
TECHNICAL APPENDIX 5.12: APPRAISAL OF THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL'S CRITERIA FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF ONSHORE WIND PROPOSALS

1.1	Introduction	1-1
1.2	Analysis of Criteria	1-3
1.3	Summary and Conclusions	1-12

1. Technical Appendix 5.12: Appraisal of The Highland Council's Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Proposals

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) details The Highland Council (THC) policy and guidance on measures to be considered for the design and assessment of onshore wind farms. In relation to landscape and visual amenity it identifies ten criteria to be used by THC as a framework and focus for assessing proposals. This Technical Appendix provides analysis of the Proposed Varied Development in relation to these criteria.

1.1.2 The ten criteria are outlined in Table 1.1.1:

Table 1.1.1: OWESG Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Farm Proposals

Criterion	Threshold
Criterion 1. Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape are respected. (the extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development)	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements / key locations or from the majority of its access routes.
Criterion 2. Key Gateway locations and routes are respected. (the extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes)	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes.
Criterion 3. Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected (the extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks)	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.
Criterion 4. The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected. (the extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and Corbetts, Long Distance Routes etc.))	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.
Criterion 5. The amenity of transport routes is respected. (the extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access))	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes.

Criterion	Threshold
<p>Criterion 6. The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected. (the degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development. Considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turbine height and proportions, • density and spacing of turbines within developments; • density and spacing of developments; • typical relationship of development to the landscape; • previously instituted mitigation measures; • Planning Authority stated aims for development of area. 	<p>The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.</p>
<p>Criterion 7. The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected. (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and/ or clusters).</p>	<p>The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters</p>
<p>Criterion 8. The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected. (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance).</p>	<p>The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception</p>
<p>Criterion 9. Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected. (the extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal).</p>	<p>Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.</p>
<p>Criterion 10. Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected. (the extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape).</p>	<p>Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.</p>

- 1.1.3 An analysis of the Proposed Varied Development in relation to these criteria is presented in section 1.2 of this Technical Appendix, along with a summary of the analysis for the Consented Development. Whilst the 2021 review dealt specifically with the 2021 Proposed Development, the conclusions are also considered attributable to the Consented Development.

1.2 Analysis of Criteria

Criterion 1. Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape are respected.

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.1 The Consented Development would not be visible from the majority of the main settlements within the study area. There was some visibility from Bonar Bridge and the outskirts of Lairg, although the effects on these areas were anticipated to be not significant.
- 1.2.2 Significant effects were anticipated at some smaller settlement areas including Rosehall, Achnairn and West Shinness and locally for users of the A838, leading to Lairg from Laxford Bridge. However, this comprised a minority of views from residential areas and therefore it was concluded that the threshold for this criteria would not be exceeded by the Consented Development.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.3 The Proposed Varied Development would be unlikely to lead to any increased prominence of wind turbines from Bonar Bridge or Lairg.
- 1.2.4 Effects from Rosehall, Achnairn and West Shinness would continue to be significant, with an increase in effect from Moderate to Moderate – Major expected at all of these settlements due to the increased height of the turbines, which would make them more prominent in the view (see Appendix 5.9: Visual Assessment Tables). Significant effects are still anticipated for users of the A838, where there would be some increased theoretical visibility for the Proposed Varied Development. However, it is not considered that this would result in an increased effect for the route overall. There would also be some increased effects at Achfrish, although these would remain not significant.
- 1.2.5 While there would be some increased effects for the Proposed Varied Development in comparison with the Consented Development from key settlements and locations, there would be no additional significant effects, and therefore it is not considered that the threshold for this criteria would be exceeded by the Proposed Varied Development.

Criterion 2. Key Gateway locations and routes are respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.6 The sensitivity appraisal by THC has not yet been undertaken for East and Central Sutherland and therefore Key Gateway locations and routes have not yet been defined. Drawing from the baseline studies, the 2021 LVIA included the following suggested locations which may be considered key gateways in the study area:
- The B9176 northbound over Struie, including the parking area and viewpoint on this route.
 - The Kyle of Sutherland on the A836 at Bonar Bridge and Invershin both north-west and south-eastwards, and at Carbisdale Castle looking to the north-west.
 - The A837 which generally provides a gateway between east and west Sutherland, and notably around Rosehall where views down the Kyle of Sutherland open up.

- The A836 and A839 on approach to Lairg and where views across Little Loch Shin are opened up.
- The A836 north of Lairg which provides a transition between central and north Sutherland, particularly at Crask looking north and south.
- The A838, particularly where views open up over Loch Shin, westwards at the junction with the A836 and eastwards near Overscaig and at Fiag Bridge.

1.2.7 The assessment concluded that there would be a limited effect on the majority of locations which may be considered important gateways. From the south-east, down the Kyle of Sutherland and Dornoch Firth, the Consented Development would always be seen through existing turbines with minimal perceived increase in effect. From the north and west, the Consented Development would usually be seen in a context where existing turbines would be visible. A significant effect was identified for the A838 due to views of the Consented Development, but this was not anticipated to affect the sense of a gateway perceived when looking across Loch Shin. A significant effect was also identified for VP6 at Rosehall. However, this relates to the views towards Glen Cassley, and away from the Kyle of Sutherland where the sense of a gateway is felt. No significant effects were identified for any of the other key routes or gateways identified above.

1.2.8 It was therefore concluded that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Consented Development, because it is not anticipated to detract from key elements of these routes and gateway points.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

1.2.9 From the south-east the Proposed Varied Development would still be seen through existing turbines and there would be no perceptible increase in effect compared to the Consented Development. From the north and west, the Consented Development would still be seen in a context where existing turbines would be visible, although it would appear more prominent and closer than existing turbines. There would be some additional theoretical visibility from parts of the A838 (R4 in Appendix 5.9: Visual Assessment Tables), and the turbines would appear more noticeable from some sections. However, the level of effect would not be increased and this is unlikely to affect the sense of a gateway perceived when looking across Loch Shin. The effect for VP6 at Rosehall (see Figure V3a-4.1 - Figure V3a-4.4 and Figure V3b-4.1 - V3b-4.5) is predicted to increase slightly from Moderate (significant) to Moderate – Major (significant). However, similar to the Consented Development, views through the Kyle of Sutherland where the sense of a gateway is felt would be unaffected. Although there would be some other locally increased effects in other areas, no further significant effects are predicted, and the sense of a gateway is not predicted to be affected at any of the other locations identified above.

1.2.10 Therefore, it is considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Varied Development.

Criterion 3. Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

1.2.11 Valued natural landmarks referred to under this criteria were considered to comprise geological features such as distinct mountains and lochs and other features which contribute to the Special Qualities of designated and protected landscapes. Valued

cultural landmarks were considered to comprise important cultural sites and designated cultural heritage sites.

- 1.2.12 The 2021 LVIA did not identify any significant effects to key landmark features which contribute to NSAs or SLAs as a result of the Consented Development. No significant effects were predicted for any mountain Landscape Character Types (LCTs).
- 1.2.13 The effect on views featuring key natural landmarks such as mountains was generally not predicted to be significant. While some significant effects were identified to views on the north side of Loch Shin, these were not anticipated to lead to a deterioration of the appreciation of Loch Shin as a feature of the landscape.
- 1.2.14 The effect from one mountain VP, VP21 (Meall an Aonaich) was predicted to be significant but this was not considered likely to affect the wider appreciation of this summit within the context.
- 1.2.15 While a significant effect was anticipated to the setting of one Scheduled Monument site: Dail Langwell broch, there was not considered to be an adverse effect upon the integrity of its setting.
- 1.2.16 Overall it was considered that the Consented Development would not diminish the prominence or disrupt the setting to any natural or cultural heritage landmarks, and that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.17 No new significant effects have been identified to key landmark features which contribute to NSAs or SLAs as a result of the Proposed Varied Development, and no new significant effects have been identified for Mountain LCTs.
- 1.2.18 The effect from VP21 (see Figure V3a-15.1 - V3a-15.4 and Figure V3b-15.1 - V3b-15.5) is still anticipated to be significant, but would not increase for the Proposed Varied Development, as it is considered that while the Proposed Varied Development would increase the height of turbines, its overall influence would remain comparable to that of the Consented Development. No new significant effects have been identified for other mountain VPs.
- 1.2.19 The effect on views featuring key natural landmarks such as mountains is not anticipated to be significant. There would be an increase in effect compared to the Consented Development to some views on the north side of Loch Shin, although these would still not lead to a deterioration of the appreciation of Loch Shin as a feature of the landscape.
- 1.2.20 A significant effect is anticipated to the setting of one Scheduled Monument site: Dail Langwell broch (see Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage). However, whilst there would be a potentially significant effect upon the setting of the broch, the asset's key relationship with the River Cassley and surrounding river valley would remain appreciable, and the ability to understand its strategic and defensive position would not be diminished as a result of the Proposed Varied Development.
- 1.2.21 Overall, it is not considered that the Proposed Varied Development would diminish the prominence or disrupt the setting to any natural or cultural heritage landmarks that the threshold for this criterion would be exceeded.

Criterion 4. The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.22 As the sensitivity appraisal by THC has not yet been undertaken for East and Central Sutherland key recreational routes and ways have not been defined. A significant effect to visual receptors using one Core Path was identified in the 2021 LVIA: SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk. A localised significant effect was also identified for one longer distance footpath Scottish Hill Track 332 between Kylesku and the A837 near Benmore Lodge, at a point where it would pass closer to the Consented Development. A significant effect was also identified for users of the public road through Glen Cassley, which may be used recreationally. These effects were considered to be relatively localised with respect to the available recreational routes within the study area were not considered sufficient to overwhelm or significantly detract from the visual appeal of these routes.
- 1.2.23 The visual effect on all Munros and Corbetts assessed within the study area was concluded as not significant and the effect on views from routes ascending these peaks is anticipated to be similarly limited.
- 1.2.24 It was considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.25 There would continue to be significant effects from SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk (R12), from the public road through Glen Cassley (R9) (see VP 11, Figure V3a-7.1 - V3a-7.4 and Figure V3b-7.1 - V3b-7.5b) and locally from a section of Scottish Hill Track 332 (R17), but while there would be some increased visibility from these routes the overall visual effect is not predicted to increase. There are not predicted to be any new significant effects from any other recreational routes.
- 1.2.26 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded for the Proposed Varied Development.

Criterion 5. The amenity of transport routes is respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.27 As the sensitivity appraisal by THC has not yet been undertaken for East and Central Sutherland key routes have not yet been defined. The 2021 LVIA concluded that the majority of road routes within the study area would not be significantly affected by the Consented Development. A significant effect was identified for one main road route within the study area: the A838 between Dalchork and Corrykinloch. Whilst this was anticipated to affect the visual amenity of this route, the rating for this effect was Moderate and it was considered that this would not overwhelm or significantly detract from the visual appeal of the route as open and attractive views would still be retained in areas not affected by the Consented Development.
- 1.2.28 It was therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.29 There would continue to be a significant effect for the A838 between Dalchork and Corrykinloch. While theoretical visibility the Proposed Varied Development would increase and extend for another approximately 3 km between Fiag Bridge and Carrachan, the additional visibility is limited to occasional turbine tips. Although the Proposed Varied

Development would result in turbines appearing more noticeable from sections of this route, this is not predicted to result in an increase to the level of visual effect. No new significant visual effects are predicted for any other transport routes within the study area.

- 1.2.30 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

Criterion 6. The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.31 This criterion cites the following considerations to be taken into account:

- Turbine height and proportions;
- density and spacing of turbines within developments;
- density and spacing of developments;
- typical relationship of development to the landscape;
- previously instituted mitigation measures; and
- Planning Authority stated aims for development of area.

- 1.2.32 The Consented Development was predicted to lead to some increased cumulative effect on landscape character and views in addition to other consented and operational developments. This would include, in some areas, a greater number of turbines seen within views and potentially greater surrounding effect of wind turbines, and in other areas a reduced proximity to turbines within the view. The difference in turbine dimensions to the smaller neighbouring turbines at Achany Wind Farm and Rosehall Wind Farm, also set on the higher plateau between glens in the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT, would not normally be perceived in views due to a degree of separation between these existing turbines and the Consented Development, which would be seen alongside, but as a separate cluster to existing turbines. From the north-west, the Consented Development would be seen in combination with existing turbines, but the increased scale would lead to its appearing as a separate, closer development. From the south-east, due to the turbines of these existing sites being set at a mostly slightly greater elevation, the Consented Development would be seldom seen to the rear of existing turbines, other than as blades and tips, which would usually be more difficult to perceive.

- 1.2.33 From some areas to the south-west and north-east (e.g. VP13 – Ben Klibreck) and VP19 – Seana Bhràigh, the increased spread of wind turbines would be seen further to the north-west. However, due to the separation of the Consented Development from existing wind farms, the greater size of turbines would result in the Consented Development appearing slightly closer, rather than larger. It would reflect an existing pattern of development along the elevated ridge within a similar landscape context to the existing wind farms. Although there would be a perceptible movement of wind farm development towards the north-west in these views it would still be seen in a context where existing wind turbines affect a similar area.

- 1.2.34 Overall, it was considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded, as the Consented Development would form a well-located wind farm site which would enable the generation of renewable energy with relatively localised significant landscape and visual effects, respecting the pattern of existing development within the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.35 The Proposed Varied Development would be introduced into a setting where only one further wind farm has been developed (Creag Riabhach), but where several additional developments have been consented (including Sallachy, Strath Tirry, Chleansaid, Meall Buidhe, Lairg 2 Re-design and Garvary).
- 1.2.36 The Proposed Varied Development would be located within the same location as the Consented Development, but in some areas the increased turbine height would lead to greater numbers of turbines becoming visible, whilst in other areas it would lead to an appearance of reduced proximity to turbines within the view. The taller turbines would be likely to appear more distinct from the existing Lairg and Achany turbines and appear as a separate cluster, at closer proximity from areas to the north and west. From south-easterly areas the Proposed Varied Development would still be seen to the rear of existing turbines, and while a few more hubs and tips would be visible from some locations there would be no noticeable increase in landscape effects.
- 1.2.37 There would be few areas where the difference in turbine height compared to the existing Achany and Rosehall turbines would be clearly apparent as the Proposed Varied Development would be more likely to appear as a separate, closer cluster. However, from some locations toward the north-east, such as VP 13 - Ben Klibreck (see Figure V3a-9.1 - V3a-9.4 and Figure V3b-9.1 - V3b-9.5) and to the south and south-west, such as VP 18 - Carn Chuinneag (Figure V3a-12.1 - V3a-12.4 and Figure V3b-12.1 - V3b-12.5) and VP 19 - Seana Braigh (Figure V3a-13.1 - V3a-13.4 and Figure V3b-13.1 - V3b-13.5) it would be seen to draw turbines further into the west and north-western landscape in a similar way to the Consented Development. However, this change would be slightly less notable than for the Consented Development because the operational Creag Riabhach and consented Sallachy Wind Farms would already create clusters of turbines further to the north and west.
- 1.2.38 Overall, while the larger scale turbines would extend the influence of the Proposed Varied Development, this would continue to be situated within a well-located site and effects would remain relatively localised, respecting the pattern of existing development within the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT. It is therefore considered that the threshold for this Criterion would not be breached.

Criterion 7. The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.39 The Consented Development would be located close to the existing Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms but would usually be seen to form a separate wind turbine cluster. This was not predicted to change the way that existing development clusters are perceived and was considered unlikely to be seen to form one large cluster with the existing wind farms from any particular location, due to the difference in turbine size which would usually lead to it appearing as a separate, closer development. The wind turbine cluster would normally be seen as similar in scale to the existing cluster of Achany and Rosehall.
- 1.2.40 It was therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Consented Development.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

-
- 1.2.41 The Proposed Varied Development is considered more likely to be seen as a separate wind turbine cluster to existing Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms due to the increased difference in the scale of turbines. It would often be seen within the same context as other operational and consented wind farms around Lairg but would appear as a distinct cluster to these other developments. Therefore, whilst the Proposed Varied Development would lead to an increased presence of wind farm development within the area. It is not predicted to lead to any change in the way existing development clusters are seen. Due to the larger turbine size it would often appear as a separate, closer development, similar in scale to these existing clusters.
- 1.2.42 It is considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Varied Development.

Criterion 8. The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.43 The Consented Development would be formed of larger turbines than those used on existing operational sites within the nearby area. This was anticipated to lead to it appearing somewhat closer to the viewer from some locations. From most mountain summit areas where the widest views are obtained across the landscape, this was not considered to lead to a notable effect on the perceived scale of the landscape as the view is already so expansive. For most of these locations, the perception of scale was influenced by a greater sense of distance beyond where the Consented Development would be seen. For example, from locations such as VP13 – Ben Klibreck and VP5 – Ben Hee distant mountains beyond the Consented Development were more influential in leading to the perceived sense of scale. From closer areas and summits, such as VP10 – Ben More Assynt the location and scale of the Consented Development was considered to lead to some degree of perceived reduction in the more local, surrounding undeveloped peatlands to the south-east because it would be closer than existing turbines. However, expansive views would still be perceived in other directions and the sense of scale in the more distant landscape would be maintained.
- 1.2.44 From lower areas, the Consented Development would normally be seen as proportionate to the adjacent landscape as turbines have been purposely set away from the highest parts of the site. For example, from VP9 – Achnairn Caravan and Camping Site Entrance and VP14 – A838 near West Shinness, although the visual effect of the Consented Development was anticipated to be significant, the turbines would be seen on the skyline between two adjacent hills with hubs always below the height of the adjacent topography, thereby reducing the prominence of the turbines. As such, it was not considered that the Consented Development would overwhelm the scale of the ridge.
- 1.2.45 It was considered that overall, the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Consented Development because the apparent landscape scale and distance perceived by receptors would be generally maintained, other than in very localised locations where the Consented Development would inevitably be closer than existing wind turbines.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.46 The Proposed Varied Development turbines would be larger in scale than Consented Development turbines, contributing further to the perception of turbines appearing

closer to the viewer from some locations. From mountain summit areas, where the most expansive views would be obtained, this is not considered to result in a notable increase in effect on the perceived scale of the landscape although it may contribute to a perception of turbines appearing closer within the surrounding landscape. There would be no increase in effect from more distant locations such as VP5 (Ben Hee, see Figure V3a-3.1 - V3a-3.4 and Figure V3b-3.1 - V3b-3.5), VP13 (Ben Klibreck, see Figure V3a-9.1 - V3a-9.4 and Figure V3b-9.1 - V3b-9.5) and VP19 (Sean Braigh, see Figure V3a-13.1 - V3a-13.4 and Figure V3b-13.1 - V3b-13.5), and the Proposed Varied Development turbines are not considered to affect the sense of scale which is experienced. From closer areas such as VP10 – Ben More Assynt (see Figure V3a-6.1 - V3a-6.4 and Figure V3b-6.1 - V3b-6.5), while the turbines would appear closer than previously, with the potential to reduce the perceived extent of the more local, surrounding undeveloped peatlands, the wider views across the mountainous landscapes in other directions would remain unaffected, and the wider sense of expansiveness would still be experienced.

- 1.2.47 From some lower areas, the Proposed Varied Development may appear more prominent compared to the Consented Development, due to the increased scale of the turbines in relation to the surrounding landform, which previously contained the turbines e.g. from VP9 (see Figure V3a-5.1 - V3a-5.4 and V3b-5.1 - V3b-5.5) and VP14 (see Figure V3a-10.1 - V3a-10.4 and Figure V3b-10.1 - V3b-10.5). Where increased effects are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Varied Development, this may locally reduce the perceived scale of the terrain slightly but this would be a localised effect.
- 1.2.48 Overall, it is considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded, as these effects would remain relatively localised.

Criterion 9. Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.49 As detailed for Criterion 6, the Consented Development would be set close to the existing Achany and Rosehall turbines but would almost always appear as a separate cluster. Due to the position of the existing wind turbines at slightly higher elevation, the setting of these wind turbines was considered unlikely to be noticeably affected by the Consented Development, other than where the Consented Development would form a closer feature within the landscape setting to the front of these turbines. However, in these situations it would still form a clearly separate cluster due to the larger turbine size which would exaggerate the perceived distance between it and the existing wind farms. It was not considered that there would be any locations where the Consented Development would increase the prominence of existing wind turbines within the landscape setting.
- 1.2.50 It was therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Consented Development.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.51 The impact on the setting of the existing Achany and Rosehall turbines is generally comparable for the Proposed Varied Development and the Consented Development. Where the Consented Development would form a closer feature within the landscape setting to the front of these turbines, it would still form a clearly separate cluster, with the increased height difference to existing turbines further reinforcing the separation between the Proposed Varied Development and the existing turbines. It is not considered

that there would be any locations where the Proposed Varied Development would increase the prominence of existing wind turbines within the landscape setting.

- 1.2.52 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Varied Development.

Criterion 10. Distinctiveness of landscape character is respected

Summary of analysis for Consented Development

- 1.2.53 The Consented Development was considered to lead to some localised effects on landscape character, largely limited to the north of the Consented Development where existing wind turbines would be less influential. These would affect LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland and LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland, anticipated to reach up to 8km from the Consented Development and locally to 10km.
- 1.2.54 A localised significant effect was also identified to Wild Land Area (WLA) 34—Reay Cassley and one of its Key Qualities: *“Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains”*, covering a similar area to the east and west of Glen Cassley. However, this was not anticipated to affect the integrity of WLA 34.
- 1.2.55 No significant effects were identified to any NSA or SLA designated landscapes.
- 1.2.56 The range of significant effects were considered to be localised and other than within the directly affected confines of the immediate development site, the landscape character was not considered to be fundamentally changed. The integrity of the LCTs was therefore not anticipated to be affected within the study area. Surrounding LCTs would not be significantly affected and as the Consented Development would be located within the same LCT as existing wind farm development within the surrounding area, no loss to the experience of landscape variety within the study area was anticipated.
- 1.2.57 It was therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Consented Development.

Analysis for Proposed Varied Development

- 1.2.58 The Proposed Varied Development would continue to lead to localised significant effects on landscape character within LCT 135: Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland and LCT 142: Strath – Caithness & Sutherland. Within LCT 135, the extent of the area within which significant effects would be experienced would be broadly similar to the Consented Development. However, the area within which significant effects would be Major (significant) rather than Moderate (significant) is predicted to be slightly larger, increasing from around 2km for the Consented Development, to localised areas up to 3km away, with the Moderate effect being experienced within surrounding context up to around 8-10km. Within LCT 142, there would be an increased significant effect within the upper part of Glen Cassley from a localised Moderate (significant) effect to a localised Moderate – Major (significant) effect, also resulting in a slightly larger area being significantly affected.
- 1.2.59 Within WLA 34, the area of significant effect to WLQ4 would increase to 10 – 12km, affecting localised parts of the Eastern and Western Lobster Claw and south-eastern Central Core.

-
- 1.2.60 No new significant effects were identified to any NSA or SLA designated landscapes.
- 1.2.61 While there would be some localised increases in landscape effect, significant effects would continue to be localised and other than within the directly affected confines of the immediate development site, the landscape character is not considered to be fundamentally changed. Significant effects would continue to be confined to LCTs which are already largely associated with wind farm development. With the introduction of the Proposed Varied Development into the current baseline, notable areas of these LCTs would continue to be unaffected by the close presence of wind turbines whilst more distant presence of wind turbines is already common feature of these LCTs. No loss to the experience of landscape variety within the study area is therefore anticipated.
- 1.2.62 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Varied Development.
- 1.2.63 It is noted that when cumulative effects are taken into account, wind turbines would become a more dominating feature throughout some of these landscape areas. However, this would be mostly attributable to other proposed developments rather than the Proposed Varied Development. In this context, it is not considered that the Proposed Varied Development itself would breach the threshold for this criterion.

1.3 Summary and Conclusions

- 1.3.1 The analysis of the THC criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals has taken account of the anticipated landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Varied Development detailed in Chapter 5 of the EIA. This has concluded that although the Proposed Varied Development would result in some new effects compared to the Consented Development, these would still be focused within localised parts of the landscape and visual resource, and the location, design and layout of the Proposed Varied Development is not anticipated to result in the threshold for any of the ten THC criteria being exceeded.
- 1.3.2 The Proposed Varied Development is therefore considered to be in broad conformity with THC's criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals.