

APPENDIX 5.4 – BHLARAI DH WIND FARM HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN COMPENSATION ASSESSMENT

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Condition 33 of the planning consent for Bhlaraidh Wind Farm obliges SSE Generation Ltd to deliver a habitat management plan (HMP) to protect and enhance nature conservation interest in the area. The approved HMP details measures to manage vegetation and woodland within the site, and mitigate any effects on Black grouse *Tetrao tetrix* and their habitat to avoid adverse impacts. A principal objective of the HMP is to expand areas of native woodland, and accordingly three areas (W1, W2 and W3) were identified for the creation of native woodland through planting of native trees and shrubs.
- 1.1.2 The proposed alignment for the Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm grid connection traverses one area of new native woodland created as part of the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm HMP. This area is W2, where existing windblow and high stumps from former conifer forestry plantation were removed and planting of native woodland undertaken.
- 1.1.3 This assessment details the likely impact of the proposed alignment for the overhead line of the Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm grid connection on the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm HMP, and proposes compensation measures to ensure that SSE Generation Ltd maintain compliance with their obligations under Condition 33 to protect and enhance nature conservation interest in the area.
- 1.1.4 An existing 33 kV (distribution) overhead line (OHL) operated by Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks Distribution intersects the HMP along the same alignment as that of the proposed Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm grid connection. The 33 kV OHL will be realigned and undergrounded to make way for the proposed connection alignment. The Proposed alignment will utilise the existing wayleave currently used by the 33kV OHL and widen to make it suitable for a 132kV OHL.

1.2 Impact Assessment

- 1.2.1 The alignment of the proposed overhead line route for the Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm grid connection traverses HMP area W2 for a distance of 227 metres. Three trident wood poles will also be required within W2 to support this section of the overhead line. The installation of overhead line infrastructure will require the removal of woodland within a wayleave of 25 m either side of the alignment. The total area of potential impact is therefore 1.15 ha. Of this area, 0.75 ha is identified from habitat survey data as mixed woodland plantation created under the HMP. Remaining habitats include recently-felled coniferous woodland (0.19ha), Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* (0.18 ha) and wet dwarf shrub heath (0.04 ha).
- 1.2.2 The mixed woodland plantation is planted at a density of 1600 stems/ha, and is dominated by Scot's pine *Pinus sylvestris*, Downy birch *Betula pubescens*, Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Alder *Alnus glutinosa*. More widely, Aspen *Populus tremula*, Holly *Ilex aquifolium* and Wild cherry *Prunus avium* were noted. Assuming consistent density of tree planting across the HMP area, a total of approximately 1200 trees may therefore require removal. Also noted within the required wayleave area were four mature Downy birch trees that act as a seed source for native woodland regeneration.

1.3 Compensation Measures

- 1.3.1 Three compensation options are considered to offset the loss of native woodland within the existing Bhlaraidh Wind Farm HMP area:
1. Transplant affected trees within the wayleave for the proposed overhead line alignment to other areas within W2.

2. Enrichment planting of W2 to offset the loss of 1200 trees to maintain the required density within the overall existing HMP area.
3. Offset loss of woodland area by extending planting areas W1 and / or W2 with an area equivalent to the loss created by the wayleave for the proposed overhead line alignment.

Option 1

- 1.3.2 The current age structure of the new native woodland within the HMP (approx. 7 years) would mean that transplanting existing trees may result in poor tree survival. It is also considered impractical to physically remove trees and find areas suitable to accommodate them within W2 given the current density of trees is high.

Option 2

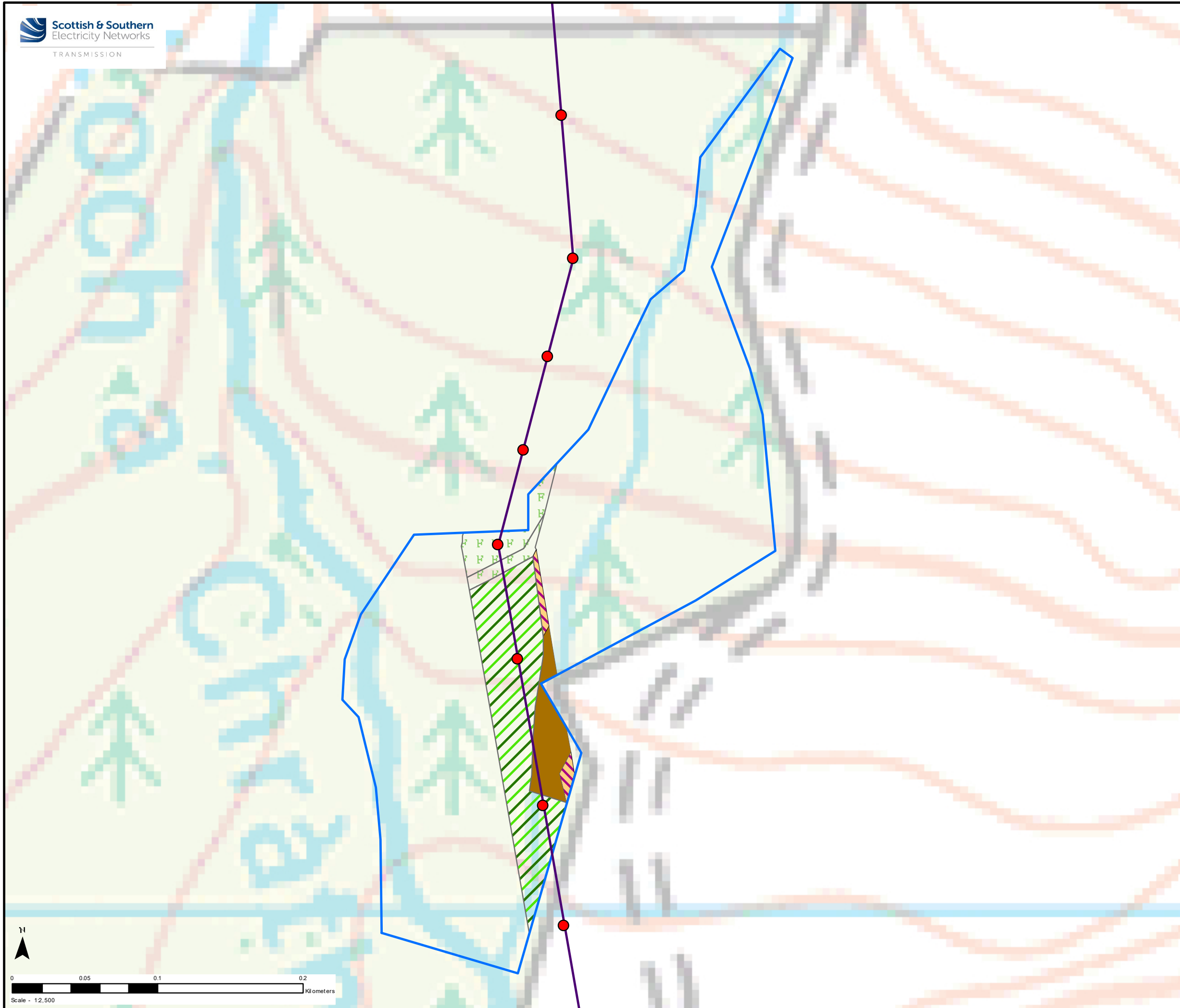
- 1.3.3 Enrichment planting within the remaining area of W2 further to creation of the wayleave would require an additional 1200 trees to be established within a reduced area (5.68ha). This would increase the density of trees within the remaining area of W2 to approximately 1800 stems/ha. Establishing native woodland at such a high density is considered both impractical and potentially difficult to ensure survival of newly planted trees.

Option 3








- 1.3.4 Planting an additional area of new native woodland at least equivalent to the area lost for creation of the wayleave (0.75ha) offers the most practical solution, and it is considered that, in principle, there is sufficient suitable open ground within the vicinity of W2 to accommodate an area this size.

1.4 Recommended Measures

- 1.4.1 On consideration of potential compensation measures, the preferred option should be to create an area of new native woodland within, or in close proximity to the Bhlaraidh Wind Farm site to offset the loss of woodland area within the existing HMP from the creation of the wayleave for the Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm grid connection. Proposed areas should be located in proximity to the existing HMP areas as far as is possible, and sites should be considered suitable for woodland establishment (ie. avoiding sensitive habitats and offer suitable ground conditions for tree planting). Suitable areas will be identified by the Applicant, in conjunction with SSE Generation Ltd and the landowner (Glenmoriston Estate).
- 1.4.2 In addition, it is considered that there is scope within the required wayleave to plant low-growing shrubs/scrub habitat eg. Juniper *Juniperus communis* and Holly *Ilex aquifolium*, which will maintain a diverse woodland habitat across HMP area W2, and retain habitat connectivity between areas to the east and west of the proposed overhead line alignment.



Key

-  Proposed 132kV Overhead Line
-  Proposed Pole Locations
- Phase 1 Habitat**
-  Bracken - continuous
-  Coniferous woodland - recently-felled plantation
-  Mixed woodland - plantation
-  Wet dwarf shrub heath
-  HMP Native Woodland W2

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 Project: Bhlairaidh Extension Wind Farm Grid Connection Works: Environmental Appraisal

Title: Figure 1 - Habitats within wayleave corridor of HMP area W2

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