

## **APPENDIX 5.6: ASSYNT – COIGACH NSA SPECIAL LANDSCAPE QUALITIES ASSESSMENT**

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## **1. Technical Appendix 5.6: Assynt – Coigach NSA Special Landscape Qualities Assessment**

### **1.1 Introduction**

1.1.1 This report details the assessment of the effects of the Proposed Varied Development on the Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) which have been identified for the Assynt Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA). The Assessment has been completed by Chartered Landscape Architects from ASH Design + Assessment Ltd.

1.1.2 This assessment is separate, but complimentary to the Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) (see Volume 2, Chapter 5). Reference is made to other aspects of the LVIA where relevant.

#### **Assynt Coigach NSA**

1.1.3 The NSA comprises an expansive area covering 86,540 hectares (ha) of rugged complex moorland, rocky knolls, lochans and peaty hollows, from which distinctive, isolated mountains rise, forming well-recognised silhouettes. These mountains have a rugged appearance and irregular landform and vary in their appearance and geological composition. They often appear larger than they are due to their contrast with the surrounding simple moorland cover. The NSA extends to the western coastline, consisting of a diverse seascape of scattered islands, cliffs and rocky outcrops enclosing sandy bays. Settlement is mainly concentrated around this coastline in small, nucleus settlements and more scattered crofting communities, leaving a remote and largely uninhabited interior with limited accessibility.

1.1.4 The SLQs for the Assynt – Coigach NSA are identified in the NatureScot Publication ‘Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas’ (NatureScot, 2010) and comprise the following:

- Spectacular scenery of lone mountains;
- Rocky topography of great variety;
- Settlements nestled within a wider landscape of mountain peaks, wild moorlands, and rocky seascapes;
- Extensive cnocan landscapes;
- A coastline of endless drama;
- An intricate multitude of lochs and lochans;
- A landscape of vast open space and exposure;
- Significant tracts of wild land;
- Unexpected and extensive tracts of native woodland; and
- A still, quiet landscape under a constantly changing sky.

#### **Background**

1.1.5 An assessment of effects on the NSA was previously undertaken in 2021 (the 2021 assessment) for the Achany Wind Farm Extension (the 2021 Proposed Development). A revised layout which excluded two turbines was subsequently (the Consented Development). The Proposed Varied Development discussed in this assessment raises the height of the Consented Development turbines from 149.9m to tip to 200m to tip.

- 1.1.6 The 2021 assessment was completed prior to the publication of current guidance and therefore a new assessment is being completed for the Proposed Varied Development. The conclusions of the 2021 assessment have been used to inform the scope for this assessment, as described in Section 1.3.

## **1.2 Methodology**

- 1.2.1 The methodology is based on the Guidance ‘Special Landscape Qualities - Guidance on assessing effects’ (NatureScot, 2025). This Guidance advocates a four-step approach as follows:

- Step 1 – Review and Describe the Proposed Development;
- Step 2 – Identify the SLQs that may be affected by the Proposed Development;
- Step 3 – Assessment of Effects on SLQs and Design Objectives; and
- Step 4 – Summary of Significant Effects on SLQs.

### **Step 1 – Review and Describe the Proposed Varied Development**

- 1.2.2 This step relates to an understanding of the Proposed Varied Development as described in Chapter 2 of the EIA Report. Reference is also made to the LVIA (Chapter 5) to inform the understanding of the Proposed Varied Development in relation to the landscape and visual context.

### **Step 2 – Identify the SLQs that may be affected by the Proposed Varied Development**

- 1.2.3 The SLQ assessment has been narrowed down by establishing the sensitivity of each SLQ to the effects of the Proposed Varied Development. Sensitivity is a combination of the value of a receptor (in this case the SLQ) and its susceptibility to the change proposed. Given the identification process for SLQs, these are considered to be universally highly valued. However, each individual SLQ has been considered with regards to its susceptibility to the Proposed Varied Development.
- 1.2.4 This stage of the assessment has included the desk review of tools such as Zone of Theoretical Visibility diagrams (ZTVs) and wirelines to establish the areas of potential impact in relation to the Proposed Varied Development. The Landscape Character, Visual Amenity and Wild Land assessments undertaken for the Proposed Varied Development have also informed an understanding of the location and types of effects which would occur.
- 1.2.5 These resources have helped to inform the establishment of a study area for the assessment within which there is considered to be potential for significant effects to SLQs.
- 1.2.6 An initial high level review has excluded SLQs that relate geographically or to specific features that are outwith the study area. The results of the 2021 assessment were also used to focus the scope of the assessment to SLQs most likely to be affected.
- 1.2.7 Site visits were then undertaken to a number of fixed assessment points, where the sensitivity of each remaining SLQ to the Proposed Varied Development was evaluated. Sensitivity of each SLQ within the study area has then been summarised using a criteria rating ranging from Low to High as follows:

- High – The SLQ is strongly representative of the NSA within the study area and is very susceptible to the type of change likely to occur from the Proposed Varied Development.
- Medium – The SLQ is experienced within the study area but has lower susceptibility to the type of change likely to occur from the Proposed Varied Development; or the SLQ is less noticeably experienced but is very susceptible to the type of change likely to occur from the Proposed Development.
- Low – The SLQ is not noticeably experienced within the study area and/or has limited susceptibility to the type of change likely to occur from the Proposed Varied Development.

- 1.2.8 Any SLQs which were identified as being of Low sensitivity have been excluded from further study.

### **Step 3 – Assessment of Effects on SLQs and Design Objectives**

- 1.2.9 This step involves evaluation of the magnitude of change that would occur to each SLQ as a result of the Proposed Varied Development and considers the scale and extent of effects, their reversibility and duration. Given the scale and location of the Proposed Varied Development outwith the NSA and the temporary nature of likely construction-based effects, and taking into account the results and feedback of the 2021 assessment the SLQ assessment focusses on operational effects only.

- 1.2.10 The evaluation of magnitude of change draws upon the effects identified and described in the LVIA and considers how these would affect each of the SLQs.

- 1.2.11 The magnitude of change to the SLQs is considered at each of the assessment locations and combined to form a magnitude value for each SLQ within the study area with the following criteria:

- High – A very noticeable change to features or experiences which contribute to the SLQ within the study area.
- Medium – A noticeable change to features or experiences which contribute to the SLQ within the study area.
- Low – A perceptible change to features or experiences which contribute to the SLQ within the study area.
- Negligible – A barely perceptible change to features or experiences which contribute to the SLQ within the study area.

- 1.2.12 The Guidance states that, at this stage of the assessment process, Design Objectives should be noted in response to each of the SLQs. However, when considering the design stage of the Proposed Varied Development which has already been developed for the earlier 2021 application, this stage has been omitted as there are unlikely to be any further opportunities for modifications to the layout. The NSA was fully considered as a constraint to previous design iterations.

### **Step 4 - Summary of Significant Effects on SLQs**

- 1.2.13 The conclusion of significant effects considers the predicted magnitude of change against the evaluated sensitivity for each SLQ. Additional mitigation measures which have been developed for the 2021 Proposed Development to minimise potentially significant effects have been taken on board where relevant (see paragraph 1.4.14).

- 1.2.14 Significance of effect is summarised by the application of one of four criteria as follows:
- Major – A very noticeable reduction or loss of the presence and/or experience of an SLQ which is highly sensitive and important in characterising the NSA within the study area.
  - Moderate – A noticeable reduction in the presence / experience of a highly sensitive and important SLQ, ranging to a very noticeable reduction in the presence / experience of a less sensitive or less notable SLQ within the study area.
  - Minor – Perceptibly reduced presence / experience of the SLQ within the study area but overall retention of the contributory role of the SLQ to the overall experience of the NSA.
  - Negligible – A barely perceptible change to the presence and/or experience of the SLQ within the study area.
- 1.2.15 Reflecting the nature of the Proposed Varied Development, as outlined in the 2021 EIAR, Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual, paragraph 7.2.12, all effects are considered to be adverse.

### **1.3 The Proposed Varied Development**

- 1.3.1 The Proposed Varied Development comprises an 18 turbine wind farm with turbines of up to 200m in height and associated tracks, borrow pits and substation. The blade length of the proposed turbines for the Proposed Varied Development would be the same as those for the Consented Development, but the hub height would be 50m higher.
- 1.3.2 The Proposed Varied Development (nearest turbine) would be located approximately 9.8km from the south-eastern tip boundary of the NSA and would be intervisible with summits and facing slopes on the easternmost edge of the NSA. This would include the summits and easterly facing slopes of Ben More Assynt (see VP10, (Figures 7.18.1 – 7.18.4)), Conival, Meall an Aonaich (see VP21, (Figures 7.29.1 – 7.29.4)), Breabag and surrounding smaller hills between a distance of between around 9.8km and up to 17km. Most of these areas would be intervisible with up to 18 turbines but there would be no intervisibility with turbines from northerly and westerly facing slopes, most of the remote corries and lochs or valleys between the mountains. The Proposed Development would appear in the south-easterly context from these areas, often within a context of existing wind turbines at Achany and Rosehall but would appear closer. From the most south-westerly part of the NSA, around Meall an Aonaich, it would form a more noticeable feature within this context and would form a new focal point within views beyond this area.
- 1.3.3 Beyond 17km and up to around 22km there would be intervisibility with facing slopes and summit areas of hills surrounding Ben Leòid and through an intricate area of lochs which form the headwaters of the River Cassley which lies between Ben More Assynt and Ben Leòid (the Cassley headwaters area). The Proposed Varied Development would be seen in the south-easterly context from these areas, usually to the forefront of existing Achany and Rosehall turbines, but occasionally in some lower areas (particularly around the Cassley headwaters area) would form a new feature where the existing turbines are not intervisible.
- 1.3.4 More distantly, the Proposed Varied Development would be intervisible with a few isolated summits including Cul Mòr, Cul Beag and Ben More Coigach, and to a lesser extent Suilven and Canisp. At distances of over 25km, it would appear very distant from

these areas and would be seen within a part of the eastern context where other turbines are already present.

### **Changes from the Consented Development**

- 1.3.5 The ZTVs indicate a very marginal increase in theoretical visibility between the Consented Development and the Proposed Varied Development across the majority of the NSA with most of the increased intervisibility being around the lower margins of hills, where only tops of turbines would be seen. The number of turbines theoretically visible would also be similar across most areas. The exception is the Cassley headwaters area, where greater numbers of turbines would be more clearly seen, framed through the valley to the south-east.
- 1.3.6 The taller appearance of the turbines would be more clearly observed from higher ground, where the full height of the turbines would be seen, with the taller towers bringing the hubs and blades up, away from the ridge on which they would be sited, giving them greater prominence. However, from lower areas (for example, from the Cassley headwaters area and the lower hillslopes nearer the edge of the ZTV), although greater numbers of turbines may be seen, increasing their visual focus, the taller height of the turbines would not be apparent because the towers would be mostly concealed, and the blades would be the same length.

### **Study Area**

- 1.3.7 A study area of 20km has been adopted, equivalent to the LVIA Detailed Study Area. This encompasses the areas of closest and most consistent ZTV coverage around Ben More Assynt, Breabag and Ben Leòid, which comprises the area within which significant effects on SLQs are most likely to occur.

### **Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs)**

- 1.3.8 There are 10 SLQs identified for the Assynt – Coigach NSA as listed in Section 1.1. The 2021 assessment evaluated each of the SLQs for sensitivity and magnitude of change and identified potential effects to the following SLQs:
- Rocky topography of great variety;
  - A landscape of vast open space and exposure; and
  - Significant tracts of wild land.
- 1.3.9 The SLQ assessment therefore focusses on these three SLQs as it is considered unlikely that effects on any others would be increased sufficiently for these to become significant.

### SLQ Site Appraisal

- 1.3.10 Five assessment locations were identified and included in this assessment as follows:
- NSA 1. Ben More Assynt (also VP 1)
  - NSA 2. Meall an Aonaich (also VP 21)
  - NSA 3. Loch Càrn nan Conbhairean
  - NSA 4. West of Loch na Sròine Luime
  - NSA 5. East of Loch na Sròine Luime

- 1.3.11 These assessment locations are representative of three different parts of the NSA within the study area, which differ in their characteristics and in the strength of the different SLQs:
- NSA 1 and NSA 2 are representative of the mountainous areas;
  - NSA 3 is representative of the open moorland slopes at the edge of the NSA; and
  - NSA 4 and 5 are both representative of the network of lochans at the Glen Cassley headwaters.
- 1.3.12 Note that NSA 5 does not have any theoretical visibility of the Proposed Varied Development, but was included to help provide an understanding of the context of the Glen Cassley headwaters area.
- 1.3.13 Table 1.1 details the finding for the presence of each SLQ at each of the Assessment Locations

**Table 1.1: Distribution of SLQs**

Location	Rocky Topography of Great Variety	A Landscape of Vast Open Space and Exposure	Significant Tracts of Wild Land
NSA1: Ben More Assynt	Present. From here there are extensive views across mountain summits, rocky outcrops, cnocan landscapes and surrounding moorland slopes, which allow for an appreciation of the varied topography.	Present. There is an expansive sense of space experienced from the summit area across surrounding mountains and moorland, although this is partially associated with landscapes outwith the NSA.	Present. This location is situated within WLA 34: Reay – Cassley, and surrounded by other wild land areas. The sense of wildness and remoteness is experienced particularly to the north and west although the landscapes to the south/south east feel more developed, with roads, settlement, forestry and wind development present.
NSA2: Meall an Aonaich	Present. Extensive views across mountain summits, rocky outcrops, cnocan landscapes and surrounding moorland slopes, which allow for an appreciation of the varied topography, although as this location is at the edge of the NSA, this is also influenced by landscapes outwith the NSA to the east and south.	Present. There is an expansive sense of space experienced from the summit area across surrounding mountains and moorland, although this is partially associated with landscapes outwith the NSA.	Present. This location is situated within WLA 34: Reay – Cassley, and surrounded by other wild land areas. The sense of wildness and remoteness is experienced particularly to the north and west although landscapes to the south/south east feel more developed, with roads, settlement, forestry and wind development present.
NSA3: Near Loch Càrn nan Conbhairean	Partially present. This location is representative of the sweeping moorland slopes flanking the summit of Meall an Aonaich. While the mountains are present	Partially present. There is a sense of open space and exposure, although this is mainly associated with landscapes outwith the NSA, with views into the NSA limited	Partially present. This location is situated within WLA 34: Reay – Cassley. There is a sense of wildness and remoteness, although the more prominent views to the

Location	Rocky Topography of Great Variety	A Landscape of Vast Open Space and Exposure	Significant Tracts of Wild Land
	in close proximity, this area is located at the edge of these areas, outside the core areas of the NSA in an area dominated by relatively uniform moorland, and looking out to the east towards areas outside of the NSA.	by the Ben More Assynt mountain massif.	south/south-east feature roads, settlement, forestry and wind development in areas outwith the NSA, resulting in a feeling of being on the edge of the wild land.
NSA4: West of Loch na Sròine Luime	Present. There is a sense of being on the edge of the mountain landscape to the north-west. The terrain is complex, with rocky knolls and lochs, and open peatland slopes on the opposite side of the valley.	Partially present. There are some expansive views across the open peatland to the north-west towards the mountainous interior of the NSA, which contribute to a sense of openness in this direction, but in general the surrounding hill slopes give the landscape a more enclosed and intimate character.	Present. The lack of human activity and rugged, natural terrain contribute to a sense of wild character, although this is slightly affected by the appearance of the Duchally hydro features seen on the approach to the location.
NSA5: East of Loch na Sròine Luime	Present. There is a sense of being on the edge of the mountain landscape to the north-west. The terrain is complex, with rocky knolls and lochs, surrounded by open peatland slopes.	Partially present. There are some expansive views across the open peatland to the north-west towards the mountainous interior of the NSA, which contribute to a sense of openness in this direction, but in general the surrounding hill slopes give the landscape a more enclosed and intimate character.	Present. The lack of human activity and rugged, natural terrain contribute to a sense of wild character, although this is slightly affected by the appearance of the Duchally hydro features seen on the approach to the location.

### SLQ sensitivity

- 1.3.14 Each SLQ has been re-evaluated for sensitivity to the Proposed Varied Development, taking account of latest guidance and changes to the Consented Development. Sensitivity is summarised in Table 1.2.

**Table 1.2: SLQ Sensitivity**

SLQ	Key Elements	Sensitivity
Rocky topography of great variety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety of topography and land use types;</li> <li>Distinct transition in landform and elevation from the coastal fringe, through landscapes of low lying cnochan with lone mountains to Ben Mor Assynt Massif.</li> </ul>	<p>Medium</p> <p>The Proposed Varied Development would not directly affect any terrain within the NSA. There is some potential for the scale of and focus of the topography to be affected by the</p>



SLQ	Key Elements	Sensitivity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wider, open and less steep country of uninhabited rough cnocan and smooth moorland emphasises the remoteness of the mountains.</li> <li>Dominance of rock within the landscape.</li> </ul>	Proposed Varied Development within the wider landscape context.
A landscape of vast open space and exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The juxtaposition of cnocan, sweeping moorland and concentrated pockets of pasture emphasises the extreme openness of Assynt-Coigach.</li> <li>There are few trees and the skies are often expansive, particularly on the coastal fringe.</li> <li>Although most of the NSA appears open and expansive, there are a few areas with a more enclosed feeling: the heart of the Coigach range around Beinn Mor Coigach, and the hidden steep sided folds of wooded valleys on the B869 Assynt coast road.</li> </ul>	<p>Medium</p> <p>The Proposed Varied Development lies outside the eastern edge of the NSA. There is an expansive sense of space experienced from this eastern edge, for example from the summit areas of Ben Mor Assynt, although in the context of the Proposed Varied Development, this is largely associated with landscapes outwith the NSA.</p>
Significant tracts of wild land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Much of the inland area is uninhabited and possessing a wild character with no roads or tracks, and access inland only possible on foot.</li> <li>The absence of modern artefacts, or overt human activity, over much of the landscape emphasises the feelings of openness, remoteness and wildness.</li> <li>The eastern highlands of Ben More Assynt, the high Coigach Massif and the western cnocan fringe, behind the crofting settlements, have a wild land character.</li> </ul>	<p>High</p> <p>The study area is part of the Reay – Cassley Wild Land Area (WLA14) with characteristics which are very susceptible to development of the type proposed.</p>

## 1.4 Assessment of Effects

### Summary of Landscape Character Effects within the NSA

- 1.4.1 Within the 20km study area, the Proposed Varied Development would lead to indirect effects typically affecting easterly and south-easterly elevated areas and summits of the Ben More Assynt massif, including Ben More Assynt Meall an Aonaidh, Braebeg and Beinn Leòid. There would also be indirect effects on the lower lying Cassley headwaters area.
- 1.4.2 The Proposed Varied Development would appear in the south-easterly context, away from the NSA. This would affect expansive views from these areas, but in a part of the view where existing features such as wind turbines, forest areas and a wider setting of the more developed and managed easterly landscape, provide context. From some summit areas, including VP21, Meall an Aonaidh (see Figure V3a-15.1-15.4) and Technical Appendix 5.9: Visual Assessment Tables), this is predicted to lead to significant visual effects due to the proximity and scale of the Proposed Varied Development in the view. However, this effect would recede with distance and is not considered to lead to an associated significant effect on the landscape character within these areas because these

expansive vistas would remain as a characteristic of the landscape, and vistas to the north, west and south-west across the NSA would be unaffected.

- 1.4.3 Wind turbines along with other man-made structures and land use are already a feature of the easterly and south-easterly context, but the Proposed Varied Development would bring these features closer to the NSA, onto the nearest undeveloped ridgeline. This effect would be somewhat amplified by the comparatively greater scale of the turbines for the Proposed Varied Development than existing turbines within this context. This would reduce the perceived scale of surrounding undeveloped peatlands outwith the NSA to some degree and would be likely to form a more apparent visual boundary to this edge of the NSA.

#### **Differences from the Consented Development**

- 1.4.4 Within more elevated areas where the taller height of the Proposed Varied Development turbines would be apparent, the associated visual effect is likely to be greater because the turbines would appear more prominent. However, this effect would still be limited to the context in the easterly / south-easterly direction and would not affect the visual association of these areas with the westerly and north-westerly landscapes of the NSA. The taller and more prominent turbines would form a more established visual boundary to the NSA than the Consented Development, as the blades would sit higher and form a greater interruption to the more distant landscapes beyond. They would also be likely to appear closer to the NSA due to the greater contrast in height with existing turbines at Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms. This may in turn affect the sense of scale, distance and elevation on this edge of the NSA to a greater extent than the Consented Development.
- 1.4.5 There would be a slightly increased effect from the Proposed Varied Development on the lower lying Cassley headwaters area where more turbines would be seen on the skyline to the south-east, with more tips and hubs being visible on the skyline in views along the glen.

#### **Special Landscape Qualities**

##### *Rocky topography of great variety*

- 1.4.6 Within the south-eastern context of the NSA, the Proposed Varied Development would not directly affect any topographical features. It would be intervisible with parts of the Ben More Assynt mountain massif (see VP10, Ben More Assynt (Figure V3a-6.1-6.4 and Figure V3b-6.1-6.5) and VP21, Meall an Aonaich (Figure V3a-15.1-15.4 and Figure V3a-15.1-15.5)) and surrounding higher slopes and summits and a few of the remote summits beyond. The area surrounding Ben More Assynt marks the eastern extent of the NSA and is seen from outwith the NSA in a setting of lower rolling hills and low-lying coastal landscapes which lie to its east where wind turbines are already present. The Proposed Varied Development would bring wind turbine development closer to the NSA as can be seen within wirelines from NSA1 and NSA2 (see A5.6-Figure 2a-b and Figure 3a-b) and may be perceived to reduce the scale of surrounding peatland hills slightly. However, it is unlikely to noticeably affect the perceived variation between the mountain massif area and other surrounding lower lying landscapes either within or outwith the NSA or the appreciation of the most rugged and rocky terrain which lies predominantly to the north-west.
- 1.4.7 The Proposed Varied Development would be intervisible with some of the Cassley headwaters area, which is characterised by a more complex cnochan landscape with a number of interlinked lochs and lochans at the edge of the more mountainous landscapes

to the north-west. However, there would be limited influence of the Proposed Varied Development on this area, with only small numbers of hubs and tips likely to be experienced within the setting outwith the NSA to the south-east. Although this would introduce turbines into a context where there currently are no existing wind turbines visible, it is unlikely to noticeably affect the perceived variation in the local landform or the appreciation of the complex landform or views into the mountainous core of the NSA to the north-west.

- 1.4.8 Magnitude of change for this SLQ is therefore predicted to be Low.

*A landscape of vast open space and exposure*

- 1.4.9 This SLQ is most noticeably experienced on the higher mountain summits, represented by NSA1 and NSA2, and also on the lower peatland slopes on the eastern periphery of the NSA, represented by NSA3. The Proposed Varied Development would be seen within the eastern context, but outwith the NSA, within extensive open views which are obtained from the mountainous areas around Ben More Assynt (see VP10, Ben More Assynt (Figure V3a-6.1-6.4 and Figure V3b-6.1-6.5) and VP21, Meall an Aonaich (Figure V3a-15.1-15.4 and Figure V3b-15.1-15.5), and to a lesser extent, Breabag and Ben Leòid. It would also be experienced in this context from the lower, moorland slopes to the east of the mountains as demonstrated by NSA3 (see A5.6-Figure 4a-b). The Proposed Varied Development would appear to bring wind farm development closer to the NSA within this context of open peatlands which would lead to these areas being perceived as somewhat reduced in their spatial extent. However, this context, particularly from the elevated mountain areas, would still appear extensive with wide and expansive views obtained. The wider sense of exposure across landscapes within the NSA to the north-west and west would not be affected.

- 1.4.10 The magnitude of change for this SLQ is therefore predicted to be Low.

*Significant tracts of wild land*

- 1.4.11 The NSA within the study area is also within WLA 34. An assessment of on the Wild Land Qualities of WLA 34 for the Proposed Varied Development has been completed and is included as Appendix 5.5 of this EIA Report. The WLA Assessment has concluded that there would be some significant effects to a localised area within around 10 – 12 km of the Proposed Varied Development. This would theoretically affect localised areas on the periphery of the NSA, but generally effects on the key qualities of the WLA are predicted to be not significant within the NSA.
- 1.4.12 Within areas of intervisibility, the Proposed Varied Development would be present in the south-easterly context. This context already has evidence of existing wind turbines and other development and contemporary land use. However, the location and taller turbines of the Proposed Varied Development would appear to bring wind farm development closer to the NSA, reducing the perceived extent of surrounding peatland areas which provide a setting to the NSA. This would lead to some very localised effects on the perception of wild land around the south-eastern boundary of the NSA. However, the greater extent of wild land is experienced across the NSA to the north and west, and these areas would not be affected by the Proposed Varied Development.
- 1.4.13 The magnitude of change for this SLQ would be Low - Medium.

### Mitigation

- 1.4.14 Mitigation for the 2021 Proposed Development in relation to landscape and visual issues was discussed in Section 7.13 of Chapter 7 of the 2021 EIA Report. This mitigation also remains relevant to the Proposed Varied Development.

## 1.5 Summary of Significant Effects

### Special Landscape Qualities

- 1.5.1 The Proposed Varied Development would not directly affect the landscapes of the NSA but would indirectly affect very localised area within the study area. These areas are recognised as providing an experience of the three SLQs assessed:
- Rocky topography of great variety;
  - A landscape of vast open space and exposure; and
  - Significant tracts of wild land.
- 1.5.2 The assessment of effects on these SLQs has determined that the Proposed Varied Development would result in limited effects to the experience and availability of two of these SLQs: '*Rocky topography of great variety*'; and '*A landscape of vast open space and exposure*'. These SLQs would remain substantially present within the NSA study area and the effect to both of these SLQs is therefore predicted to be **Minor** (not significant).
- 1.5.3 There would be a slightly more noticeable effect on the SLQ 'Significant tracts of wild land,' although this would be limited to very localised parts of the NSA. The nearest turbines would be almost 10km outwith the NSA boundary, and seen within a context where other development and land use is present. However, the Proposed Varied Development would appear to bring large scale development closer to the NSA and would reduce the perceived scale of the peatland setting which contains the NSA to the east and south-east. This is predicted to lead to some significant visual effects within the NSA periphery (see Appendix 5.9); for example, for hillwalkers on Meall an Aonaich (see A5.6-Figure 3a-b and VP21: Figures V3a-15.1-15.4 and V3b-15.1-15.5) and from the Scottish Hill Track 332 (Kylesku to A837 east of Ledmore Junction). However, the scale of effects would reduce with distance; for example the effect is predicted to be not significant from Ben More Assynt summit (see A5.6-Figure 2a-b and VP10: Figures V3a-6.1-6.4 and V3a-6.1-6.5). It is not considered that these isolated visual effects would contribute to a significant effect on the landscape qualities of wild land within the NSA due to the very localised nature of the effects. Qualities of wildness would continue to be experienced within the study area and the NSA as a whole, particularly in relation to landscapes across the NSA itself to north and west where existing baseline wild land qualities are more notable. The effect on the experience of this SLQ within the study area is therefore predicted to be **Minor – Moderate** (not significant).

### Effects on the NSA as a Whole

- 1.5.4 No significant effects are predicted to the landscape character or SLQs within the NSA. Although some locally experienced significant visual effects are predicted from a few locations, this is not predicted to lead to any consequent effects on the landscape experience within the NSA. The majority of the NSA within the study area and the wider NSA beyond the study area would not be affected by the Proposed Varied Development and overall, it is considered that the effects on the NSA as a whole would not be significant.

**Comparison of the Consented Development and the Proposed Varied Development**

- 1.5.5 The SLQ assessment has concluded that there would be some localised visual effects within the eastern periphery of the NSA, but no significant effects are predicted to any of the SLQs or the NSA as a whole. This reflects the conclusions of the 2021 assessment.
- 1.5.6 The Proposed Varied Development would appear somewhat taller and therefore closer than the Consented Development from the parts of the NSA affected which would reduce the perceived scale of surrounding peatlands which lie outwith the NSA but provide a setting. This would lead to a slightly greater effect on the SLQ '*Significant tracts of wild land*' than the Consented Development but this is still not considered to be significant within the context of the NSA.