



# Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension

## Socio-Economic Report

Document Classification | **Public**



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## Glossary

The following defined terms are used throughout this document:

**The Applicant** – SSE Generation Limited (hereafter referred to as ‘the Applicant’)

**Contractor / Principal Contractor (PC)** – as defined in the Construction (Design & Management) Regulations 2015 (as amended) or equivalent, the Principal Contractor is appointed by SSE Renewables and has control over the construction phase of the development. There may be a number of contractors (and sub-contractors) employed by the Principal Contractor or working under their management.

**Developer** – SSE Renewables Ltd

**Guidance** – Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy Guidance and Report Framework produced by Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics.

**Proposed Varied Development** – Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension. The S36C application proposes to vary the Section 36 consent granted by the Scottish Ministers on August 2022 for the construction and operation of the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension (the ‘Consented Development’)

# Executive Summary

**Maximising socio-economic benefits of Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension:** This socio-economic report accompanies the Proposed Varied Development's (*Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension*) Section 36C application and outlines how the Applicant plans to maximise the net socio-economic impacts of the Proposed Varied Development.

**Renewable energy brings opportunities for economic development within the Highlands:** The transition to net zero, and the developments associated with it, including the Proposed Varied Development, present a significant opportunity for the region to address demographic challenges, such as rural depopulation, and support community wealth building ambitions. By generating high-quality employment opportunities for local workforces and suppliers, the Proposed Varied Development has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the attraction and retention of residents, particularly young people, within the Highlands.

**Alignment to best practice Guidance:** The Applicant has used the '*Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy*' Guidance and Report Framework developed by Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics to write this report, which provides guidance of what is expected in relation to policy 11c in Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework. The socio-economic commitments made in this report by the Applicant are targeted and place-based to maximise the social value. The Applicant has engaged in a partnership with BiGGAR Economics to write this report, both ensuring it aligns to the Guidance requirements and to enable third-party independence of the Economic Context chapter (Section 3) and the Economic Impact Assessment (Section 4).

**The Applicant proposes to maximise net socio-economic benefits across four core areas:** These four broad categories stem from the Scottish Onshore Wind Sector Deal and are outlined in the Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics Guidance. The Applicant's commitments are summarised in the Commitments Overview section and are detailed in the Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefits (Section 5) of this report. In summary, the Applicant is committing to:

- **Supply Chain Development:** maximising impacts through supporting supply chain development, particularly focusing on local and regional supply chain engagement, reporting on local content and collaborating with key stakeholders to promote opportunities.
- **Skills and Workforce Development:** maximising benefits through upholding its progressive recruitment and employment practices for all workers, including the supply chain, building collaborative relationships with local education and training providers, and exploring opportunities for a regional wind turbine apprenticeship to address a critical skills gap.
- **Community Empowerment:** understanding the local area and providing support to local community councils, development trusts and key local stakeholders to build capacity, providing both local Community Benefit Funding in line with the Scottish Government's Good Practice Principles, as well as continued support for its regional Sustainable Development Fund. Funds are focused on delivering priorities identified in Local Place Plans and Community Action Plans.
- **Environmental Protection and Enhancement:** ensuring that the Proposed Varied Development enhances both the natural and social capital of the local area, provide upskilling opportunities on peatland restoration, and ensure the site is safe and accessible for public access, supporting local recreation and tourism.

**Supporting the aims of the Social Value Charter and Community Wealth Building:** These targeted, place-based commitments aimed at maximising socio-economic impact are consistent with key elements of 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 regional impact through strategic collaboration:** The Applicant acknowledges its broader role within the regional ecosystem and recognises that, to maximise socio-economic benefit, it must collaborate with industry and regional bodies to support a coordinated regional approach. To this end, the Applicant is actively engaging with key stakeholders to support regional growth. While discussions remain at an early stage, they reflect the Applicant's long-term commitment to addressing regional challenges through collaborative approaches.

**With the Applicant's approach and commitments in the framework of the Proposed Varied Development, the project can create a 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 benefit:

#### **Total Economic Impact (Gross)**

	Highlands	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	24.8	43.1
Total Job Years	310	580

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

#### **Total Annual Operational Impact**

	Highlands	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	1.9	4.2
Total Jobs	16	43

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

# Commitments Overview

The Applicant 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.

**Table 1: Commitments to Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of the Proposed Varied Development**

Supply Chain Development (Community Wealth Building)	
1	Ensure that the Applicant's standard approach to local supply chain engagement is fully delivered including maximising local opportunities, reporting on local content, and utilising progressive procurement practices to allow the Proposed Varied Development to support supply chain development.
2	Continue to engage with key stakeholders, including Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Scottish and Southern Energy Networks (SSEN), and the supply chain, to assess opportunities for regional interventions that will practically support local suppliers to build and strengthen capacity that could help them win contracts for upcoming renewable energy and infrastructure developments, and provide any updates and outcomes to The Highland Council.
3	Explore, through collaborating with regional stakeholders including HIE and the Inverness Chamber of Commerce, the value of hosting a regional "Meet the Buyers" event which would connect local suppliers with contractors and developers involved in the multiple renewable energy projects proposed across the Highlands. This could encourage broader participation in the clean energy transition by local suppliers. The Applicant will be transparent and open with The Highland Council on the outcomes of its collaborative efforts.
Skills and Workforce Development (The Highland Council Social Value Charter, Principle 7)	
4	Ensure that the Applicant's standard approach to utilising progressive recruitment and employment practices, understanding local capacity, building relationships with local education and training providers, exploring labour market development solutions and providing community funding for skills development is fully delivered for the Proposed Varied Development to support skills and workforce development.
5	The Applicant will engage with the Wind Turbine Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) to explore skills development opportunities that could support workforce growth in the Highlands and address key skills gaps, notably a possible regional wind turbine technician apprenticeship.
6	The Applicant will include young person's outreach in the social value component of its tender and request a social value plan from its Principal Contractor. The plan delivered by the Principal

	Contractor should outline the ways in which the civil contractor will contribute to promoting construction careers and skills (a critical skills gap in the Highlands <sup>1</sup> ).
<b>Community Empowerment (The Highland Council Social Value Charter, Principles 1 and 7)</b>	
<b>7</b>	Ensure that the Applicant's standard approach is implemented for the Proposed Varied Development. This includes: understanding the local area; being open to the principle of shared ownership on new developments; ensuring effective governance of all processes; and pursuing opportunities to collaborate with regional stakeholders.
<b>8</b>	Continue to undertake a place-based approach to empowering communities through providing a local Community Benefit Fund, in line with the UK and Scottish Government's Good Practice Principles, actively encouraging collaboration between local organisations to address local challenges, and providing support to local community councils to build capacity and maximise opportunities.
<b>9</b>	Provide continued support for regional priorities through SSE Renewables' Sustainable Development Fund <sup>2</sup> to boost regional prospects and address regionally important priorities, like depopulation and skills development.
<b>Environmental Protection and Enhancement</b>	
<b>10</b>	Ensure that the Applicant's standard approach of implementing robust Environmental Protection and Enhancement Plans, minimising and effectively managing waste, investing in infrastructure which improves community access to green spaces and ensuring to consider communities when planning for decommissioning is fully delivered for the Proposed Varied Development. 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.
<b>11</b>	Continue to explore upskilling opportunities to locally certified plant operators on peatland restoration techniques, in collaboration with NatureScot and Peatland Action, and explore opportunities to roll out further peatland restoration training in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to better maximise the benefits of the industry's growing demand for peatland restoration in the region.
<b>12</b>	Continue to review the Applicant's internal governance processes and framework to ensure that sustainability, including the consideration of how to maximise socio-economic benefits, is embedded into the early design stage of projects to ensure opportunities are maximised and deliverable.

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<sup>1</sup> [rsa-regional-report-highlands-and-islands.pdf](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Sustainable development fund | SSE Renewables](#)

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Project Background

SSE Generation Limited (hereafter referred to as ‘the Applicant’) is submitting an application to the Scottish Ministers via the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECU) under Section 36C (‘the S36C application’) of the Electricity Act 1989 (‘the 1989 Act’). The S36C application proposes to vary the Section 36 consent granted by the Scottish Ministers on 30th August 2022 for the construction and operation of the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension (the ‘Consented Development’) located on the Glenmoriston Estate, north-west of Invermoriston in the Great Glen within The Highland Council Local Planning Authority Area.

The principal variation requested to the Consented Scheme is to increase the tip height of the 15 turbines from 180m to up to 230m with related minimal changes to infrastructure.

Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension has been subject to two previous design iterations over the life of the project, and the layout has evolved in response to both feedback from consultees and from additional environmental data. The principal iterations are summarised in the originally submitted 2021 Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) and 2022 Additional Information Report (AIR):

- 2021 EIAR for 18 wind turbines generators (WTGs); and
- 2022 AIR to modify the scheme to 15 WTGs - the Consented Development layout.

## 1.2. Overview of this Report

This report seeks to demonstrate compliance with Scotland’s National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Policy 11<sup>3</sup> by fulfilling the requirements set in Paragraph c:

*“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 Framework (the Guidance)<sup>4</sup>, produced by Scottish Renewables and BiGGAR Economics, to develop this socio-economic report. The Guidance is aligned to the key themes of the Scottish Onshore Wind Sector Deal<sup>5</sup> and focuses on *how* a project will ensure that socio-economic benefits are maximised and *how* they will be demonstrated. The Guidance 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, 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.

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<sup>3</sup> [Supporting documents - National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy Guidance and Reporting Framework](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Onshore wind sector deal - gov.scot](#)



SSE Renewables welcomes feedback and comment on this report from THC so that it can steadily and consistently improve its approach.

### **1.2.1. Working with BiGGAR Economics**

The Applicant has been refining its approach to socio-economic reporting in alignment with the updated NPF4 requirements. This new approach has allowed for greater flexibility and deeper engagement with internal stakeholders, particularly those who are instrumental in delivering socio-economic benefits.

The Applicant has engaged with BiGGAR Economics 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, relying on its deep-rooted regional expertise, drafted the economic context Section (Section 3).

## **1.3. About SSE Renewables**

SSE's purpose is to provide the energy needed today while building a better world of energy for tomorrow. We do this by developing, building, operating and investing in electricity infrastructure and businesses essential to the energy transition, including transmission and distribution networks, onshore and offshore wind farms, hydro-electric power and flexible thermal generation technologies. Our Transformation for Growth investment plan commits £33bn to critical electricity infrastructure by 2030.

A FTSE-100 company headquartered in Scotland with operations across the UK and Ireland, SSE employs around 14,000 people and is proud to be a 'real Living Wage' and 'Living Hours' employer, accredited with the 'Fair Tax Mark'. SSE was the first company globally to develop a 'Just Transition Strategy' to ensure the benefits of the clean energy transition are shared by workers and communities.

The Applicant is part of SSE Renewables, a leading developer, owner and operator of onshore and offshore wind farms in the UK and Ireland, with a vision to make renewable energy the foundation of a zero-carbon world. SSE Renewables operates one of the largest onshore wind fleets in the UK and Ireland, with almost 5GW of installed capacity and 2GW in construction. Their ambition is to increase renewable output by ~40% over the next two years, continuing to progress new onshore wind farms and extensions to existing sites to support a net-zero future.

## 2. Project Context

This Section outlines the National and Regional Policy Contexts that are pertinent to the Proposed Varied Development. It provides a summary of the key policy considerations that inform and support the application. A full overview of all referenced policies is provided in **Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of this document** for further detail.

### 2.1. National Policy Context

At the heart of Scotland's national ambitions for sustainable growth and transition to net zero is the **National Performance Framework (NPF)**. This framework champions a wellbeing economy and inclusive development and reflects Scotland's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The **National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)** places climate and nature at the forefront of planning policy. Specifically, **NPF4 Policy 11** supports the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure and **NPF4 Policy 25** promotes community wealth building, ensuring that local people benefit directly from investment and innovation. The Scottish Government's **Good Practice Principles for Community Benefits from Onshore Renewable Energy Developments** provide a framework to ensure that communities near renewable energy projects can meaningfully benefit from them.

Further reinforcing this direction is the **National Strategy for Economic Transformation**, which sets out a pathway to a greener, fairer economy through a focus on innovation, skills development, and sustainable industry. The **Onshore Wind Sector Deal** complements these efforts by streamlining planning processes, expanding wind energy capacity, and delivering tangible benefits to communities across Scotland.

Together, these frameworks and strategies provide a strong foundation to ensure that renewable energy development projects contribute meaningfully to Scotland's sustainable future.

### 2.2. Regional Policy Context

The ambitions set out in the **Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership's Regional Economic Strategy 2025–2035** envision a thriving, inclusive economy driven by innovation, low-carbon industries, and place-based investment.

The objectives of the **Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal** seek to ensure that infrastructure and energy improvements support long-term productivity and inclusive growth. Additionally, the **Highland Outcome Improvement Plan** provides the strategic framework to ensure that people, place and prosperity is considered. The **Highland Area Tourism Partnership Plan** aims to enhance and sustain tourism across the Highlands, while ensuring to promote a greener visitor economy and reinforcing the region's reputation for environmental leadership.

**The Highland Council's Net Zero Strategy** supports the transition to clean energy and reducing carbon emissions by outlining a comprehensive approach to addressing the climate emergency. It specifically notes that a key area of focus is unlocking opportunities from renewable energy generation.

This also aligns with the principles of the **Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024** which aims to ensure that economic benefits are retained and reinvested locally, and community ownership and resilience is strengthened.

Lastly, **The Highland Council's Social Value Charter** builds on this further to ensure that social, economic, and environmental value is embedded into developments to ensure that communities benefit fairly, championing fair work, skills development, and place-based impact. Relevant references to the Social Value Charter in particular are made throughout this report.

## **3. Economic Context**

This section outlines the socio-economic profile of the local community and the development context of the Proposed Varied Development.

### **3.1. Summary of Socio-Economic Profile**

Similar to the Highland region as a whole, the population in Aird and Loch Ness is aging, with the number of residents aged 65 and over growing at a much faster rate than younger groups. Aging populations place increasing pressure on services required to address health issues, poverty and social isolation. This, coupled with limited economic opportunities exacerbates economic and social decline.

Expanding employment opportunities in higher-paid industries will be essential to improving economic resilience and addressing the underlying drivers of deprivation in Aird and Loch Ness. Attracting and retaining more young people to the region will help to counter the trend towards an increasingly older population.

### **3.2. Socio-Economic Context**

#### **3.2.1. Location of Aird and Loch Ness Ward**

Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension sits within the ward of Aird and Loch Ness in the Highlands which is part of the Great Glen. The Great Glen is a natural travelling route linking Inverness on the east coast to Fort William on the west coast by both the Caledonian Canal and the A82 road. The area closest to the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension is Invermoriston which is rural in character and equidistant in terms of road travel time (1 hour) between Inverness and Fort William.

The data provided in this section has been provided for the geography of Aird and Loch Ness which covers the community councils of Strathnairn; Dores and Essich; Inverness West; Kirkhill and Bunchrew; Kiltarlity; Kilmorack; Strathglass; Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston; Stratherrick and Foyers; Glenurquhart; Holm, and Slackbuie.

**Figure 1: Location of Aird and Loch Ness Ward**

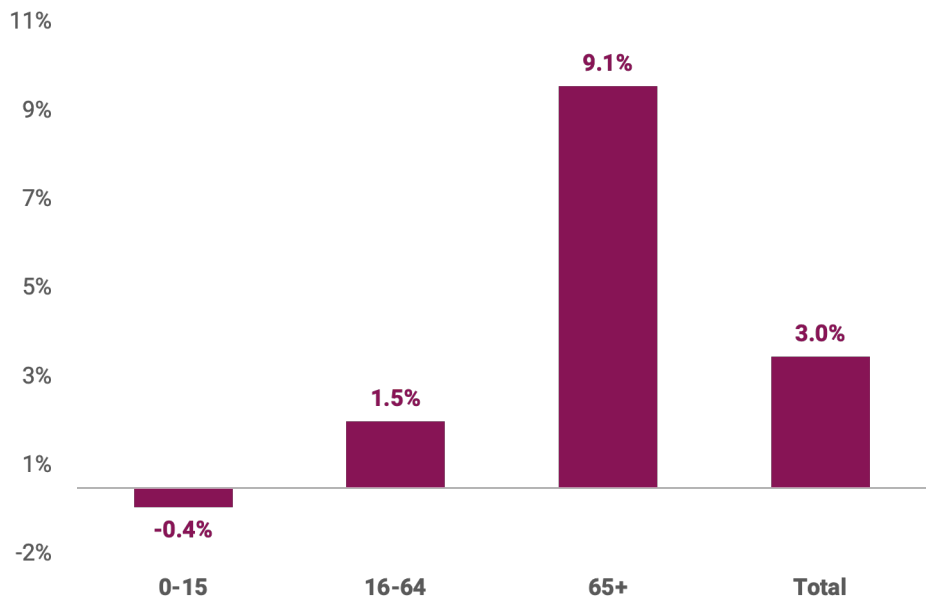
### **3.2.2. Population**

The demographic profile of the Highlands is comparatively older than that of Scotland; it is characterised by a lower proportion of young people and a higher proportion of older residents. Within this context, the Aird and Loch Ness area represents 4.9% of the total Highlands population.

Since the commissioning of Bhlaraidh Wind Farm in 2017, the total population of Aird and Loch Ness has increased by 3%. This increase however masks contrasting trends within different age groups. The local population of children aged 0–15 fell slightly by 0.4%, while the working-age population (16–64) rose by 1.5%. The most significant change, however, has been in the older population (65+), which grew by 9.1%, a much faster rate than any other group.

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 the Highlands region, and for Aird and Loch Ness.

**Figure 2: Aird and Loch Ness Population Growth 2017-2021**



Source: National Records of Scotland (NRS), Electoral Ward Population Estimates, Scotland: mid-2001 to mid-2021

Employment opportunities that offer stable and rewarding employment are important factors in attracting and retaining working age people. Good jobs are likely to make the area more attractive to families which in turn supports schools and the social infrastructure surrounding them.

If the Proposed Varied Development helps create long-term, high-quality work opportunities for local people, it could help attract 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 self-reinforcing cycle.

**3.2.3. Industrial Structure**

Reflecting a rise in the number of working age people, overall employment in the local area grew 16% from 2,895 to 3,350 between 2015 and 2023. However, the composition of Aird and Loch Ness’ industrial structure has changed, with a decrease in education (-13%); professional, scientific and technical activities (-18%); and administrative and support service activities (-8%). In contrast, employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing increased fourfold, predominantly due to an increase in forestry activities; and employment in accommodation and food service activities increased by 8%, 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 relatively 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.

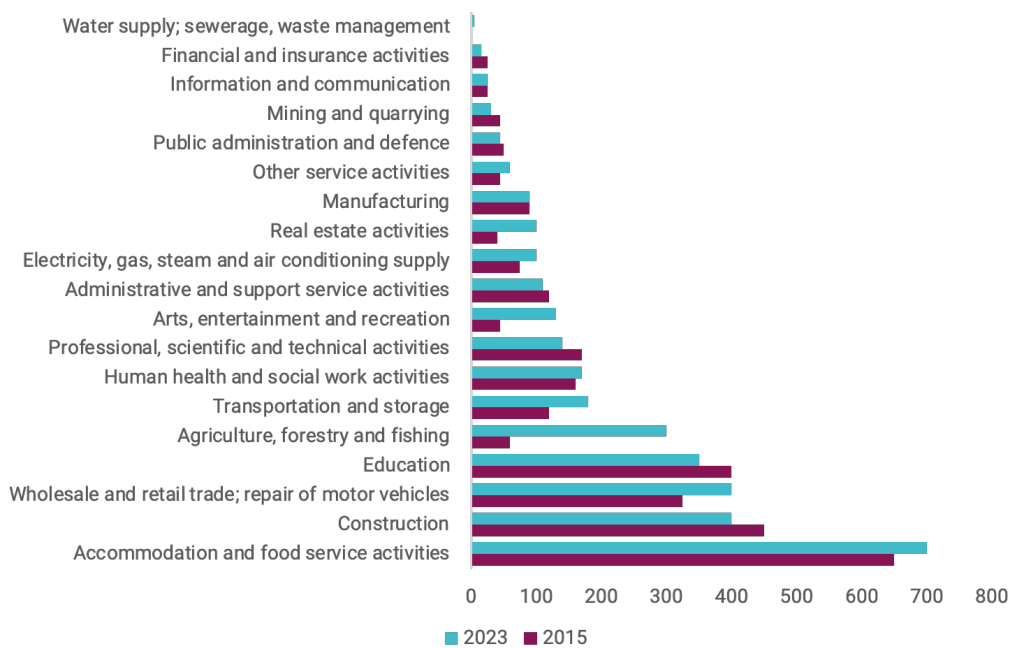
Tourism in Aird and Loch Ness is heavily dependent on the surrounding natural environment and activities such as cycling, water sports and hiking. This is illustrated by the number of different paths nearby, with over 39 different core paths<sup>6</sup> within 15km of the Proposed Varied Development. This

<sup>6</sup> 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>

includes the Great Glen Way which is a long-distance path running from Fort William to Inverness. Loch Ness itself attracts visitors from all over the world and the villages of Fort Augustus (7 miles south of the Proposed Varied Development) and Drumnadrochit (13 miles north) are hubs for Loch Ness Monster tourism.

Over the same period, 2015 to 2023, construction employment declined by 11% in Aird and Loch Ness whereas construction employment increased by 14.3% in the Highlands overall. This indicates that whilst the immediate local area may have less capacity to engage in construction related opportunities the overall region is well placed to benefit. The more heavily populated and industrialised areas of Inverness and Easter Ross sit just outside the local area of Aird and Loch Ness.

**Figure 3: Local Area - Industrial Structure**



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

### 3.2.4. 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.

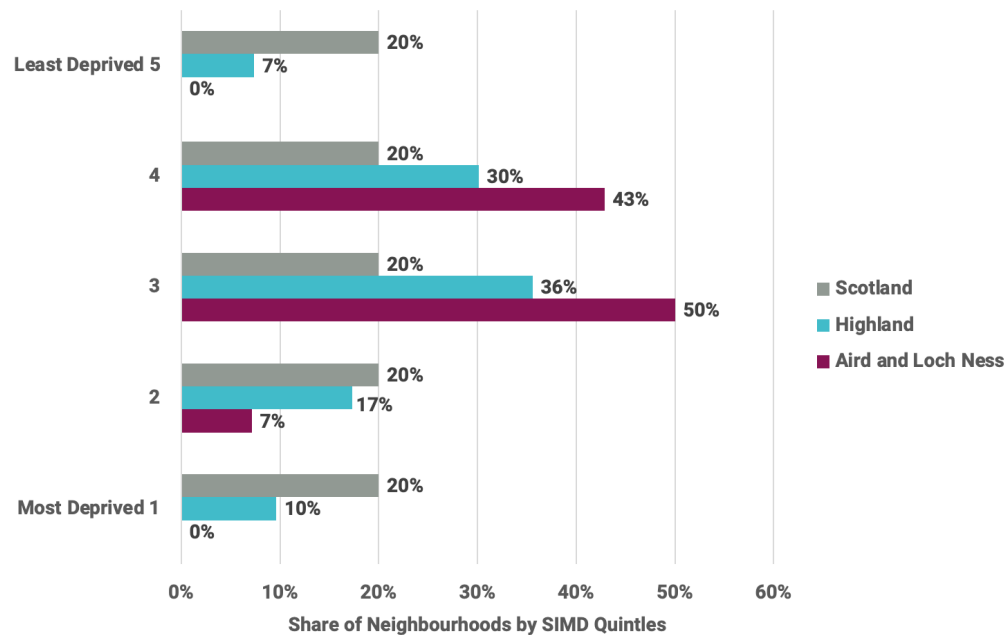
50% and 43% of the data zones within Aird and Loch Ness rank at deprivation level three and four respectively, indicating a moderate level of deprivation. However, recognised limitations<sup>7</sup> in applying the SIMD to rural areas means this conclusion should be treated with some caution. This is 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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?

When examining the individual deprivation domains (income, employment and housing), income deprivation emerges as the most significant challenge for Aird and Loch Ness, with around 7% of residents identified as income deprived compared 4% living in overcrowded housing and 3% who are employment deprived. This pattern suggests that while overall employment levels may appear relatively stable, many jobs are likely to be low-paid, leaving households vulnerable to financial hardship.

Expanding access to higher-paying opportunities, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy, could help address these income pressures and support long-term community resilience. Challenges related to limited economic opportunities and an aging population are also likely to contribute to sustained deprivation in the area.

**Figure 4: Deprivation levels in Local Area and the Highlands**



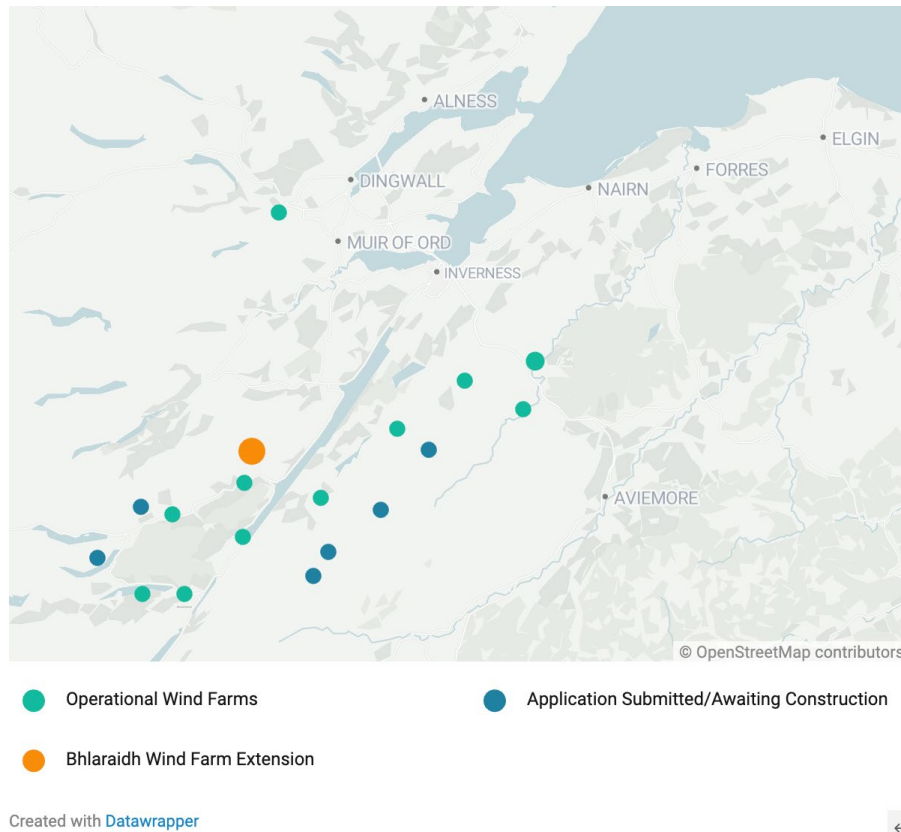
Source: Scottish Government (2025), Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020.

### 3.3. Development Context

Aird and Loch Ness has 11 operational wind farms (Bhlaraidh, Corriegarth, Dunmaglass, Moy, Stronelairg, Benneun, Millennium, Millennium Extension, Fairburn, Glen Kyllachy and Farr) and 6 that are either under construction or in the planning system (Aberarder, Bunloinn, Cloiche, Corriegarth 2, Dell and Tomchrasky). SSE Renewables operates Bhlaraidh, Dunmaglass and Stronelairg wind farms with Cloiche Wind Farm consented but not yet constructed.

SSE Renewables also has a number of operational hydro assets and pumped storage hydro developments around the Great Glen with assets at Glenmoriston and Invergarry running since the 1960's; Glendoe opened in 2012; Foyers Pumped Storage Power Station operational since 1975 and and Coire Glas Pumped Hydro project at Loch Lochy is consented but not yet constructed.

**Figure 5: Wind Farms Operational and Planned within Aird and Loch Ness**



### 3.3.1. Economic Benefits of Existing Operations

The responsible development and delivery of SSE Renewables projects have brought a wealth of benefits to the Great Glen region and the local area of Aird and Loch Ness. A report published in 2020<sup>8</sup> highlights how the development, construction and operation of Stronelairg Wind Farm, Bhlaraidh Wind Farm, Dunmaglass Wind Farm and Glendoe Hydro station has generated and will continue to generate substantial local, regional and national economic benefits, including £140m in value and 1,860 years of employment (see definition for Job Years in section 4.1) for the Highlands during the development and construction, and a further £14m in value for each year of operations and supporting 170 jobs each year.

Additionally, the *Delivering Investment, Supporting Jobs* report<sup>9</sup>, published in 2021, outlines the significant socio-economic value that SSE Renewables' projects Strathy North, Achany, Gordonbush and Gordonbush Extension are delivering in the north of Scotland, demonstrating that the Applicant has delivered significant investment and good quality jobs in the local area and across Scotland. For the Highlands specifically, this report outlines that the total lifetime economic contribution of the four projects is estimated to be £131m, which includes £43m to the local economy during development and construction, and 520 years of employment supported, and a further £4m every year and 50 jobs for the operational lifetime of the assets (25 years).

<sup>8</sup> SSE Renewables, June 2020. Generating Benefits in the Great Glen, SSE Renewables' Socio-Economic Contribution. [generating-benefits-in-the-great-glen-june-2020.pdf](#)

<sup>9</sup>SSE Renewables, April 2021. Delivering investment, supporting jobs. [SSE Renewables brochure.pdf](#)



A Highlands-based company was commissioned to undertake the main civil engineering and enabling works for Bhlaraidh Wind Farm in 2014. This included road, substation, and crane hard standing area building. The same company was also commissioned to do similar work for Dunmaglass Wind Farm and Stronelairst Wind Farm. These projects involved over 50 employees being located at a base camp near the site, including engineers, plant operators and tradespeople. The total contracts value from these projects was approximately £100m. An analysis of these contracts found most of the activity was within the Highlands, accounting for 70% of this spend, including 44% in the Great Glen<sup>10</sup>.

### **3.3.2. Impact of Existing Community Benefit Funding**

SSE Renewables currently operates four community benefit funds within the Local Area (Dunmaglass, Bhlaraidh and Stronelairst Wind Farms, and Glendoe Hydro). Over their lifetimes, these community benefit funds will be worth a total of £57.2m, split between £30.7m in local funds for the communities closest to the projects and £26.5m for the Highland Sustainable Development Fund<sup>11</sup>. The local community funds are led by communities, through a model that gives local people control over how funding is distributed to ensure projects address their specific needs. The funds support local projects by focusing on areas like skills development, culture, energy efficiency, and community infrastructure, with the goal of creating a positive and lasting local legacy. Bhlaraidh Wind Farm provides an annual RPI-linked fund which is available for community and charitable projects. The baseline figure for the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm fund is £270,000 (July 2016) and, in 2025, the local fund payment was £372,395.91. Between 2016 and 2041, the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm fund will contribute £7m to local funds and £7m to the Highlands Sustainable Development Fund in total.<sup>12</sup> The Bhlaraidh community fund is administered by two local community organisations, Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company and Soirbheas, covering the two community council areas of Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston and Glen Urquhart. This is further outlined in Section [5](#).

### **3.3.3. Evolving Relationships between Communities and Wind Farms**

The number and scale of wind farms in Aird and Loch Ness continues to grow and SSE Renewables has a strong presence in the community due its long association with hydro-electric projects and with Bhlaraidh, Dunmaglass and Stronelairst Wind Farms being operational since 2017/18. Community experience and capacity has also grown alongside the number of developments and there is increasing expectations that synergies between local communities and wind farm developments in Aird and Loch Ness will help to deliver regionally important priorities like jobs, affordable housing and skills development, thereby enabling young people to live and work in the Glen.

### **3.3.4. Local Delivery Capacity**

Over the past 15 years, community bodies in Aird and Loch Ness have evolved to keep pace with the community funding they now manage. Community companies, trusts and charities have developed considerable capacity and pioneered important community-led projects. This has in part been enabled through continued engagement, guidance and capacity-building facilitated and enabled by the Applicant, including funding support for the delivery of respective community action plans. This has resulted in a long-term, trusted relationship between the Applicant and the communities.

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<sup>10</sup> SSE Renewables, June 2020. Generating Benefits in the Great Glen, SSE Renewables' Socio-Economic Contribution. [generating-benefits-in-the-great-glen-june-2020.pdf](#)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

Today these organisations enable the communities they serve to articulate and address their needs. They are well connected and ambitious. There are two key delivery organisations in Aird and Loch Ness that work collaboratively with others to deliver projects for local communities.

Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company (FAGCC) have been operating for nearly 20 years. It has administered various community funds from wind farms, hydro and pumped hydro projects for over 14 years<sup>13</sup>. It took over ownership and management of Fort Augustus village hall in 2010<sup>14</sup> and, with the help of community benefit funding from Bhlaraidh Wind Farm, the company now employs local administrators, a development officer, and community caretakers<sup>15</sup>.

FAGCC has moved beyond granting small projects into delivering more strategic projects on behalf of the community. It facilitated the rebuild of the local medical centre in Fort Augustus when it was destroyed by fire in 2015. The new Cill Chuimein Medical Centre was officially opened in April 2019 and is leased to the NHS providing a range of health services for the communities of Fort Augustus, Glenmoriston, Glengarry, and the surrounding area<sup>16</sup>. FAGCC also managed the building of 12 new homes for affordable rent in Fort Augustus. The new homes completed in August 2021 are a mix of two and three bedrooms with flats, bungalows, and two-storey houses reflecting the various needs of the community<sup>17</sup>.

Similarly, Soirbheas, operating since 2014, is a registered charity funded from local renewable energy schemes whose objectives are to strengthen and support the communities of Glen Urquhart and Strathglass<sup>18</sup>. It provided funds for the development trust in Glen Urquhart – the Glenurquhart Rural Community Association (GURCA) - to develop the community owned Loch Ness Hub in Drumnadrochit<sup>19</sup>. It is dedicated to providing Loch Ness visitor experiences through expert local visitor information, baggage transfers, shuttle services and activities such as boat cruises, e-Bike hire, fishing and Highland cow tours.

### **3.3.5. Addressing Local Needs**

Two formal community development plans have been developed in the Local Area – the Glen Urquhart Community Action Plan<sup>20</sup> and the Stratherrick and Foyers Community Action Plan<sup>21</sup>. These plans have been developed through extensive community consultation and form the vision for the community over the next 10-20 years. They will help community organisations prioritise resources and channel funding requests to what the community deems to be the most important. They include activities for safer and active travel, more community owned facilities, care at home, affordable housing, apprenticeships, energy efficiency in homes, broadband connectivity and sustaining and nurturing natural and cultural heritage for locals and visitors. The Stratherrick and Foyers Community Action Plan has been registered with The Highland Council as a Local Place Plan.

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<sup>13</sup> Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company website- <https://communitycompany.co.uk/what-we-do/>

<sup>14</sup> Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company website- <https://communitycompany.co.uk/village-hall/>

<sup>15</sup> Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company website- <https://communitycompany.co.uk/community-caretakers/>

<sup>16</sup> Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company website- <https://communitycompany.co.uk/medical-centre-rebuild/>

<sup>17</sup> Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company website- <https://communitycompany.co.uk/caledonian-court/>

<sup>18</sup> Soirbheas website- <https://www.soirbheas.org/>

<sup>19</sup> Loch Ness Hub & Travel <https://www.lochnesstravel.com/>

<sup>20</sup> [Glen Urquhart Community Action Plan 2022](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Stratherrick and Foyers Local Place Plan, May 2023](#)

## 4. Economic Impact Assessment

### 4.1. Approach and Method

The construction and operation of the Proposed Varied Development will generate economic impacts for the regional and national economy, supporting business activity and employment. SSER are 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 are a reflection of 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 project's:

- **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 5 jobs/job years throughout this assessment.

Impacts presented are inclusive of the full scale of economic activity the development and operation of the Proposed Varied Development 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:

- The Highlands; and
- Scotland.

### 4.2. Development and Construction Impacts

Based on the current capacity and number of proposed turbines of the Proposed Varied Development, it was estimated that the development and construction expenditure could be **up to approximately £200 million**. The expenditure was split according to the following component contracts:

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

To estimate the economic impacts from the development and construction of the Proposed Varied Development, 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 SSER's previous work with contractors, it was estimated that approximately 25% of the contracts could be carried out by Scottish businesses, with a value of £49.2 million. It was estimated that spending on businesses based in the Highlands could be approximately £36.0 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 £30.6 million. Balance of plant contracts would also be the largest opportunity for businesses in the Highlands and could be worth up to £24.9 million.

**Table 2: Development and Construction Expenditure by Study Area**

Expenditure Type	Highlands		Scotland	
	%	£m	%	£m
Development and Planning	34%	4.2	59%	7.3
Turbines	2%	2.4	5%	5.9
Balance of Plant	40%	24.9	49%	30.6
Grid Connection	36%	4.5	43%	5.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>36.0</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>49.2</b>

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)<sup>22</sup> code, and applying turnover-to-GVA and turnover-to-job ratios from the Scottish Annual Business Survey (ABS)<sup>23</sup>. It was estimated that the development and construction of the Proposed Varied Development is likely to generate £18.8 million direct GVA and 250 years of employment in the Highlands and £25.7 million direct GVA and 340 years of employment in Scotland.

**Table 3: Development and Construction Direct GVA and Employment Impact by Study Area**

Expenditure Type	Highlands		Scotland	
	GVA (£m)	Years of Employment	GVA (£m)	Years of Employment
Development and Planning	2.9	10	4.8	40
Turbines	1.2	30	3.0	50
Balance of Plant	12.8	170	15.7	210

<sup>22</sup> Office for National Statistics (2009), Standard Industrial Classification of industrial Activities (SIC 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Scottish Government (2024), Scottish Annual Business Statistics.

Grid Connection	1.9	40	2.3	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>340</b>

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 Tables<sup>24</sup>. Adding up direct, indirect and induced impacts, it was estimated that the construction and development of the Proposed Varied Development could support:

- £43.1 million GVA and 580 job years across Scotland; of which
- £24.8 million GVA and 310 jobs years could be retained in the Highlands.

**Table 4: Total Economic Impact (Gross)**

	Highlands	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	24.8	43.1
Total Job Years	310	580

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

Employment impacts will peak during the construction phase when up to 288 jobs could be supported in Scotland, including around 188 in the Highlands.

### 4.3. Opportunities in The Highlands

There are a number of local opportunities associated with the construction of the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm Extension (the Proposed Varied Development). 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 the Highlands, 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

<sup>24</sup>Scottish Government (2024), Supply, Use and Input-Output Tables.

'Agriculture, forestry and fishing' sectors. This could directly generate 58 job years in the first sector, 36 job years in the second and about 29 in the latter.

## 4.4. Annual Operational Impact

The initial stage in determining the economic impact stemming from the operations and maintenance of the Proposed Varied Development 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 £5.7 million**.

It was further assumed that businesses in the Highlands could benefit from a total £2.8 million in operations and maintenance contracts (49% of OPEX) annually and that annual expenditure in Scottish contractors could be up to £5.0 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 the Proposed Varied Development is likely to generate:

- £2.5 million GVA and 25 jobs in Scotland; of which
- £1.4 million GVA and 12 jobs would be in the Highlands.

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

- £4.2 million GVA and 43 jobs across Scotland; of which
- £1.9 million GVA and 16 jobs would be retained in the Highlands.

**Table 5: Total Annual Operational Impact**

	Highlands	Scotland
Total GVA (£m)	1.9	4.2
Total Jobs	16	43

Source: BiGGAR Economics Analysis

## 4.5. Decommissioning Impact

There exists limited evidence on the economic benefits associated with the decommissioning of an onshore wind farm. This is because only a few sites, which were built in the 1990s have reached this phase of their lifetime. Decommissioning is expected to take place in reversal order of construction. The scale of works required for decommissioning are not expected to be any greater than those for construction and development phase.

## 5. Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefits

This section outlines the socio-economic benefits that the Proposed Varied Development will aim to maximise under the four broad categories identified in the Guidance referenced in Section 1.

Each section is separated into:

- **The Applicant's Standard Approach:** initiatives which seek to maximise socio-economic benefits for the local community and region that are standard practice for the Applicant; and
- **Specific, Place-Based Initiatives for the Proposed Varied Development:** targeted initiatives that the Applicant commits to exploring that are specifically aimed at maximising the socio-economic benefits for the place where the Proposed Varied Development is sited.

A summary is provided at the end of each section to demonstrate how the approach aligns with BiGGAR Economics and Scottish Renewables' Principles to Maximise Socio-Economic Benefit (see 5.8 in Appendix 4 of this document) and, if applicable, how it aligns to The Highland Council's Social Value Charter<sup>25</sup>.

### 5.1. Supply Chain Development

As illustrated in Section 4.3, it is anticipated that there will be several local opportunities associated with the construction of the Proposed Varied Development, which, according to BiGGAR Economics' independent analysis, could directly generate 58 job years in the first sector, 36 job years in the second and approximately 29 in the latter. The Developer's existing assets have and continue to deliver a wealth of socio-economic benefits to the Highlands region, including supporting the supply chain to develop, and this is evidenced in the reports referenced in Section 3.3.1.

The Applicant is committed to maximising the socio-economic benefits of the Proposed Varied Development through supporting supply chain development, particularly focusing on local and regional supply chain engagement to support local development, reporting on local content to be transparent on how it has supported the local supply chain, and collaborating with key stakeholders to promote opportunities.

This aligns with the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership's (HIREP) Regional Economic Strategy for 2025-2035 by utilising place-based opportunities to build resilience and competitiveness and aligns with the ambitions of the Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal to boost economic growth, infrastructure and innovation across the region. Nationally, the Proposed Varied Development is firmly rooted in the principles of NPF4 and the Onshore Wind Sector Deal.

#### 5.1.1. The Applicant's Standard Approach

Initiative	Description	Resources
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<sup>25</sup> [Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment | Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment](#)



1	<b>Engaging with the Local supply chain</b>	The Applicant's internal procedures require engagement with local contractors to ensure that regional economic opportunities are maximised for the local supply chain. As per SSE's Sustainable Procurement Code, "SSE is committed to ensuring that real economic and social benefits flow to local businesses as a result of its investment in new energy infrastructure".	SSE's Sustainable Procurement Code, pages 10 & 13 <sup>26</sup> .
2	<b>Maximising local opportunities through procurement</b>	The Applicant's standard approach encourages the Principal Contractor(s) to undertake initiatives to maximise local opportunities, these include: participating in local information sessions hosted by the Applicant; advertising opportunities via the Scottish Renewables Pathfinder Portal; prioritising local supply chain partners, particularly where capacity exists in the Highlands. The agreed initiatives will be dependent on final contract negotiations.	SSE's Sustainable Procurement Code, pages 10 & 13.
3	<b>Regularly reporting on local content</b>	In line with the Applicant's commitments under the Onshore Wind Sector Deal, the Applicant will monitor and report on local content through a supply chain data collection mechanism embedded in its contractual framework. This structured reporting will support transparency and contribute to national efforts to strengthen the renewable energy supply chain in Scotland.	
4	<b>Utilising progressive procurement practices</b>	SSE Renewables' real Living Wage commitment expands to its supply chain, meaning that regional sub-contractors will receive a real Living Wage (£13.45) <sup>27</sup> when working on the Proposed Varied Development. This is higher than the current National Living Wage (£12.21).	SSE's Sustainable Procurement Code, page 13.

## 5.1.2. Specific Place-Based Initiatives for the Proposed Varied Development

### 5.1.2.1. REGIONAL COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT LOCAL SUPPLY CHAINS

To maximise the socio-economic benefits of the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant is committed to enabling regional collaboration that strengthens the capacity of local supply chains. As

<sup>26</sup> [sustainable-procurement-code-2024-1.pdf](#)

<sup>27</sup> [What is the real Living Wage? | Living Wage Foundation](#)



outlined in Section 3.2.3 and Figure 2, construction employment has declined in Aird and Loch Ness whilst construction employment has increased in the Highlands. This indicates that the overall region is well placed to benefit from the Proposed Varied Development and other renewable developments in the locality if the Developers can coordinate and collaborate.

Recognising the importance of coordinated regional approaches, particularly during peak construction periods, the Applicant is committed to initiating discussions with key stakeholders—including Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks (SEN), and members of its own supply chain—to identify practical interventions that support local suppliers in the net zero transition.

The Applicant will utilise these discussions to assess:

- the need for a collaborative forum or initiative in the Highlands and/or Great Glen area, building on existing cluster approaches;
- the key challenges facing the local supply chain (e.g. workforce capacity, coordination); and
- which organisations are best placed to lead any future initiative, noting the value of third-party leadership and dedicated resource.

This approach will be informed by ongoing regional work, including an SSE Hydro Community Fund-supported initiative involving HIE, the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), and The Highland Council (THC) to assess STEM and skills provision, which will contribute towards supporting future workforce capacity.

This aligns with the principles of collaboration and innovation, as identified by BIGGAR Economics and Scottish Renewables in the Guidance.

#### **5.1.2.2. HOSTING REGIONAL MEET THE BUYER EVENTS**

Building on the above, with the understanding that the Highlands region is well placed to benefit from the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant is committed to exploring the value of hosting regional "Meet the Buyers" events. This initiative would aim to connect local suppliers with contractors and developers involved in multiple renewable energy projects proposed across the Highlands, thereby enhancing visibility of upcoming opportunities and enabling broader participation in the clean energy transition.

The Applicant recognises that coordinated regional engagement is essential to unlocking long-term economic benefits for local communities. By facilitating direct dialogue between suppliers and project delivery teams, such an event could help build capacity within the local supply chain, support business growth, and improve readiness for future infrastructure demands.

In collaboration with regional stakeholders, including HIE and the Inverness Chamber of Commerce, the Applicant will assess the feasibility and potential impact of such an event, and in a first step explore the deliverability of it through its key regional stakeholders. This approach reflects a proactive commitment to inclusive economic development and supports the wider strategic goals of community wealth building and just transition in the Highlands.

This aligns with the principles of place-based and collaboration, as identified in the Guidance.

#### **5.1.3. Summary: Maximising Socio-economic Benefit**

The Applicant's approach to supporting supply chain development, as illustrated in this section, is aligned to the principles underpinning the Guidance. The approach is **place-based** as it focuses on engaging the local and regional supply chain and maximising the opportunities available to them. It is also

**collaborative**, recognising the importance of a coordinated approach to unlocking economic benefits for local communities. Additionally, based on the Applicant's track record of delivery in the region and expertise in procurement initiatives, the approach is **deliverable**.

## 5.2. Skills and Workforce Development

As described in 3.2.4, according to the SIMD, income deprivation is the most significant challenge for Aird and Loch Ness. This suggests that many jobs in the region are likely low paid. The Proposed Varied Development presents a significant opportunity for economic development and upskilling in the region which will benefit local workers and communities, and could contribute to improving the quality of local jobs. Renewable energy developments, such as the Proposed Varied Development, presents an opportunity for local people to pursue higher paid, quality jobs that support the local economy.

The Applicant is committed to upholding its' progressive recruitment and employment practices for all workers involved with the Proposed Varied Development, including the supply chain, which includes paying the real Living Wage. The Applicant is also committed to building collaborative relationships with local education and training providers and supply chain partners to explore opportunities for regional upskilling, such as a wind turbine technician apprenticeship with the Wind Turbine Manufacturer.

This aligns with the aims of Scotland's National Performance Framework, specifically supporting the national outcomes of education and fair work and business. It also supports Scotland's national policies NPF4, Onshore Sector Deal and NSET by helping to develop skills and creating high-quality jobs.

### 5.2.1. The Applicant's Standard Approach

	Initiative	Description	Resources
1	<b>Utilising progressive recruitment and employment practices</b>	The Applicant's existing policies provide a robust framework for advancing responsible business practice, including safe working environments, mitigating human rights risks, fostering inclusivity and diversity, and addressing workforce considerations in the transition to net zero.  For example, by maintaining SSE's real Living Wage commitment, the Applicant ensures that all workers are compensated fairly and work under safe conditions.	SSE Group Safety and Health Policy <sup>28</sup>  SSE Group Human Rights Policy <sup>29</sup>  SSE Inclusion & Diversity webpage <sup>30</sup>  SSE Group Employment Policy <sup>31</sup> .
2	<b>Understanding local capacity</b>	The Applicant proactively works to understand the capacity and characteristics of the areas in which it operates. Supported by dedicated	Principles of Engagement, SSE

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.sse.com/media/vjncnvs4/po-grp-015-1.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.sse.com/media/ikycmpm/po-grp-009.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> [Inclusion & Diversity](#)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.sse.com/media/ik5jy0et/po-grp-006.pdf>

3		Procurement and Community Engagement teams, the Applicant ensures that its developments are informed by local context and needs. Continuous engagement with stakeholders is maintained throughout the project lifecycle to foster collaboration and responsiveness.	Renewables & SSE Thermal <sup>32</sup>  Ensuring Robust Stakeholder Consultation, SSE Renewables Sustainability Report (page 11) <sup>33</sup>  Skills Development Scotland – Workforce North webpage <sup>34</sup>
	<b>Building relationships with local education and training providers</b>	The Applicant is actively building relationships with providers to support skills and workforce development. SSE has maintained a formal partnership with UHI since December 2023, and is a regular supporter of Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). This aligns with the Highland's Social Value Charter 6 "Skills & Training – Workforce for the Future".	SSE & UHI Partnership Agreement <sup>35</sup>
	<b>Community funding for skills development</b>	To date, the Applicant has invested £1 million to address critical skills gaps and enhance workforce capacity across the Highlands with key regional actors. The Applicant also supports six community led and operated apprenticeship programmes across the Highlands and Islands. This aligns with the Highland's Social Value Charter 6 "Skills & Training – Workforce for the Future".	SSE Community Investment Review 2024/25 <sup>36</sup> , pages 6 and 25-36

<sup>32</sup> [sse-principles-of-engagement-final.pdf](#)

<sup>33</sup> [saser-sustainability-2024.pdf](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Workforce North - Skills Development Scotland](#)

<sup>35</sup> [a-partnership-between-sse-and-the-university-of-highlands-and-islands\\_external.pdf](#)

<sup>36</sup> [sasercommunityinvestmentreview\\_2024\\_25\\_final-1.pdf](#)

## 5.2.2. Specific Place-Based Initiatives for the Proposed Varied Development

### 5.2.2.1. EXPLORING A REGIONAL WIND TURBINE TECHNICIAN APPRENTICESHIP

The Applicant maintains longstanding relationships with its Tier 1 supply chain partners (those with whom it holds direct contracts) and has demonstrated collaborative engagement, notably through its *Powering Net Zero Pact* which involves 27 of SSE's strategic suppliers.

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 technicians<sup>37</sup>. The Applicant is committed to engaging with Tier 1 partners to explore skills development opportunities that support workforce growth in the Highlands and address these skills gaps. Recognising the regional pipeline of operational and planned projects, the Applicant acknowledges the importance of collaboration.

Building on its engagement with the Achany Wind Farm Community Benefit Fund, the Kyle Sutherland Apprenticeship Programme, and its established relationships with UHI and HIE, the Applicant is well-positioned to explore a cross-project apprenticeship initiative. Such a programme could strengthen community ties, offer career pathways for young people, and support regional retention efforts.

The Applicant will initiate exploratory discussions with regional stakeholders to assess the feasibility and value of a **Highland-wide wind turbine technician apprenticeship programme**, leveraging the Proposed Varied Development and other projects. Subsequently, the Applicant will develop and share a programme outline with the Wind Turbine OEM.

The Applicant has already had an exploratory meeting with UHI and BiGGAR Economics (who are supporting the Applicant to develop the above-referenced programme outline), with clear next steps identified by UHI, including a mapping of existing, complementary activity in the region which UHI is already supporting. A meeting with the Wind Turbine OEM to present the programme took place in November 2025.

While the inclusion of the Civil Balance of Plant (CBoP) in this regional initiative has been considered, the Applicant has opted to focus on wind turbine technicians due to its greater influence in this area and the identified skills gap. The Applicant continues to engage with civil contractors through the Powering Net Zero Pact's Social Value and Skills Working Group, where school engagement and youth awareness in construction have been highlighted as priorities. The Applicant remains open to facilitating connections between the CBoP and relevant regional stakeholders, including the various apprenticeship schemes funded within the Great Glen (e.g. the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company which manages the apprenticeship partnership covering four community areas).

### 5.2.2.2. DELIVERING SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PRINCIPAL CONTRACTOR

The Applicant is actively pursuing targeted STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) engagement in the Highlands, with a strategic focus on school outreach. In 2024/25, the Applicant delivered 23 STEM sessions, reaching 3,539 pupils across the region.

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<sup>37</sup> Workforce and skills requirements in Scotland's onshore wind industry | ClimateXChange

In the context of the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant will promote STEM and school engagement as a key social value theme during the tendering process with its civil contractor. This is part of its enhanced and updated procurement approach to ensure more place-based, target social value creation.

School engagement is particularly relevant for civils and construction, where awareness of career pathways—including apprenticeships – is a key barrier.

The Applicant will use its tendering process to request a social value plan from the Principal Contractor on how it will engage with local schools to raise awareness for careers in construction. This has the strategic aim of raising awareness of careers in construction and engineering among young people in the Highlands. If possible, the Applicant will seek to find ways to collaborate with the Principal Contractor on its activities.

Additionally, the Applicant is aware of an ongoing assessment of STEM provision in the region, supported by SSE's Hydro Community Fund and led by UHI, THC, and HIE. The Applicant intends to incorporate the findings of this work into the design of the social value component of the Proposed Varied Development, ensuring alignment with regional needs and opportunities.

### 5.2.3. Summary: Maximising Socio-economic Benefit

The Applicant's approach to supporting supply chain development, as illustrated in this chapter, is aligned to the principles underpinning BiGGAR Economics and Scottish Renewables' Guidance. The approach is **place-based** as the Applicant commits to working with regional actors to address skills gaps and workforce challenges that are specific for the area, focussing on a wind turbine technician apprenticeship. It also focuses on engaging the local and regional supply chain and maximising the opportunities available to them through the Applicant's procurement process. It is **collaborative**, recognising the importance of a coordinated approach to unlocking economic benefits for local communities, and **innovative** through the Applicant leveraging its position as a renewables developer to initiate discussions with regional actors and bring key stakeholders together to identify a regional solution to the challenge of wind turbine technician skills scarcity.

## 5.3. Community Empowerment

The Proposed Varied Development's Community Fund (the Bhlaraidh Extension Community Fund) will build on an existing collaboration model that exists for the Bhlaraidh Community Fund between local delivery partners. As outlined in Section 3.3.2., the Bhlaraidh Community Fund is administered by two local community organisations, Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company and Soirbheas, covering the two community council areas of Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston and Glen Urquhart. A wide variety of projects have been funded to date including play, sports and gardening equipment, transport to swimming lessons, a lunch club and hall refurbishments. Many of these projects aim to improve the health and well-being of residents and enable young people to access a range of sport and extra-curricular activities.

Soirbheas and the Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company (FAGCC) both operate an Apprenticeship Grant Scheme funded by the Applicant's Community Funds (including Bhlaraidh)<sup>7</sup>. The aim is to encourage young residents to remain in these rural areas and the scheme prioritises local businesses and social enterprises who wish to develop or expand their business, provide new products or services, or would like to increase their workforce by employing a modern apprentice. They may also consider supporting young people coming to work in the community and young people from the

community being employed as an apprentice outside the area. Since 2017 the combined schemes (funded by Bhlaraidh Wind Farm) have supported 24 apprenticeships across a wide range of disciplines.

The Local Delivery Capacity chapter (3.3.4) outlines how the capacity within the local delivery bodies has evolved over time. Much of this capacity has been due to the continued efforts and commitment on behalf of the Applicant to the communities, working with them and building trusted relationships to enable strategic focus on key issues.

### 5.3.1. The Applicant's Standard Approach

	Initiative	Description	Resource
1	<b>Understanding local needs, aspirations, appetite and delivery capacity</b>	The Applicant actively identifies and supports initiatives that align with the evolving needs and priorities of local communities through sustained engagement with community stakeholders. This forms a core part of its existing and ongoing approach, and is further detailed in Section 3.3.4 and 5.3.2.1	SSE's Community Investment Principles <sup>38</sup> , page 4
2	<b>Community Benefit Fund aligned to the UK and Scottish government's good practice principles for onshore wind</b>	The Applicant has provided community benefit since 1998 and has had a comprehensive voluntary community benefit policy for over 15 years. Its community benefit programme supports 153 communities in GB. To date, the Applicant has delivered over £100 million to communities in the UK and Ireland (including £87 million in GB), and the lifetime value of its funds is £315 million. The Applicant invests in community benefits in line with the UK and Scottish Government's Good Practice Principles and is funded through the operating expenditure of each applicable asset. This approach is also in line with the Highland's Social Value Charter, Principle 1.	SSE Renewables' Communities Webpage <sup>39</sup>
3	<b>Regional fund for strategic issues</b>	Since 2012, the Applicant has committed to both increasing access to, and assessing the impact of, community benefit funds by advocating for and supporting regional funds initiatives.	SSE Renewables Sustainable Development Fund Report <sup>40</sup>  SSE Renewables Sustainable

<sup>38</sup> [https://www.sserenewables.com/media/mnwqptjs/ssercommunityinvestmentreview\\_2024\\_25\\_final-1.pdf](https://www.sserenewables.com/media/mnwqptjs/ssercommunityinvestmentreview_2024_25_final-1.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> [Communities | SSE Renewables](#)

<sup>40</sup> [sdf-review-final.pdf](#)

		<p>This approach enables a greater number of communities to benefit from the funds and allows the funds to have a larger lasting impact.</p> <p>Against this backdrop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50% of the £5k/MW is paid into a local fund. In the context of the Proposed Varied Development, this is in relation to the <b>Bhlaraidh Extension Fund</b>.</li> <li>• 50% of the £5k/MW is paid into a regional fund. In the context of the Proposed Varied Development, this is the <b>Sustainable Development Fund</b></li> </ul> <p>This is aligned with Principle 2 of the Highland Social Value Charter, recognising the importance of regional funding for strategic issues. However, this is advanced through the Applicant's Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), of which Highland Council Highland Energy Efficiency Programme is the largest recipient with £1.85 million support to date. The SDF also provides matched funding for local projects, in line with Principle 7 of the Social Value Charter, further outlined below in 5.3.2.2.</p>	<p>Development Fund Webpage<sup>41</sup></p>
4	<p><b>Shared Ownership</b></p>	<p>The Applicant recognises the principle of shared ownership as a key pillar of community wealth building and is offering shared ownership on all its new onshore wind development projects, directly in support of Highland Council's Social Value Charter, Principle 5. The Applicant is already in separate and ongoing discussions with The Highland Council on issues relating to shared disbursement with onshore wind farms and notes that significant challenges remain, particularly regarding access to affordable finance for communities.</p>	
5	<p><b>Effective governance, administration,</b></p>	<p>The Applicant's experience demonstrates that when communities are well supported,</p>	<p>SSE's Community Investment Principles<sup>42</sup>, page 4</p>

<sup>41</sup> [Sustainable development fund | SSE Renewables](#)

<sup>42</sup> [https://www.sserenewables.com/media/mnwqpts/ssercommunityinvestmentreview\\_2024\\_25\\_final-1.pdf](https://www.sserenewables.com/media/mnwqpts/ssercommunityinvestmentreview_2024_25_final-1.pdf)



6	<b>monitoring and evaluation</b>	<p>community-led fund decisions deliver a meaningful and lasting legacy.</p> <p>Good governance is a core principle of the Applicant's community benefit funds and its approach has been independently reviewed and audited, included by EY.</p> <p>This approach is aligned with the ethos of the Social Value Charter which rests on a long-term, collaborative and transparency approach between regional actors – communities, developers and public authorities.</p>	
	<b>Collaboration with regional stakeholders</b>	<p>The Applicant works closely with regional stakeholders in the context of its community local and regional funds. This forms a core part of its usual approach. For example, closely working with Highland Council and HIE, as elaborated on further in the detailed example of the regional fund relevant for the Proposed Varied Development.</p>	

### 5.3.2. Specific Place-Based Initiatives for the Proposed Varied Development

#### 5.3.2.1. SUPPORTING LOCAL CAPACITY AND COLLABORATION TO ENABLE CONTINUED IMPACT

In the context of the Proposed Varied Development, the Applicant has recently supported the local delivery partners to ensure they can continue to deliver high impact in the context of the Proposed Varied Development. Both community action plans for Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston and Soirbheas were recently updated with funding support from the Applicant, to ensure continued focus on community-led, local priorities.<sup>43</sup> The Applicant has also continued to support the Fort Augustus community with capacity building during a challenging time of staff absences due to sickness. This support has included providing training and guidance for board engagement and providing historical knowledge and experience.

This capacity building and financial support to realise the updated community action plans is enabling the community to pivot its focus more on regional priorities, ensuring the fund can address strategic issues. This includes housing and expanding apprenticeships – both of which also directly support aims of The Highland Council Social Value Charter, notably on housing (Principle 3) and workforce development (Principle 6).

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<sup>43</sup> [Community Action Plan – Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company](#); [Community Action Plans | Soirbheas](#)



These delivery bodies have co-ordinated multiple funding sources and expertise to deliver strategic tourism, health and housing projects. They have enabled partners to work together to deliver large complex community led Projects. For example, throughout the pandemic Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company (FAGCC) worked with Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Council, Glengarry Trust and Glengarry Community Council to deliver meals on wheels, community larder boxes and a variety of grants to help those who had been most affected by the pandemic. FAGCC worked with The Highland Council, NHS Highland, SSE Renewables, the Scottish Land Fund, and the Glengarry Trust in its affordable housing and health centre projects.

Similarly, Glen Urquhart is a strong and collaborative community where local organisations work together to support the needs of residents. For example, Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association (GURCA) worked alongside Soirbheas and the Glen Urquhart Community Council to deliver the Loch Ness Hub, a community owned Visitor Information Centre<sup>44</sup>.

The Applicant will continue to actively encourage these organisations to work together in the context of the Proposed Varied Development, recognising that partnership working and effective communication between local organisations will help to deliver meaningful impact for the wider community. It recognises that these organisations need to retain capacity and develop resources to deliver local ambitions.

#### **5.3.2.2. CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL PRIORITIES THROUGH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND**

The Applicant has also created the Sustainable Development Fund in 2013 as part of its voluntary community benefit arrangements from its onshore renewable energy developments in the Highlands. This investment, including funding from Bhlaraidh Wind Farm, is aimed at stimulating transformation and growth for communities across the whole Highland region. It allows the benefits of SSE's renewable energy developments to be accessible to a wider area and is directed to projects that can achieve significant impact. It is expected that the fund could be worth over £57 million over the next 25 years.

It aims to deliver transformational social, economic and environmental changes in the Highlands, help the region prepare for a net zero future, and support long-term community development. The funds priority areas are:

- creating opportunities: increase opportunities for education and employment;
- empowering communities: build resilience and protect vulnerable residents; and
- building sustainable places: stimulate meaningful community regeneration.

In its first 10 years of operation the Sustainable Development Fund invested over £8m across Highland<sup>16</sup>.

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. Future wind farm developments, including the Proposed Varied Development, can help to boost the prospects of the region by developing synergies with local communities that address regionally important priorities like depopulation and skills development.

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<sup>44</sup> [Loch Ness Hub | Visit Inverness Loch Ness](#)

More recently, the fund has focused on key regional priorities including fuel poverty, housing and skills. To ensure it continues to tackle regional challenges, the Applicant engages regularly with Highland Council and other key regional stakeholders.

### Highland Energy Efficiency Programme

Delivered by The Highland Council, £800,000 was awarded which will help the programme to deliver energy efficiency in households across the region experiencing fuel poverty. Initially funded with £1m from SSE Renewables in 2022, it has delivered improvements in 220 homes to date. The new funding will enable it to deliver to 160 more homes, including those in remote and rural locations where the costs of installations are often higher. The total funding is now at £1.85m.

### Affordable Housing – Principle 3, Social Value Charter

The Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston Community Company were able to build 12 new homes, essential to helping attract and retain people in Scotland's remote and rural areas. These new homes used locally sourced stone and includes over 500 trees planted on their grounds. These homes required a total investment of £3mn, of which more than £1.5mn came from the applicant, including £115,000 from the Sustainable Development Fund.

The affordable housing project at Fort Augustus came about as a direct response to the Community Action Plan which identified a need for more affordable housing. This was reinforced by a housing needs survey carried out in 2019 and by the fact that over 60 people were on the list to be considered for the 12 homes that were completed in 2021.

### Match funding for local projects – Principle 7, Social Value Charter

The flexible funding enabled by the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) played a key role in supporting the Highlands Wildlife Park. The SDF was the first funder to commit to an ambitious re-development plan to help sustain the vital tourism site during the pandemic. This initial £200,000 helped to attract a further £6.5million from other funding sources. The completed site now has an engaging multi-sensory visitor experience, a comprehensive learning suite, and a sustainability hub to inspire the protection of the Cairngorms.

### 5.3.2.3. Summary: Maximising Socio-economic Benefit

The Applicant's approach to community empowerment as illustrated in this chapter is aligned to the six principles underpinning the BiGGAR Economics and Scottish Renewables guidance. The approach is **place-based**, as it focuses on the needs of the local community and is led by them, with capacity building support to ensure local priorities can be realised. It is **transparent**, with a governance model which is audited by a third-party, and collaborative, both in terms of how it fosters collaboration between delivery bodies to maximise impact, as well as how it collaborates and leverages regional and local actor views and insights. Its approach to community benefit funding is **flexible**, recognising the importance of providing flexible funding to communities, and it is importantly **deliverable**, supported by a quarter of a century's worth of experience in delivering community benefit funding.

#### How does the Applicant's Approach support Community Wealth Building?

SSE's community funds have supported all the principles of community wealth building, for example:

- **Workforce:** Funds support local apprenticeship schemes, which grow the local labour market

- **Land and property:** The existing funds have enabled communities to own a range of initiatives, including community homes.
- **Shops, crofts, woodlands, museums, and community hubs, inclusive ownership:** A key success of the community funds is growing enterprises that build community wealth, such as local co-operatives, local development trusts, and local social enterprises. In 2023 and 2024, the Applicant's community funds supported 34 Development Trust Association Scotland members to grow their local ownership.

## 5.4. Environmental Protection and Enhancement

As described in Section 3.3., SSE Renewables already has operational wind farms in the local region and therefore understands the habitat conditions of the area. As outlined in SSE Renewables' *Sustainability Report*<sup>45</sup>, SSE Renewables is aware of the responsibility it has, as a responsible and sustainable developer, to minimise its impact on the environment through building and maintaining its sites in line with guidance and best practice. In 2022, SSE Renewables published its *Positive for the Planet: Renewable energy with a Biodiversity Net Gain*<sup>46</sup> report which outlines its 10-point plan for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Within the plan, SSE Renewables commits to actively participating in industry forums to support the development of BNG, collaborate with partners to identify biodiversity improvements on operational sites, lead the BNG working group of the Powering Net Zero Pact, and deliver BNG on major onshore projects consented from 2025.

In addition to environmental protection and enhancement through robust plans and managing waste appropriately, the Applicant is committed to ensuring that the local community can benefit from the Proposed Varied Development through improving access to green spaces, when feasible, supporting skills development on nature positive practices, and engaging with the community when planning for decommissioning. As tourism in Aird and Loch Ness is heavily dependent on the surrounding natural environment, as described in Section 3.2.3, the Applicant understands the importance of ensuring the Proposed Varied Development supports the vision of the Highland Area Tourism Improvement Plan and does not negatively impact local tourism.

The below table provides a specific focus on how the environmental initiatives that are part of SSE Renewables' standard approach connects to social impact and the maximisation of socio-economic benefit. The chapters of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that are mentioned are referenced.

### 5.4.1. The Applicant's Standard Approach

	Initiative	How this connects to social impact and benefits	Resources
1	Robust Environmental Protection and Enhancement Plans	The plans outline how the Applicant has assessed the residual effects of the Proposed Varied Development and identified mitigation	All relevant Environmental Impact Assessment documents

<sup>45</sup> [sser-sustainability-2024.pdf](#), page 40

<sup>46</sup> [sser-biodiversity-net-gain-report-nov-2022-final.pdf](#)

	<p>including, but not limited to, Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), Peat Management Plan (PMP), Habitat Management Plan (HMP), Deer Management Plan (DMP) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).</p>	<p>measures to prevent, reduce and, if possible, offset potential significant adverse environmental impacts.</p> <p>This robust planning and scoping aim to ensure that the design of the Proposed Varied Development is appropriately designed in line with policies in the local and strategic development plans and conforms to national policy.</p> <p>Additionally, consultation remains a critical component of the EIA process and, in order to inform the EIA for the Proposed Varied Development, there has been ongoing consultation with statutory consultees, engagement through the formal EIA Scoping process and subsequent discussions, correspondence and meetings as required (full details are provided within each technical chapter of the EIA Report).</p>	<p>will be publicly available and published on the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit webpage at the time of submission.</p>
2	<p>Minimising and managing waste</p>	<p>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 focus on reducing waste. There will be a focus on prioritising the use of local suppliers for waste management activities, and where possible, re-using waste, such as spoil, locally.</p>	
3	<p>Investing in infrastructure and improving community access to green spaces</p>	<p>The Applicant aims to ensure that public access is maintained for the Operational Development wind farm's access tracks, existing hydro access tracks and the local path networks (H171, WAN1 and WAN2) during the construction phase, where it's safe to do so, to ensure that the community, and tourists visiting the area, continue to have safe access to green spaces.</p> <p>Upon the completion of construction, full public access to existing tracks will be restored with no restrictions, as well as the new track which will be constructed out to the substation.</p>	<p>The Outdoor Access Plan will be publicly available and published on the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit webpage at the time of submission.</p>

4	<p>Planning for Decommissioning: ensuring communities and stakeholders are consulted with.</p>	<p>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, ensuring their perspectives are taken into consideration.</p> <p>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 other SSE turbines 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) Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).</p> <p>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 CWIC<sup>47</sup> and SusWIND<sup>48</sup>.</p>	
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## 5.4.2. Specific Place-Based Initiatives for the Proposed Varied Development

### INTEGRATING RECREATIONAL VALUE INTO EARLY-STAGE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

This report relates to the submission of a proposed variation to a previously submitted planning application for a wind farm extension. As such the project has progressed past the design stage which has meant that incorporating changes to the original design, to align with the new NPF4 Policy 11c guidance and reporting framework, has been particularly challenging.

The Developer recognises that in order to maximise the socio-economic benefits that can be achieved through the development of renewable energy projects, sustainability must be embedded into the early design stage. As such, SSE is currently reviewing its internal governance processes and frameworks to ensure recreational value is embedded into the early stages of project developments. Internal

<sup>47</sup> [Coalition for Wind Industry Circularity | University of Strathclyde](#)

<sup>48</sup> [UK initiative launched to advance technology for sustainable and recyclable wind turbine blades | NCCUK](#)

consultations and workshops with stakeholders who are key in incorporating the delivery of socio-economic benefits through the project design and planning phase are currently underway.

For future developments, SSE Renewables is open to engaging The Highland Council to discuss the projects potential socio-economic benefits at an early stage, to ensure that benefits including recreational benefits are maximised and can be built into the project design.

#### **5.4.2.1. UPSKILLING AND PEATLAND**

##### **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 restoration works on other SSE Renewables' wind farm sites in the Highlands 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.

##### **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 on Shetland, 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.

# Appendix 1

## National Policy Context

### National Performance Framework

Aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF)<sup>49</sup> 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:

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

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<sup>49</sup> [National Performance Framework - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/national-performance-framework)



## National Planning Framework 4

In September 2023, the Scottish Government published the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)<sup>50</sup>. 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**.

## 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.

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<sup>50</sup> [National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/pages/11-energy.aspx)



## 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;
- 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.

## Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation

Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)<sup>51</sup>, 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.

## 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.

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<sup>51</sup> [Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/nset/pages/1-introduction-to-the-strategy.aspx)



## Appendix 2

### Regional Policy Context

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

HIREP's Regional Economic Strategy 2025-2035<sup>53</sup>, 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.

#### **Inverness and Highland City-Region Deal**

The Inverness and Highland 'City-Region Deal'<sup>54</sup> 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;

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<sup>53</sup> [hirep-strategy-2025-2035.pdf](#)

<sup>54</sup> [City Region Deal](#) | The Highland Council

- 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
- 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.

## 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.

## Highland Area Tourism Partnership Plan

The Highland Area Tourism Partnership Plan<sup>55</sup> 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

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<sup>55</sup> [Highland Tourism Partnership | Tourism](#) | The Highland Council

- 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.

## The Highland Council's Net Zero Strategy

The Highland Council's Net Zero Strategy<sup>56</sup> 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 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.

## The Highland Council's Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024

The Highland Council's Community Wealth draft strategy<sup>57</sup> 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.

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<sup>56</sup> [Net Zero Strategy | Climate change](#) | The Highland Council

<sup>57</sup> [Community Wealth Building Strategy | Community Wealth Building Strategy 2024](#)

## **The Highland Council's Social Value Charter**

Building on the community wealth building strategy and approach to economic development, The Highland Council launched a 'Social Value Charter for Renewables Investment'<sup>58</sup>.

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

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<sup>58</sup> [https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/83522/item\\_10\\_social\\_values\\_charter\\_for\\_renewables\\_investment](https://www.highland.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/83522/item_10_social_values_charter_for_renewables_investment)

## Appendix 3

### Environmental Protection and Enhancement Plans

The Proposed Varied Development Site is predominantly wet heath and blanket bog, with areas of wet modified bog, dry heath, unimproved acid grassland, marshy grassland, and standing water.

With embedded and targeted mitigation, compensation, and enhancement measures (as set out in the final Habitat Management Plan (HMP) **Technical Appendix 3.6a** and Deer Management Plan (DMP) **Technical Appendix 3.6d**), the Proposed Varied Development is not expected to cause any new or materially different significant adverse ecological effects compared to the Consented Development.

### Peatland Condition and Mitigation

Peatland assessments show most areas are modified or highly modified, with few near-natural peatlands. The Proposed Varied Development avoids direct impacts where possible and retains embedded mitigation measures from the Consented Development, which remain appropriate.

### Habitat Management and Restoration

- The final HMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6a**) for the Consented Development proposed restoring 31.88 ha of degraded peatland within the Site and planting Caledonian woodland and montane scrub outside the Site boundary.
- Although peatland loss differs under the Proposed Varied Development, the restoration scope remains the same, representing the maximum achievable restoration within the Site.
- The DMP (**Technical Appendix 3.6d**) will reduce grazing intensity, benefiting peatland habitats—these benefits apply equally to the Proposed Varied Development.

### Biodiversity Enhancements

Measures carried forward from the Consented Development include:

- **Peatland restoration:** 31.88 ha within the Site.
- **Woodland creation:** 23.64 ha of low-density Caledonian woodland outside the Site, providing foraging for black grouse and maintaining open ground for golden eagle.
- **Montane scrub planting:** 23.25 ha outside the Site, improving habitat diversity and prey availability for golden eagle.
- **Artificial nesting habitat:** For black-throated divers.
- **Reduced deer grazing:** Promoting natural regeneration and tree growth.

### Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

A BNG assessment (**Technical Appendix 3.6c**) using the SSER Toolkit estimated a 4–40% biodiversity increase from habitat creation and enhancements. Non-quantifiable measures (e.g., reduced grazing pressure and ornithological enhancements) were assessed qualitatively and contribute to meeting NPF4 biodiversity requirements. A complementary Carbon Assessment related to the BNG report was undertaken. It concluded that, after an initial loss of land carbon stocks during construction, the Consented Development and its associated HMP would achieve an increase in biogenic carbon storage and sequestration capacity (**Technical Appendix 3.6b**).

## Appendix 4

### BiGGAR Economics and Scottish Renewables' Principles to Maximise Socio-Economic Benefits <sup>59</sup>

To assess whether the socio-economic benefits of a project have been maximised it will be important to consider whether the developer's approach is:

- **Place based** - every project and every community is different so packages of benefits that are tailored around the needs and capacity of the community in question are likely to generate greater benefits than standardised approach. This highlights the importance of identifying and considering evidence regarding relevant economic, social and community issues and articulating a clear rationale for proposed interventions to maximise benefits.
- **Innovative** - many of the benefits that have been realised by renewables to date have happened because of innovation at the project level. To maintain this culture of continuous improvement it is important that developers to continue to innovate and collaborate with each other where multiple projects impact a community.
- **Collaborative** - many of the benefits of renewable energy developments are not directly within the gift of developers. They will require input and support of others in the public, private and third sector to realise, making a collaborative approach essential.
- **Transparent** - effective collaboration requires the parties involved to trust each other and an open and transparent approach is crucial for establishing this trust. Any report submitted to demonstrate compliance with Policy 11c should focus on the relevance, evidence for and rationale of proposed measures and benefits, rather than simply their financial value.
- **Flexible** - a lot can change between project inception and completion, and these changes can make a big difference to the benefits ultimately realised. A flexible approach that responds positively to such changes is therefore important.
- **Deliverable** - providing communities with realistic expectations about what can be delivered during the construction and operation phase of a project will help achieve trust with relevant stakeholders. This will positively impact relationships for future renewable projects.

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<sup>59</sup> [Maximising Net Socio-Economic Benefit of Renewable Energy Guidance and Reporting Framework](#), page 5