TECHNICAL APPENDIX 5.3: ASSESSMENT OF LANDSCAPE CHARACTER TYPES

1. Technical Appendix 5.3: Assessment of Landscape Character Types

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This appendix sets out the assessment findings for the Landscape Character Assessment included within the 2021 EIAR, outlining any changes to the assessment for the Proposed Varied Development.

1.1.2 The following Landscape Character Types (LCTs) within the detailed study area were identified within the 2021 EIAR as potentially experiencing landscape effects of Minor-Moderate or above as a result of the 2021 EIAR Layout (as illustrated in Figure 5.5: Landscape Character within Detailed Study Area):

- LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows;
- LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland;
- LCT 139: Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland;
- LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland;

1.1.3 The above areas are therefore assessed in the following tables, in accordance with criteria outlined in the 2021 EIAR, Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual, Section 7.5.

1.1.4 The tables reference the 20 turbine 2021 EIAR Layout. The Further Environmental Information (FEI) Report submitted in 2022 did not identify any changes to landscape effects for the Consented Development as a result of the removal of turbines 10 and 20.

1.1.5 Assessment of Designated and Protected Landscapes is detailed in Technical Appendix 5.4: Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire Special Landscape Area Assessment and Technical Appendix 5.6: Assynt Coigach National Scenic Area – Special Landscape Qualities Assessment. The detailed assessment of WLA 34 (Reay – Cassley) is provided in Technical Appendix 5.5: WLA 34 Reay – Cassley – Wild Land Assessment.

1.2 Landscape Character Types

Table 1.2.1: LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows

Landscape Baseline	
Description	This LCT comprises two sub-areas within the detailed study area including a small sub-area at the head of Glen Cassley approximately 8 km to the north-west of the Site (the western sub-area) and a larger sub-area to the north-east of Loch Shin and approximately 7km to the north-east of the Site (the eastern sub-area). It is characterised by a flat and gently undulating landscape of sweeping moorlands with occasional isolated hills which stand out from the low-lying surrounds, despite their limited height. The landscape has a simple composition with wide and largely uninterrupted skylines and extensive visibility. Lochs and meandering rivers sited in shallow valleys and basins provide some focal features. It also provides a setting for *LCT 138: Lone Mountains*, which are accentuated by the surrounding expanse of moorland. This is an undeveloped landscape with a strong sense of remoteness. Pockets of improved grazing and forest plantations are present on the outer edges of the LCT and there is occasional influence single track roads and tracks, and from wind farms and transmission lines outside of the LCT. Settlement is sparse, consisting of dispersed crofts and farms concentrated in straths and along the margins. However, there is a long history of settlement in the area, evidenced by occasional ruined buildings field boundaries and drainage channels. It is noted that this LCT is fairly atypical of the description within the detailed study area with a more elevated and undulating character across the western sub-area and extensive areas of coniferous forest across parts of the eastern sub-area.
Key Characteristics	The key characteristics of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT are noted as follows: • Gently sloping or undulating landform which lies generally below 350 metres. • Occasional isolated hills of limited height form local landmark features. • Lochs and mature, meandering rivers. • Very distinct flora, dominated by sphagnum mosses, produced by the wetness and infertility of the flows. • Areas of peat cuttings and hagging. • Pockets of improved grazing, mainly within the outer fringes of sweeping moorland. • Coniferous forest forming a dominant characteristic within some parts of this landscape character type. • Ribbons of broadleaf woodland occasionally run along the water courses and loch edges. • Very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath. • Vehicular tracks within parts of the landscape. • Wind farms, transmission lines, the A9 and a network of minor roads are key features within the more modified outer fringes within Caithness. • Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space. • Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland. • Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau. • A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.

Landscape Value	This LCT is valued for its wild character and sense of remoteness, although this is felt mostly within the interior. Within the detailed study area, the LCT is partially within the Foinaven - Ben Hee and Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest Wild Land Areas. A small part of this landscape also falls within the Assynt – Coigach NSA. Landscape value is therefore considered to be **High**
Changes to the Landscape Baseline since 2021 EIAR	The construction of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm along the northern boundary of the eastern sub-area at its transition with LCT 135, has increased the presence of wind development across the northerly section of the eastern sub-area, affecting some of the key characteristics including the long, uninterrupted skylines, sense of exposure and sense of remoteness within this area by introducing large, man-made elements. The landscape value is still considered to be **High**.
Consented Development - Summary of Landscape Effects	
Summary of 2021 LVIA	The 2021 LVIA identified a Minor to Moderate (not significant) effect for the western sub-area, and a Minor (not significant) effect for the eastern sub-area during both construction and operation. It was noted that extensive forest coniferous forest areas within the eastern sub-area would somewhat reduce the degree of intervisibility within a large part of this sub-area. Within both sub-areas, the introduction of further turbines on the southerly skyline would not result in a noticeable change in characteristics as wind turbines already characterise this part of the surrounding context reducing sensitivity to further, similar development in this area. However, for the western sub-area and closer parts of the eastern sub-area, (within around 10 – 12 km of the Site and outwith forested areas) the increased presence of wind turbines at closer proximity was considered likely to increase the strength of wind farm development as a characteristic of the LCT slightly, leading to some localised reduction in perceived remoteness within these areas and some localised areas where turbines may form a new visual focus. However, this was not considered to result in a sufficient degree of change to alter key characteristics of expansiveness and exposure and would not affect the prominence of existing mountain focal points which are more generally located within the context to north, east and west. Overall it was concluded that the key characteristics of this LCT would remain intact and therefore the effect would not be significant. Sensitivity was noted to be High to direct change reducing to Medium for indirect change in the southern context for some areas, due to the presence of existing wind turbines in this context. Magnitude of change was predicted to be Low.
Consented Layout	The consented layout of 18 turbines would not change the assessment or conclusions for this LCT.
Proposed Varied Development – Assessment of Landscape Effects	
Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this LCT which may be affected by the Proposed Varied Development comprise: • Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space. • Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland. • Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau. • A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.

Landscape Sensitivity	This is a highly valued landscape with an open and expansive character and wide, uninterrupted skylines which are highly susceptible to change. However, the presence of existing, similar features such as existing wind turbines at the Achany, Rosehall and Lairg Wind Farms locally reduce sensitivity to indirect change in the southern context. The construction of the Creag Rhiabhach wind farm in the north of this LCT further reduces remote qualities within this part of the landscape. Landscape sensitivity is unchanged in the western sub-area and is therefore **High** to direct change, and **Medium** to indirect change in the southern context. Due to the additional presence of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, landscape sensitivity in the eastern sub-area is now considered to be **Medium-High** to direct change but continues to be **Medium** to indirect change in the southern context in some areas.
Potential Effects	Potential effects which may result to this landscape comprise: • Appearance of turbines could lead to interruption of the skyline creating a new focus within views and affecting sense of enclosure. • Appearance of turbines could interrupt views towards mountains or distract by forming a new visual focus. • The appearance of wind turbines within the surrounding landscape could affect the sense of remoteness.
Magnitude of Change	There would be no direct change to this LCT from the Proposed Varied Development. The ZTV indicates very little increase in the extent of intervisibility within this LCT compared to the consented layout. Theoretical visibility is shown to be widespread within the detailed study area, including within the southern half of the smaller western sub-area at the head of Glen Cassley and throughout much of the larger eastern sub-area to the north-east of Loch Shin. However, due to their taller height, there would usually be greater numbers of turbines intervisible within both the western and eastern sub-areas and more consistent intervisibility with the maximum number of turbines (18 turbines) would occur beyond around 8 km, as opposed to the Consented Development for which this was typically beyond around 12 km. Within these areas, the Proposed Varied Development would appear as turbines on the south-eastern or south-western skyline. From most areas affected, wind turbines are already seen as a feature of the southerly skyline. However, the turbines of the Proposed Varied Development would appear taller and closer to both sub-areas of this LCT and would increase the part of the southern skyline occupied by turbines for the eastern sub-area. This is likely to lead to wind turbines becoming a more noticeable characteristic within the context of the more southerly parts of this LCT but would be a less noticeable change towards the north of the eastern sub-area, where Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is already very influential. The perceptible change in characteristics for a localised part of the surrounding context is considered to lead to a **Low** magnitude of landscape change during construction and operation.
Significance of Effect (summary of key changes)	Whilst intervisibility of the Proposed Varied Development would theoretically affect large areas within this LCT, the presence of extensive areas of coniferous forest is likely to limit this somewhat within the eastern sub-area. The turbines of the Proposed Varied Development would typically appear more prominent than those of the Consented Development in the southern context due to their taller stature, which would lead to them appearing more noticeable above the horizontal skyline. The consistent blade length would be unlikely to make them appear closer than the turbines of the Consented Development, but their greater prominence would lead to them appearing to sit more on top of the southern ridgeline rather than behind it, thereby appearing to draw the ridgeline closer. This may somewhat reduce the perceived expanse of the LCT in some areas. Within the western sub-area and open, southerly parts of the eastern sub-area to the north-east of Loch Shin, the closer proximity of wind turbines is considered likely to

	increase the strength of wind farm development as a characteristic of the LCT, and this would also reduce the sense of remoteness which is stronger in the western sub-area. However, this is unlikely to be very different to the effect of the Consented Development. In more northern parts of the eastern sub-area, the presence of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm means that wind turbines are already a notable characteristic of the LCT. The Proposed Varied Development would be more distant and less prominent in these areas though its presence above the southern ridge line may slightly reduce the perceived scale of the LCT. The landscape effect is predicted to be **Minor to Moderate** (not significant) on both the eastern and western sub areas.
Change to Effect Significance	No change is predicted to the level of effect within the western sub-area of this LCT. The Proposed Varied Development would slightly increase the landscape effect on the eastern sub-area of this LCT. However, the localised change within this sub-area from Minor (not significant) to Minor to Moderate (not significant) would not lead to any new significant effects.

Table 1.2.2: LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland

Landscape Baseline	
Description	The Site would be located within this LCT, which is the most common landscape type within the detailed study area and occurs extensively across Caithness and Sutherland. It is characterised by broad hills with rounded summits, rising from rolling moorland and reaching heights of mostly 400 - 500m AOD. The terrain varies between swathes of subtly rolling hills and moorland through central areas, more prominent coastal hills and occasional more pronounced hills featuring patches of scree and crags. Hills are divided by straths and often cut into by narrower glens. Heather moorland forms the predominant land cover and woodland is scarce, limited to areas of coniferous forest on lower hill slopes and within glens, and occasional broadleaf woodland in more inaccessible locations such as crags and narrower glens. There is limited settlement, comprised of widely dispersed crofts, farms and occasional estate buildings on lower slopes but the LCT provides an important setting and backdrop to adjacent strath and coastal lands. Hydro infrastructure is present in parts of this area, including at the head of Glen Cassley, in the form of weirs, above ground aqueducts and associated tracks. Wind farm development is also present within this LCT, usually associated with the more subtly undulating and lower hills set within the interior of the uplands. Elsewhere, a sense of wild character can be experienced in the more remote and less modified parts of the LCT.
Key Characteristics	The key characteristics of the Rounded Hills Caithness and Sutherland LCT are noted as follows: • Rolling hills forming broad, subtly rounded summits but with some more pronounced hills also occurring, these often featuring steeper slopes along the coast or where truncated by deep glens. • Hills cut by numerous narrow burns and small lochans lie within dips, corries and on plateau summits. • Predominantly dense heather ground cover and moorland grasses, but also some areas of bog. • Fragments of broadleaf woodland in inaccessible locations. • Scarcely settled with a largely uninhabited interior and widely scattered crofts and farms on lower slopes adjoining straths and farmed landscapes. • Narrow glens and lower hill slopes often rich in archaeology with features such as standing stones, brochs and medieval townships. • Wind farms located in more accessible and generally lower rolling hills, either close to extensive forestry or the high voltage transmission line aligned broadly parallel to the south-east Sutherland coast (hydro infrastructure is also present in some areas although not mentioned specifically as a key characteristic). • Convex character of hill slopes limiting distant visibility and views of the hill tops when travelling through the landscape. • Views into the interior of the hills very restricted. • Strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape.
Landscape Value	This LCT is widespread within the detailed study area and the wider Caithness and Sutherland area. It falls within a number of protected and designated areas including: the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest and Reay – Cassley WLA; and the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire, Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth, and Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLAs. The LCT is valued for its wild characteristics and as a backdrop to straths and coastal areas. As this LCT covers a very extensive and variable area, landscape value is considered to be generally **Medium** but may be locally **High** where it forms an important component of designated or protected areas or an important backdrop for local communities.

Changes to the Landscape Baseline since 2021 EIAR	The construction of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm within the northern part of this LCT, at its boundary with LCT 134, has increased the presence of wind development within this part of the landscape. There is relatively extensive intervisibility with Creag Riabhach Wind Farm within the central part of this LCT along the north-facing slopes above Loch Shin. This has reduced the sense of wild character in the most northerly parts of the LCT within the study area.
Consented Development - Summary of Landscape Effects	
Summary of 2021 LVIA	The 2021 LVIA identified significant effects on landscape character, during construction and operation, in and around the 2021 Proposed Development and within the surrounding context up to around 8km from the Site and locally up to 10km to the west of Glen Cassley, limited to areas to the north of Aonach a' Choire Bhuig and Strath Grudie on the east side of Glen Cassley, and Beinn an Rosail Beag to the west of Glen Cassley where the influence of existing wind turbines is reduced. A locally Major (significant) effect was identified within the immediate confines of the 2021 EIAR Layout at its northern end within Coire Buidhe where the wind turbines would become the main character defining feature of the landscape. The effect was predicted to be Moderate (significant) within the further surrounding areas described above, where it was noted that the 2021 EIAR Layout would form a new focus within the landscape to a sufficient degree to influence landscape character, likely to increase the role of wind turbines as a characteristic of the landscape and/or affect the sense of remoteness and wild character. However, beyond these areas it was considered that while the turbines may continue to form a focus within some views, locally affecting the sense of remoteness and wildness, they would be unlikely to be sufficiently noticeable to alter any of the key characteristics of the LCT. The effect in these areas was therefore considered to range from Minor to Minor – Moderate, being Negligible in areas with little or no intervisibility. These significance of effect ratings reflect a sensitivity level for this LCT which is variable, ranging from Low within areas already strongly characterised by wind development to Medium where there is a closer association with settlement and communities and in some areas where coniferous forest plantation is influential, being High in areas where wild land characteristics predominate, with magnitude change predicted to be High within areas directly affected and to north, east and west of the more northerly turbines within around 2km of the Site and Medium within other areas
Consented Layout	The consented layout of 18 turbines would not change the assessment or conclusions for this LCT.
Proposed Varied Development – Assessment of Landscape Effects	
Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this landscape which may be affected by the Proposed Varied Development comprise: • Rolling hills forming broad, subtly rounded summits and some more pronounced hills. • Scarcely settled with a largely uninhabited interior and widely scattered crofts and farms on lower slopes adjoining straths and farmed landscapes. • Wind farms located in more accessible and generally lower rolling hills, either close to extensive forestry or the high voltage transmission line aligned broadly parallel to the south-east Sutherland coast. • Convex character of hill slopes limiting distant visibility and views of the hill tops when travelling through the landscape. • Views into the interior of the hills very restricted. • Strong sense of wild character experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of the landscape.

Landscape Sensitivity	This is a landscape of high value in some areas, although wind farm development or other localised features such as hydro development, already forms a key characteristic within other parts. The character of broad, convex hill slopes which limit extensive visibility, theoretically reduces susceptibility to change although in areas where remote and wild characteristics predominate susceptibility is greater. Landscape sensitivity is unchanged through the majority of this LCT, remaining **Low** within areas already strongly characterised by wind development, **Medium** where there is a closer association with settlement and communities, and also in some areas where coniferous forest plantation has more influence on character, and **High** in areas where wild land characteristics predominate. The new presence of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm within the northern part of this LCT reduces the sensitivity in this area to **Low** or **Medium**, reflecting other areas where similar wind farm development is an influential characteristic.
Potential Effects	Potential effects which may result to this landscape comprise: • Wind turbines, as large vertical structures within the LCT, have the potential to diminish subtle variations in the landscape and could distract from the prominence of more pronounced hills; • Turbines and associated tracks and substation within the LCT have the potential to alter the existing patterns of the landscape including the existing pattern of wind farms and balance of developed and undeveloped areas; • Appearance of turbines within the LCT may form new focal points, within views towards the interior or distant areas, affecting sense of space and scale; and • Direct presence of turbines, tracks and substation within the LCT and appearance of turbines within the surrounds may affect sense of wild character.
Magnitude of Change	The Proposed Varied Development would be entirely within this LCT including 18 turbines, new access tracks and hardstanding, substation, LiDAR position and temporary infrastructure and borrow-pits during construction. The ZTV indicates that indirect change in the form of intervisibility of the Proposed Varied Development would be widespread but with the greatest area of change likely to continue to be within 5-6km of the Proposed Varied Development. However, the taller turbines would lead to new intervisibility within this area, mostly affecting localised areas on the plateau and north-easterly-facing slopes to the west of Loch Shin. Further intervisibility is indicated up the western side of Glen Cassley, up to 10-12 km from the Proposed Varied Development which would be similar in extent to the Consented Develpoment. However, the taller height of turbines would be clearly apparent through this area, forming a greater focus above the ridgeline to the south-west and appearing noticeably closer than existing Achany and Rosehall turbines. Extensive areas of intervisiblity are also indicated across forested and forest edge slopes to the south of Strath Oykel and south of Lairg. The taller turbines would lead to some limited new areas of intervisibility around lower slopes in these areas and some western parts of Strath Oykel, around Meallan Odhar and Cairn Meall a' Chaorainnn. The numbers of turbines affecting these areas would be generally similar to the Consented Development, although they would be noticeably taller and locally, within some of the areas closer to the Proposed Varied Development, this would lead to more turbines being seen. Greater numbers of turbines would also theoretically influence the most northerly part of this LCT within the study area, where up to 18 turbines would now be visible (previously generally below 14 turbines), but these would be distant and experienced in the context of the Creag Riabhach Wind Farm which is now located directly within this part of the LCT. Magnitude of change would still be variable, anticipated to be **High** within areas directly affected and to north, east and west of the more northerly turbines within around 2km of the Proposed Varied Development and **Medium** within other areas.

Significance of Effect (summary of key changes)	Effects would continue to be most notable within and around the Proposed Varied Development site, where direct effects for the Proposed Varied Development would be similar to those of the Consented Development, being most pronounced within and around the northern part of the site, where there is no influence from existing wind development. This would be similar to the effects of the Consented Development with the taller turbines unlikely to change the nature of the effect within this area. However, the sense of the landscape being more closely defined by wind turbines may be extended over a slightly wider area, locally up to 3 km. The Proposed Varied Development would lead to indirect effects across a similar area to the Consented Development. The taller height and increased prominence of turbines would lead to a slightly increased influence of wind turbines as a characteristic of the landscape within this area, particularly along the slopes to the west of Glen Cassley. The effect on landscape character would be similar to that of the consented development, where the turbines would form a new or more prominent characteristic of the landscape, and/or affect the sense of remoteness and wild character (see Appendix 5.5), although the taller turbine towers with hubs and blades higher above the landform may appear to diminish the topographical scale and distance a little more. There would be a less noticeable difference in effect within parts of the LCT to the south where the landscape is more strongly influenced by existing turbines. There would be some areas at greater distance where the Proposed Varied Development would be somewhat more noticeable, due to the taller turbines which would be more likely to appear above intervening landform and may become more of a focus in some views. However, at the distances involved, it is unlikely that it would alter the key characteristics of the LCT in these areas. The effect on landscape character would remain **Major** (significant) within the immediate confines of the Proposed Varied Development site but this level of effect is predicted to cover a slightly greater area of 2-2.5 km and locally up to 3 km. A **Moderate** (significant) effect is predicted in areas in and around the Proposed Varied Development and the surrounding context within areas up to 8-10 km from the Proposed Varied Development, chiefly on slopes and plateau areas to the west of Glen Cassley where the Proposed Varied Development would appear substantially closer than the existing wind turbines at Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms and where effects on wild land characteristics are predicted. Beyond 10 km in this direction, the taller turbines would appear more present within the nearby landscape than the shorter turbines of the Consented Development and would be considerably larger and more noticeable than those of the existing Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms. However, they would not appear very out of scale or inconsistent within the landscape which already shows a greater diversity within the south-easterly context and other aspects of the surrounding landscape are likely to continue to have a greater influence on the landscape character and experience. The effect at this distance is therefore predicted to be **Minor – Moderate** (not significant). Beyond these areas, while there may be locally increased effects in some locations, effects are still expected to range from **Minor** to **Minor – Moderate** (not significant) and would remain **Negligible** in areas with little or no visibility.
Change to Effect Significance	There would not be an increase in the effect ratings for this LCT, and the extent of the area within which significant effects would be experienced would be broadly similar. However, the area within which significant effects would be Major rather than Moderate is predicted to be slightly larger, increasing from around 2 km for the Consented Development, to localised areas up to 3 km away.

Table 1.2.3: LCT 139: Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland

Landscape Baseline	
Description	This LCT comprises two separate areas within the detailed study area located approximately 10.8km to the north-west of the Site (the Ben More Assynt sub-area) and 15km to the south (the Freevater-Glencalvie sub-area (also including a small, disconnected area above Strathcarron)). It is characterised by high mountains with a rugged and predominantly irregular and complex form and massive scale. The mountains are defined by areas of sheer scree slopes, narrow bare rock ridges, crags and defined summit peaks with their scale and ruggedness enhanced by the adjacent deeply indented fjord-like coastline, glens and lochs which cut into the massif. Quartzite screes on the sheer south-west flanks of Fionaven and Arkle and the upper slopes of Ben More Assynt give these mountains a characteristically pale grey colour.
Key Characteristics	The key characteristics of the Rugged Mountain Massif - Caithness & Sutherland LCT are noted as follows: • Mountains with very steep slopes which are often covered in scree and commonly feature narrow rocky ridges, buttresses, crags and pronounced peaks. • High, generally lying above 800m. • Different geology associated with each mountain group influencing their character. • Deeply indented sea lochs of Lochs Glendhu and Glencoul and a number of sheer sided glens, cut into the mountains of north-west Sutherland, generally orientated on long north-west to south-east fault lines. • Dark, narrow lochs within some of the north-west Sutherland mountain glens. • Mountain peaks form landmarks, rising above the interlocking mass of lower slopes and distinguished by their height, distinctive and recognisable profile. • Largely uninhabited and difficult to access. The small number of settlements and roads which do exist tend to be located at the edges of this character type and at the intersection of a strath or loch. • Interior of this landscape is mainly visited by hill walkers and deer stalkers. • Limited visibility within the glens which lie between or at the foot of these mountains, due to their steepness of slope and immense size. • Extensive views of the surrounding landscape and an exhilarating experience of openness and exposure from mountain ridges and summits. • Natural unmodified character of the high mountains, with their remoteness, ruggedness, and difficulty of access, creating a strong wild character.
Landscape Value	This LCT is appreciated for its scenic qualities and wild, rugged character. Within the detailed study area, the Ben More Assynt sub-area falls partially within the Assynt – Coigach NSA and also partly within WLA 34 (Reay – Cassley) and WLA 37 (Foinaven – Ben Hee) whilst the Freevater - Glencalvie sub-area falls within WLA 29 (Rhiddoroch - Beinn Dearg - Ben Wyvis) and the Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie SLA. Landscape value is considered to be High.
Changes to the Landscape Baseline since 2021 EIAR	There have been no major changes to the landscape baseline within this LCT within the study area since the 2021 EIAR.
Consented Development - Summary of Landscape Effects	
Summary of 2021 LVIA	The 2021 LVIA identified the landscape effect during both construction and operation to be Minor (not significant) within around 15km of the Site around Ben More Assynt, but rising to a *localised* Minor to Moderate (not significant) effect at the closest point

	around Meall an Aonaich. The landscape effect was predicted to be be Negligible elsewhere. Within the Ben More Assynt sub-area, the 2021 Proposed Development would move wind turbines closer to the LCT. This was predicted to affect the sense of wild character, reducing the perception of distance between the mountains and the developed landscape, and would also have some effect on the key characteristic of extensive views. However, the parts of the LCT that would be affected are already influenced by outside development which slightly reduces sensitivity to further development in the same context. The effect was considered to be greatest within areas closest to the Site around Meall an Aonaich where the 2021 Proposed Development would be prominent, but would become less notable around Ben More Assynt, and would be inappreciable around Ben Hee and Braebeg due to the context of existing turbines and the distance involved. Within the Freevater – Glencalvie sub-area, it was noted that the 2021 Proposed Development may form a feature within elevated views in some areas but would usually be seen within a context where existing turbines are already present or would reflect other nearby parts of the landscape where turbines are already visible. It would therefore appear unexceptional within the context and would not form a new characteristic. These significance of effect ratings reflect a sensitivity level for this LCT of High, with Magnitude of Change predicted to be Medium in areas closest to the Site around Ben More Assynt and Meall an Aonaich and Low elsewhere within the Ben More Assynt sub-area, and Low within the Freevater – Glencalvie sub-area
Consented Layout	The consented layout of 18 turbines would not change the assessment or conclusions for this LCT.
Proposed Varied Development – Assessment of Landscape Effects	
Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this landscape which may be affected by the Proposed Varied Development comprise: • Mountain peaks form landmarks, rising above the interlocking mass of lower slopes and distinguished by their height, distinctive and recognisable profile. • Extensive views of the surrounding landscape and an exhilarating experience of openness and exposure from mountain ridges and summits. • Natural unmodified character of the high mountains, with their remoteness, ruggedness, and difficulty of access, creating a strong wild character.
Landscape Sensitivity	This is a highly valued upland landscape and its qualities of remoteness and elevated open views make it very susceptible to change of the type proposed. It is not considered that there are any changes to the landscape sensitivity since the 2021 EIAR. Landscape sensitivity to change of the type proposed is still considered to be **High**.
Potential Effects	Potential effects which may result to this landscape comprise: • Turbines within the surrounding landscape may form a new focus, intruding into views towards mountain peaks, or distracting from views towards mountains affecting their role as a landmark. • Turbines may appear within extensive views from mountain ridges and summits forming a distracting feature. • The appearance of the turbines within the wider landscape context may affect the sense of wild character.
Magnitude of Change	There would be no direct change to this LCT. Indirect change would be in the form of intervisibility with turbines and potentially tracks in the surrounding landscape context. The ZTV indicates that the extent of intervisibility for the Proposed Varied Development would be very similar to that of the Consented Development. Within the

	Ben More Assynt sub-area, the Proposed Varied Development would be intervisible with high summits and facing slopes including Ben More Assynt, Meall an Aonaich, Breabeg and Ben Leòid, appearing to the south-east and south. The numbers of turbines theoretically visible would be mostly similar to those of the Consented Development, other than a few areas at the north end of Loch Shin. However, whilst they would still be experienced in the context of the existing Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms, the taller turbines would appear noticeably closer due to the disparity of scale. Within the Freevater – Glencalvie sub-area, similar numbers of turbines would be intervisible for the Proposed Varied Development as for the Consented Development, affecting a few facing slopes and summit areas. These would be present within the northern context of the LCT in the middle distance. For most of these areas within the detailed study area, this comprises a part of the context where wind turbines already form an existing feature. However, as the relative distance would be easier to perceive, the larger scale of the Proposed Varied Development turbines would be more clearly apparent and this is likely to lead to wind turbines being a more noticeable part of this context within the limited areas affected. Magnitude of change would be **Medium** within the Ben More Assynt sub-area and **Low** within the Freevater – Glencalvie sub-area.
Significance of Effect (summary of key changes)	Within the Ben More Assynt sub-area, the Proposed Varied Development turbines would appear larger than those of the Consented Development with the differing geometry of taller towers with proportionately shorter blades leading to them appearing noticeably closer than the exiting Achany and Rosehall turbines, therefore having a greater presence in the nearby landscape context. This is predicted to have a greater influence on areas slightly further into the centre of the LCT such as the summit areas of Braebag and Conival where the turbines would be seen in the context of the mountainous LCT, as well as appearing closer to the outer summit areas such as Ben More Assynt and Meall an Aonaich where it would be seen within the wider and more expansive context beyond the LCT. The taller turbine towers may also reduce the perceived scale and extent of the topography in some areas. Although existing features including wind turbines already have some influence on parts of this landscape, the sense of turbines being taller and closer to the LCT is likely to lead to some effect on the sense of wildness within this part of the LCT. There would also be some effect on the LCT characteristic of extensive views from or towards the mountains. However, the availability of these views would not be affected, and views would remain unchanged in other directions, particularly the valued westerly views. Within the Freevater – Glencalvie sub-area the Proposed Varied Development would also form a feature within some elevated views and would be somewhat more influential than the Consented Development due to its larger scale which would be more apparent in relation to existing turbines. However, this would affect a proportionately smaller area where wild land qualities are already limited by existing nearby swathes of forest plantation and existing wind turbines. Therefore, although the Proposed Varied Development would appear larger and more prominent in views, it is not considered that this would result in a noticeable change to landscape characteristics. The resultant effect on the landscape character of the Ben More Assynt sub-area during construction and operation is therefore predicted to be **Minor – Moderate** (not significant) within the Ben More Assynt sub-area. The effect on the landscape character of the Freevater – Glencalvie sub-area is predicted to be **Minor** (not significant) during construction and operation.

Change to Effect Significance	The level of effect would be slightly increased for this LCT, with the localised Minor – Moderate (not significant) effect within the Ben More Assynt sub-area predicted to be experienced more widely within the 20 km detailed study area, and the Negligible effect on the Freevateer – Glencalvie sub-area predicted to rise to Minor (not significant). However, the effect on this LCT would remain not significant.

Table 1.2.4: LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland

Landscape Baseline	
Description	Within the detailed study area, this LCT is located in Glen Cassley, approximately 1.5km from the closest turbines, Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland (the Kyle) from 4km to 20km away, Strath Fleet 13.5km away, Strath Carron around 13km away and the lower end of Strath Tirry 8.3 km from the Site. It is comprised of linear straths, usually featuring a river or loch with varying degree of enclosure: some from deeply incised troughs whilst others such as Strath Tirry are broader and more open. Strath floors are predominantly under pasture, occasionally featuring areas of wetland and woodland. Varying proportions of semi-improved and rough grazing interspersed with mixed woodlands, forest plantation and occasional croft lands cover the side slopes. Vegetation in the upper straths becomes more dominated by heather moorland and mixed woodland. The sheltered and often fertile straths are relatively well-settled and accommodate access roads and other communications whilst settlement is sparser in upper straths, often limited to remote crofts and shooting lodges with associated policy grounds. Abandoned crofts are also often a feature of upper straths and there are occasional pre-historic features such as brochs. Wind farm development sited in the upland interior is visible from some straths where the skyline of containing hills dips or is breached by side valleys. There is also some localised influence from hydro infrastructure in the surrounding hills, such as hydro aqueduct pipelines seen from some areas of upper Glen Cassley. Views are generally focussed along straths from the narrow roads with a backdrop of mountains often revealed in some of the upper reaches.
Key Characteristics	The key characteristics of the Strath - Caithness & Sutherland LCT are noted as follows: • Straths range from fairly straight deeply incised troughs to more winding valleys with a number of minor side glens. • River terraces and hummocky lower side slopes a common feature. • Water is a key characteristic with straths accommodating a central river meandering across the floodplain, often traced by clumps of birch and alder. • Lochs in some straths, where a string of small lochs add to the scenic richness of the lower strath. • Areas of wetland often present on the strath floors. • Smooth and fairly large pastures the predominant land cover on the floodplains of the straths, commonly enclosed by wire fences. • Semi-improved pastures, heather and grass moorland and coniferous plantations covering lower side slopes. • Increasing extent of moorland and woodland generally further up the straths, where the floodplain narrows and settlement is sparser. • Smaller strip-fields present on often hummocky, lower side slopes and associated with croft houses arranged in linear groups raised on terraces above the floodplain and sometimes backed by woodland. • Some crofts within the Straths more randomly dispersed or staggered on lower hill slopes. • Occasional small farms located in the broader and more fertile parts of the straths. • Settlement generally denser within the lower reaches of many straths, especially at bridging points, on the coast and close to major roads. • Many areas rich in archaeology with cairns, roundhouses, brochs and old field systems, usually found on side slopes. • Abandoned crofts, particularly within the upper straths and in narrow side glens. • Focus in views from roads provided by a number of estate shooting lodges, and clustered, predominantly 19th Century, often estate style buildings. • Narrow roads, commonly aligned along the edge of the floodplain, from which views are strongly channelled by the side slopes.

Landscape Baseline	
	• Rounded Hills often forming prominent edges to the straths with shapely well-defined hills, providing a distinctive skyline and scenic backdrop. • Highly scenic backdrop of mountains often revealed in some of the upper reaches of these straths.
Landscape Value	Within the detailed study area none of the areas of Strath – Caithness and Sutherland fall within designated or protected landscapes although some fringe the edge of WLAs and SLAs. Nevertheless, the straths are valued locally as a contrasting farmed and settled landscape within the predominant uplands, for their accessibility and views towards the mountain interior and, within the more remote glens for their historic association with past settlement. Landscape value is considered to be generally Medium.
Changes to the Landscape Baseline since 2021 EIAR	Growth of new woodland planting on slopes surrounding Glen Cassley has led to some increased enclosure and localised sense of management. There has also been some felling and replanting within Strath Oykel as a result of on-going forest management. However, these changes have not resulted in any notable change in baseline character.
Consented Development - Summary of Landscape Effects	
Summary of 2021 LVIA	There are 4 straths within the detailed study area: Glen Cassley which adjoins Strath Oykel/Kyle of Sutherland, Strath Tirry and Strath Fleet. The 2021 LVIA identified a locally Moderate (significant) effect within an area of Glen Cassley between Badintagairt and Glenmuick. A Minor (not significant) effect was identified for remaining parts of Glen Cassley and the transitional area between Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland as well as for Strath Tirry. The effect in all other areas was assessed as Negligible. Within the upper part of Glen Cassley between Badintagairt and Glenmuick, the 2021 LVIA noted that the turbines would likely appear noticeable on the skyline, with potential for tracks and reinstated borrow pits to also be perceptible. It was considered that this effect on the surrounding hill slopes and skyline may distract from the remote qualities and features of the upper glen and potentially diminish the perceived scale of the hills enclosing the eastern side of the glen, leading to a landscape somewhat characterised by wind turbines. However, the 2021 Proposed Development would not affect the sense of enclosure on the west side of the glen, or the connection to the interior, mountainous areas as the strength of these qualities is felt more towards the west and north. Although turbines would also occasionally appear on the skyline within other parts of Glen Cassley and within the transitional area between Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland it was considered that the greater diversity of character and coverage of woodland would reduce their influence on the character within this area, although the appearance of wind turbines up the glen would increase the impression of wind development stretching further into the interior landscape. . At Strath Tirry, the more open character is already very influenced by features outwith the area including the existing wind turbines of Achany, Rosehall and Lairg on the southern skylineIt was not considered that the 2021 Proposed Development would introduce a new characteristic to this landscape, although influence of wind turbines would be slightly increased by the additional turbine along the southern skyline. Landscape sensitivity for this LCT was considered to be High for direct change and Medium for indirect change. The magnitude of change was predicted to be Medium within Glen Cassley, Low for Strath Oykel / Kyle of Sutherland and Strath Tirry and Negligible elsewhere.
Consented Layout	The consented layout of 18 turbines would not change the assessment or conclusions for this LCT.

Landscape Baseline	
Proposed Varied Development – Assessment of Landscape Effects	
Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this landscape which may be affected by the Proposed Varied Development comprise: • Pattern of landscape features such as settlement patterns, rivers, lochs, pasture lands, woodlands and trees, and archaeological features. • Rounded Hills often forming prominent edges to the straths with shapely well-defined hills, providing a distinctive skyline and scenic backdrop. • Highly scenic backdrop of mountains often revealed in some of the upper reaches of these straths.
Landscape Sensitivity	This is a moderately valued LCT. It has a varying sense of enclosure within the study area, but patterns that are generally smaller scale in comparison with surrounding LCTs. These smaller scale landscapes tend to be susceptible to direct change of the type proposed which as the potential to become dominating and overwhelm other features. However, the presence of existing wind turbines and localised impacts of existing hydro infrastructure typically seen in the surrounding uplands reduces susceptibility to indirect change in the wider area. There is no change to landscape sensitivity which is still considered to be **High** for direct change and **Medium** for indirect change.
Potential Effects	Potential effects which may result to this landscape comprise: • Appearance of the Proposed Varied Development in the surrounding landscape context may distract focus from local landscape features, affecting balance and patterns of development in the landscape. • Appearance of Proposed Varied Development in the surrounding landscape context may interrupt the skyline and edges of straths, affecting the sense of enclosure. • Appearance of Proposed Varied Development in the surrounding context may intrude into views towards mountainous or other valued backdrops.
Magnitude of Change	Glen Cassley: While the ZTV for the Proposed Varied Development indicates limited areas of new visibility within Glen Cassley. However, the taller turbines would lead to an increase in the numbers of turbines intervisible within some parts, particularly across the glen floor, and a greater prominence of turbines in other areas. The greatest degree of intervisibility is still likely to be concentrated within the area between Badintagairt and Glenmuick with western parts of the glen also affected between Glencassley Castle and Badintargairt. Similar numbers of turbines would be visible at the bottom of the glen around Rosehall, with woodland between Rosehall and Glencassley Castle limiting the degree of actual intervisibility in the lower part of the glen. However, where turbines would be seen they would appear taller and more prominent on the adjacent ridge than the Consented Development turbines. This part of the glen which transitions into Strath Oykel / Kyle of Sutherland is already noticeably influenced by the existing Rosehall Wind Turbines. Although these are much smaller turbines, the Proposed Varied Development turbines would appear relatively proportional to them, because they would usually be more distant, and the lower portions of the turbines would be concealed by landform from most of the glen floor. However, as for the Consented Development, they would draw the presence of turbines further up the glen. The magnitude of landscape change for the Proposed Varied Development is predicted to increase to **Medium-High** due to the likely greater prominence and numbers of turbines, particularly affecting the localised area , between Badintagairt and Glenmuick. Within most lower parts of the glen, turbines would still be partially obscured by landform and vegetation or would be seen in the context of existing turbines. Glen Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland (the Kyle): The ZTV indicates that there would be limited areas of new intervisibility through these straths. The highest number of turbines intervisible would still be at the mouth of Glen Cassley, where up to 18 turbines may be intervisible with relatively similar numbers of turbines as for the Consented Development

Landscape Baseline	
	potentially visible from the north-facing glen slopes of Glen Oykel and the Kyle to either side of this. Greater intervisibility is indicated around Invershin area, but in this area only a few blades would be seen to the rear of the existing Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms. The magnitude of landscape change for the Proposed Varied Development within Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland would remain **Low** during construction and operation. Although larger number of turbines may be perceived from some areas, the increased scale of the turbines would not be clearly evident because the blade length would remain the same as the Consented Development and the lower portion of towers would always be concealed by landform. The degree of intervisibility would still be relatively localised and largely limited to areas where existing wind farms are already prominent. Strath Tirry: Intervisibility would still be relatively widespread across Strath Tirry, with higher numbers of turbines (between 9 and 18) likely to be present on the west and south-westerly skyline than for the Consented Development (between 3 and 14). The ZTV indicates a limited area of increased intervisibility within the vicinity of Blarbuie. Wind turbine are already a characteristic within the context of this area, with Lairg, Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms present in the southerly context. A greater number of taller turbines would form a more prominent feature on the ridge of this sub-area but would not add a new characteristic. However, the appearance of wind turbines would be perceptibly increased. Magnitude of change for the Strath Tirry sub-area would continue to be **Low** during construction and operation. Magnitude of change for all other areas would remain **Negligible** during construction and operation.
Significance of Effect (summary of key changes)	All effects on this LCT would still be indirect, with the greatest degree of effect within Glen Cassley. The taller turbines would appear more noticeable particularly from upper parts of the glen, likely to further diminish the perceived scale of the hills enclosing the eastern side of the glen and forming a notable new characteristic within the upper glen. However, the Proposed Varied Development would still not affect the sense of enclosure on the west side of the glen, or the connection to the interior, mountainous areas as the strength of these qualities is felt more towards the west and north. To the south of Glencassley Castle, the Proposed Varied Development would continue to be a less notable feature. Although turbines would be occasionally prominent, the greater diversity of the landscape and coverage of woodland in this area would continue to reduce the degree to which these turbines would influence the character. In the transitional area around Rosehall, where Glen Cassley meets Strath Oykel and the Kyle of Sutherland wind turbines are already a feature within the context of the glen. The Proposed Varied Development would perceptibly increase the appearance of wind turbines and increase the impression of wind development stretching further into the interior landscape. However, although comparatively more prominent than the Consented Development, the increased scale of the Proposed Varied Development turbines would not be clearly apparent from most parts of the glen, due to the blade length being the same. It is therefore considered that the effect on the landscape character within this area would not be noticeably greater than that of the Consented Development. At Strath Tirry, there would be slightly greater numbers of turbined influencing the landscape due to their taller height. However, they would not necessarily appear larger or closer due to the consistent blade length. The Proposed Varied Development would continue to be seen within a context characterised by the existing wind turbines of Achany, Rosehall and Lairg Wind Farms on the southern skyline although it would be somewhat more prominent than these other developments. It would increase the extent of the southern skyline affected by wind turbines and would increase the overall influence of wind turbines on this sub-area. However, the effect on the landscape character would not be noticeably different to that of the Consented Development. The landscape effect during construction and operation is anticipated to increase to a *localised* **Moderate-Major** (significant) effect, experienced within parts of the upper Glen

Landscape Baseline	
	Cassley, from roughly 1 km south of Badintagairt to Glenmuick. Elsewhere in Glen Cassley and the transitional area between Glen Cassley, Strath Oykel and Kyle of Sutherland the significance of effect would remain **Minor** (not significant). The landscape effect within Strath Tirry is also predicted to be unchanged, and would **Minor** (not significant). In all other areas, the landscape effect would be **Negligible** (not significant), during construction and operation.
Change to Effect Significance	There would be an increased significant effect within the upper part of Glen Cassley from a localised Moderate (significant) effect to a localised **Moderate-Major** (significant) effect. This would also result in a slightly larger area being significantly affected from, around 1 km south of Badintagairt to Glenmuick (previously reported between Badintagairt and Glenmuick) for the Consented Development. Elsewhere within the Strath LCT, even although the Proposed Varied Development is predicted to appear slightly more prominent, the change to landscape character is not predicted to be sufficient to lead to higher levels of effect.