmpm/po-grp-009.pdf>

³⁸ [Inclusion & Diversity](#)

³⁹ <https://www.sse.com/media/ik5jy0et/po-grp-006.pdf>

⁴⁰ [sustainable-procurement-code-2024-1.pdf](#)

⁴¹ [Sustainable supply chains | SSE Renewables](#)

⁴² [sse-supplier-diversity-strategy.pdf](#)

⁴³ [sustainable-procurement-code-2024-1.pdf](#), page 13.

5.3.4 Commitments set out to support the Development of the Supply Chain

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
6	The Applicant will seek to maximise local supply chain opportunities and local content by utilising its existing progressive procurement processes to actively engage and work with local contractors. This includes exploring the value of a regional Meet the Buyers event.	Pursuing opportunities to work with the local supply chain will help to unlock socio-economic benefits in the local region, contributing towards wider community wealth building ambitions. The intended outcome from this is detailed in the economic impact assessment of this report.	The Applicant will include a requirement to monitor and report on local content in its contracts with its suppliers, in line with the Onshore Wind Sector Deal.
7	The Applicant will encourage its Tier 1 suppliers to engage and maximise opportunities for the local supply chain through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing supply chain opportunities with delivery bodies and on the Pathfinder portal; Attending information exchange sessions. 	This will support socio-economic benefits for the region, as detailed in the economic impact assessment of this report.	Depending on what is agreed with the supply chain, the Applicant could monitor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percentage of supply chain that are regional and/or national; Number of supply chain outreach communications.
8	The Applicant commits to continued exploratory discussions with regional stakeholders on whether further intervention is needed to maximise benefits for local suppliers.	This could enable a greater number of local suppliers to benefit from the opportunities of the clean energy transition in the region.	The Applicant is committed to being transparent on the outcomes of this engagement.
9	The Applicant will ensure that all labour and working conditions for the Proposed Varied Development confirm to best practices. This includes maintaining its requirement for contractors to pay their workers	Maximise economic and productivity benefits for those working on behalf of the Applicant, including through the economic uplift and longer-term benefits associated with the Real Living Wage ⁴⁴ .	The Applicant will monitor and ensure SSE's Real Living Wage contractual clause is included in its contracts and is cascaded down to sub-contractors.

⁴⁴ [For the real cost of living | Living Wage Foundation](#)

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
	the enhanced voluntary Real Living Wage rate.		

5.4 Enhancing the Natural Environment

The Applicant is dedicated to tackling the climate and biodiversity crises simultaneously and is committed to generating positive impacts for nature by supporting the protection, restoration and, when possible, the enhancement of ecosystems⁴⁵. The Applicant has a strong, established reputation for sustainable development and the responsible management of environmental impacts. The company maintains a transparent approach to its environmental obligations and commits to employ industry environmental best practice during construction and operations of the Proposed Varied Development.

The Applicant is committed to exploring potential opportunities to maximise net socio-economic impacts from the natural environment where possible and feasible in the project lifecycle. The following approaches highlight how the Applicant is seeking to do this:

5.4.1 Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity through Robust Environmental Governance and Management

The revised planning documentation for the Proposed Varied Development outlines comprehensive environmental protection measures. These include, but are not limited to:

- Peatland management and restoration strategies;
- Hydrological and hydrogeological integrity;
- Protection of Important Ornithological Features (IOF's);
- Protection of important ecological features associated with designated areas;
- Landscape and visual amenity preservation; and
- Deer management plan to balance habitat impacts and sporting interests.

Further details can be found in the Outline Habitat Management Plan (oHMP^{46[OBJ]}).

5.4.1.1 Habitat Management Plan (HMP)

The outline Habitat Management Plan (oHMP) describes the Applicant's approach to mitigating any negative impacts of the Proposed Varied Development. This is primarily done through on and off-site habitat restoration on the Glencassley estate, with enhancements planned for some of the affected habitats and natural environment.

5.4.1.2 Peat Management Plan (PMP)

Peatland/bog restoration requirements for the Proposed Varied Development are detailed within the oHMP and the Peat Management Plan⁴⁷. The Applicant is committed to implementing restoration measures within an initial 5-year period that will help to restore and enhance blanket bog condition over the long term. The compensatory restoration will aim to restore a greater area than that has been affected

⁴⁵ [saser-sustainability-2024.pdf](#) page 7

⁴⁶ [volume-4-technical-appendix-8-10-ohmp.pdf](#)

⁴⁷ [volume-4-technical-appendix-11-3-peat-management-plan.pdf](#)

to provide additional enhancement to the landscape, including improved connectivity for waders (namely Golden Plover, Greenshank and Dunlin) to features of interest related to the Caithness and Sutherland Peatland Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Ongoing collaboration with contractors will be central to identifying and implementing the most effective peat management strategies. The overarching objective is to maximise the local reuse of excavated materials in a sustainable manner.

5.4.1.3 Deer Management Plan (DMP)

To support delivery of the peatland restoration requirements, a Deer Management Plan (DMP)⁴⁸ has been developed with the aim to reduce current deer densities in the area to reduce grazing pressure and support habitat recovery. The DMP has been designed to strike a balance between allowing suitable natural regeneration whilst maintaining the sporting interests of the estate.

Importantly in the context of this report, this approach ensures that the recreational value of the estate is maintained, which provides local jobs, supports tourism and business interests, and contributes to the local economy. The DMP will be delivered by landowner, the Glencassley estate, who are actively engaged in these activities and this commitment, which is aligned with their normal estate operations. The Glencassley estate is best placed to deliver this objective so that it can ensure that the DMP aligns with the estate's plans and wider Deer Management objectives for Sutherland.

5.4.1.4 Construction and Environmental Plan (CEMP)

A comprehensive Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) is to be developed, which will build on objectives outlined in the Outline CEMP⁴⁹. The CEMP will detail appropriate measures in the avoidance, minimisation and control of adverse, environmental impact associated with construction of the Proposed Varied Development.

The CEMP aims to define good practice as well as specific commitments relating to environmental protection, as identified in the EIA Report and associated conditions of consent and environmental legal requirements. The CEMP serves as document-controlled governance that carries lessons learned and best practice spanning almost 20 years of the Applicant's experience in developing, building and operating windfarms. The CEMP is widely recognised and used in industry by other developers as a template of best practice, which, although difficult to quantify, demonstrates that the Applicant's approach is helping to drive forward environmental enhancement and management outwith its own assets.

5.4.1.5 Waste Management

The Applicant is firmly committed to minimising construction-related waste. The plan for the Proposed Varied Development prioritises the reuse of excavated materials and aims to significantly reduce the volume of material removed from the site. This supports the Highland Council's Net Zero Strategy's focus of reducing waste.

5.4.2 Promoting Upskilling and Collaboration

5.2.2.1 Supporting the Development of Skills for Nature

Peatland restoration activities associated with the Proposed Varied Development will be carried out by specialist contractors. The Applicant has established framework agreements with three Scotland-based specialist contractors, which enables close, continued engagement between the parties to maximise benefits. Each of the framework contractors have demonstrable experience in delivering similar

⁴⁸ [volume-4-technical-appendix-8-9-dmp.pdf](#)

⁴⁹ [volume-4-technical-appendix-3-1-outline-cemp.pdf](#)

restoration works on other SSE Renewables' wind farm sites such as Strathy South, Achany and Dunmaglass.

The Applicant's established presence and forward programme of works within the Highland region provides a stable and predictable pipeline, which supports contractor investment in workforce development. This investment includes the enhancement of staff skills and competencies through formal peatland restoration training and the acquisition of extensive practical experience on site. Such capacity-building contributes positively to the delivery of high-quality restoration outcomes, aligns with national and regional objectives, and enables contractors to secure and/or retain staff members which supports local business growth.

5.2.2.2 Collaborating with Industry Partners on Upskilling Opportunities

Collaboration in peatland restoration is essential to address the current industry-wide skills gap and to meet the long-term demand for restoration activities, which are fundamental to the renewable energy and land management sectors. Embedding peatland restoration into the construction phase also enables longer-term management and monitoring of measures implemented under Habitat Management Plans (HMPs), thereby supporting more effective ecological outcomes.

The Applicant has previously delivered a successful peatland restoration training initiative at the Viking Wind Farm, in partnership with NatureScot, Peatland Action, and both local and principal contractors. This initiative focused on building local contractor capacity through targeted skills development in peatland restoration techniques.

The Applicant remains committed to exploring opportunities to replicate this collaborative training model during the construction of the Proposed Varied Development. Engagement with relevant stakeholders will be prioritised to support local workforce upskilling and to contribute to the long-term sustainability of peatland restoration expertise within the Highland region.

5.4.3 Addressing Public Feedback and Planning Public Access

Following the refusal of a previous application due to identified impacts on the Assynt and Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA) and adjacent wild land, the wind farm design has been comprehensively reviewed and refined to address concerns raised. The revised layout seeks to minimise environmental effects wherever practicable, while also providing improved amenity and public access to the natural environment.

A series of design workshops were undertaken by the Applicant to inform the evolving site layout. These workshops incorporated feedback received through the scoping process and consultation with stakeholders including the Highland Council, the Energy Consents Unit and NatureScot. As a result of this iterative design process, the site boundary has been repositioned further from the Assynt and Coigach NSA, and the number of turbines has been reduced from 20 to 18. These changes have been made to reduce the potential for significant landscape and visual effects.

Access to the Proposed Varied Development has been designed to make use of existing site access tracks associated with the operational Achany Wind Farm, thereby minimising the need for new track construction. Where new tracks are required to connect the existing site to the Proposed Varied Development, their alignment has been carefully designed to avoid areas of native woodland planted by the estate. This approach reduces both the extent and the environmental impact of the new infrastructure.

All access tracks associated with the Proposed Varied Development will incorporate pedestrian gates to facilitate continued public access. This will support a range of recreational activities, including walking, birdwatching and cycling, as well as access to areas used by the estate for sporting pursuits such as shooting and fishing.

The Applicant also recognises the potential for future connectivity between the Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms, including the extension (the Proposed Varied Development). While no formal proposals are currently in place, the Applicant remains open to engaging with stakeholders to explore this opportunity further.

A Draft Outdoor Access Plan⁵⁰ has been prepared to outline how public access will be maintained and managed during both the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Varied Development. Prior to the commencement works, access arrangements and appropriate warnings will be communicated to the local community via the community liaison group, wind farm website and local mailing list.

While, due to the nature and location of the Proposed Varied Development, recreational infrastructure is not being included in the proposed plans, the Applicant remains committed to exploring opportunities to enhance recreational value and deliver socio-economic benefits as part of its wider development portfolio. In the Applicant's experience, this is best considered right at the design stage of a project. This commitment is informed by recent experience in delivering such enhancements through other projects, including the Coire Glas development⁵¹.

5.4.4 Tourism

Research undertaken to date indicates that the presence of onshore wind farms does not have an adverse impact on the tourism sector^{52 53}. On the contrary, tourism across Scotland has continued to grow alongside the development of wind energy infrastructure. In South Sutherland, tourism is closely linked to the accessibility and quality of the surrounding natural environment. This is evidenced by the presence of approximately 30 designated core paths within a 15 km radius of the Proposed Varied Development. However, as outlined in the Draft Outdoor Access Plan referenced above, there are no core paths or national cycle routes in the immediate vicinity of the site.

As outlined elsewhere in this report, the site of the Proposed Varied Development is not recognised as a tourism destination. The nearest known tourism hub is Lairg, located beyond the 5 km study buffer, which offers a limited range of visitor accommodation including guest houses, the Dunroamin Caravan Park, and the Lairg Highland Hotel. Recreational activities in the wider area typically include game shooting, fishing, cycling, rambling and birdwatching. These activities are not anticipated to be adversely affected by the Proposed Varied Development during its operational phase, consistent with the experience of the existing Achany Wind Farm. Any potential disruption would be limited to short-term and temporary periods during maintenance activities.

The Applicant remains committed to ensuring that the Proposed Varied Development is compatible with existing recreational use and continues to support access to the natural environment. This approach aligns with national and regional planning objectives to promote sustainable development while safeguarding recreational interests.

5.4.5 Planning for the Future

As operational onshore wind assets approach the end of their design life, the Applicant is committed to exploring opportunities to maximise the value of existing infrastructure. This may include life extension or

⁵⁰ [volume-4-technical-appendix-14-2-outdoor-access-plan.pdf](#)

⁵¹ [Great Glen Way diversion set to open — Coire Glas](#)

⁵² [BiGGAR-Economics-Wind-Farms-and-Tourism-2021.pdf](#)

⁵³ [Economic impacts of wind farms on Scottish tourism: report - gov.scot](#)

repowering options, where feasible, to support the continued delivery of clean, secure, and affordable energy to the UK grid.

Throughout the operational lifespan of the wind farms, the Applicant will, where practicable, explore utilising refurbished minor components sourced from the domestic supply chain. This approach supports local economic activity and aligns with circular economy principles by extending the useful life of materials and reducing demand for new resources.

Once the operational assets have been deemed to be at the end of their safe operational lives, the Applicant will go through a process of sustainable decommissioning. This process includes consultation with key stakeholders, including local groups and communities. Depending on a range of factors, the Applicant will appraise a range of options for the turbines and the turbine components, including turbine re-sale to a third party, component re-use on another SSE turbine and recycling. The disposal routes for major (e.g. blades and towers) and minor (e.g. motors) components will be selected to balance cost, practicality and sustainability (including carbon and circularity) KPIs.

The Applicant remains committed to ensuring that all end-of-life decisions reflect best practice in environmental stewardship and contribute positively to the long-term sustainability of the renewable energy sector. SSE Renewables' commitment is demonstrated by its membership to joint industry programmes, including CWIC⁵⁴ and SusWIND⁵⁵.

5.4.6. Commitments set out to support the Enhancement of the Natural Environment

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
10	The Applicant will ensure that, prior to the commencement works, access arrangements and appropriate warnings will be communicated to the local community via the community liaison group, wind farm website and local mailing list.	The community is fully informed to ensure that there is no lasting negative impact from the Proposed Varied Development on regional tourism, enabling future benefits from tourism to be realised.	The Applicant will ensure that the Outdoor Access Plan is discussed in Community Liaison meetings and information is communicated through the local mailing list and on the wind farm's website.

⁵⁴ [Coalition for Wind Industry Circularity | University of Strathclyde](#)

⁵⁵ [UK initiative launched to advance technology for sustainable and recyclable wind turbine blades | NCCUK](#)

	Applicant Commitment	Intended long-term outcome through benefit maximisation	Monitoring Approach
11	The Applicant will continue to provide upskilling opportunities to certified plant operators on peatland restoration techniques, in collaboration with NatureScot and Peatland Action, and will explore opportunities to roll out further peatland restoration training in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to support local upskilling for this development and other similar future developments in the region.	Enable local contractors to maximise the benefits of the industry's growing demand for peatland restoration in the region by gaining new skills.	The Applicant will monitor and provide regular updates through the Habitat Management Plan Monitoring Reports.
12	The Applicant will continue to engage with the local community on the Outdoor Access Plan to ensure any planned improvements align with their needs and will remain open to exploring opportunities to enhance socio-economic benefits from recreational routes in future projects.	There is no lasting negative impact from the Proposed Varied Development on regional tourism, enabling future benefits from tourism to be realised.	The Applicant will ensure that the Outdoor Access Plan is discussed in Community Liaison meetings and monitor community awareness of the plan.

6. Conclusion and Assessment of Approach

This section assesses the Applicant’s approach for the Proposed Varied Development against the six principles identified by BiGGAR Economics and Scottish Renewables in their “Maximising the Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy Guidance and Reporting Framework”.

Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics Principles	Self-alignment
<p>Principle 1: Place-based</p> <p>The Applicant strives to take a place-based approach to community investment and project development – focusing on the specific needs of the regions and communities in which it operates. For the Proposed Varied Development, examples of the Applicant’s place-based approach referenced throughout this report includes:</p> <p>Community Empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achany Extension Community Benefit Fund will be tailored towards the local needs of the community, with projects chosen by members of the community based on local priorities defined in the 2022 Community Action Plan. <p>Supply Chain Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertaking tailored outreach through locally relevant channels to promote procurement opportunities to local suppliers and exploring a regional meet the buyer’s event. <p>Skills and Workforce Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commitment to work with local schools, education providers, supply chain and regional skills networks relevant to the local area of the Proposed Varied Development. Commitment to explore a regional apprenticeship scheme for wind turbine maintenance apprenticeships. <p>Environmental Protection and Enhancement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CEMP and HMP are rooted in specific local environmental needs and specificities, such as peatland management. 	

Principle 2: Open and Transparent

The Applicant seeks to have an open and transparent approach with communities and stakeholders and has been transparent in this report about the stage of various commitments and discussions to support maximising benefits. It has sought to be as specific and explicit as possible where possible, recognising the nature of ongoing discussions on some of the commitment areas which are outside of the Applicant's control. For the Proposed Varied Development, examples of the Applicant's open and transparent approach include, but is not limited to:

Community Empowerment

- Commitment to remaining open, consistent and transparent with its engagement with the community through a designated point of contact.
- Publication of a report detailing the outputs and impact of the Achany and Rosehall Community Benefit funds and the lessons learnt.

Supply Chain Development

- Commitment to monitor and report openly and transparently on local content, which forms part of SSE Renewables' wider commitments, in alignment with the commitments made in the wind sector for the Onshore Sector Deal.

Skills and Workforce Development

- Commitment to being transparent on the outcomes of its ongoing discussions with UHI, Kyle of Sutherland Apprenticeship Scheme and others in relation to a potential wind turbine apprenticeship programme. Specifically, this includes a commitment to preparing an outline of the potential scheme to be shared with the wind turbine OEM.

Environmental Protection and Enhancement

- Commitment to deliver high standards of environmental mitigation through the actions set out in the publicly available Schedule of Mitigation.

Principle 3: Collaboration

The Applicant is striving for an inherently collaborative approach to the Proposed Varied Development with its supply chain and with other regional stakeholders, such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Highland Council. For the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant's approach to collaboration includes:

Community Empowerment

- Continuation of the Achany Wind Farm's collaborative model. As noted in section 5.1, the Community Benefit Fund is administered using a multi-community and multi-developer collaborative model with RWE's Rosehall Wind Farm.

Supply Chain Development

- Initiating discussions with key stakeholders including HIE and Scottish Renewables on what kind of intervention or collaboration would support the local supply chain.

Skills and Workforce Development

- Collaboration with supply chain partners (Wind Turbine OEM, Civils) and regional actors (UHI, HIE) on skills and workforce development activities, including STEM engagement and possible apprenticeships schemes.

Environmental Protection and Enhancement

- When redesigning the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant collaborated and consulted with The Highland Council, the Energy Consents Unit and NatureScot.

Principle 4: Innovation

The Applicant is committed to being innovative and open to change. Other examples of innovation in this report include but are not limited to:

Community Empowerment

- The above-referenced multi-collaborative community benefit fund is unique and novel in the sector, and the Applicant is committed to continuing to share the lessons learnt from this collaboration with others, including trade bodies such as Scottish Renewables.

Skills and Workforce Development

- The Applicant has committed to utilising its network to explore new innovative ways, models and schemes which could lend themselves to establishing a regional apprenticeship approach to wind turbine technician apprenticeships.

Supply chain:

The Applicant is committed to using its strategic position in the ecosystem to undertake exploratory discussions with HIE, its own supply chain, and the electricity operator SSEN, to understand

- What kind of collaborative forum or initiative – if any - would be useful in the i) Highlands and / or the ii) Great Glen Area to support the local supply chain to maximise the benefits of the clean energy transition;
- What are the challenges that this local supply chain faces? (e.g. access to skilled workforce, enhanced coordination?); and
- Which organisation(s) are best placed to help lead any potential initiative or intervention?

Principle 5: Flexibility

SSE Renewables understands that there is always a need to respond appropriately to emerging issues. Throughout this report, SSE Renewables has detailed its commitment to remaining flexible in its approach, this includes:

Community Empowerment

- Commitment to remaining flexible in its engagement with the community, including continued engagement with the community on any developing priorities.
- Commitment to upholding its flexible approach to Community Benefit Funding, as flexibility is a core component of SSE Renewables' approach to community investment.

Supply Chain Development and Skills and Workforce Development

- SSE Renewables will also be as flexible as possible in relation to skills development and supply chain but also should note that a level of flexibility is out of its control given this will also depend on the flexibility of the Principal Contractor and Wind Turbine OEM. It has therefore been scored slightly lower in its own self-assessment.

Principle 6: Deliverable

SSE Renewables has transparently highlighted throughout this report the areas in which it has control over and what it will do to deliver and maximise socio-economic benefits in those areas. It has also pinpointed those outcomes that it does not have direct control over as they rely on continued engagement and collaboration with stakeholders.

Due to this, the impact of these commitments might be greater than presented – pending the level of engagement and what is agreed. Therefore, a conservative approach to delivery has been adopted in some places.

Many of the commitments are based on existing best practices and internal commitments SSE Renewables has already committed to as well as internal experience in delivering similar initiatives and commitments.

Community Empowerment

- The Applicant has a demonstrated track record of successfully delivering Community Benefit Funding for over the last quarter of a century. This is illustrated and evidenced in several independent reports, including the independent BiGGAR Economics report on the Achany and Rosehall Community Funds, alongside a dedicated Community Impact brief⁵⁶.

Supply Chain Development

- Based on years of collaborative and established procurement relationships with suppliers, the Applicant is confident that the commitments set out in this report are deliverable. SSE Renewables has been actively working on developing the supply chain and covering social value issues through its involvement with the Powering Net Zero Pact.

Environmental Protection and Enhancement

- With SSE Renewables' long-standing experience in environmental stewardship and enhancement, the Applicant is confident that the commitments set out in the Habitat Management Plan are deliverable.

⁵⁶ <https://www.sserenewables.com/media/oo1bhcy4/100m-sharing-value-final.pdf>