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	Prepared By		Checked By		Approved By		Date of Issue
1.0.0	AM/CB		TW		TW		31.10.2022

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF REPORT

## 1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 This Environmental Appraisal (EA) has been prepared by ASH design+assessment Limited ("ASH") on behalf of Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc ("the Applicant") who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission ("SSEN Transmission"), own, operate and develop the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and remote islands. In this EA the Applicant and SSEN Transmission are used interchangeably unless the context requires otherwise. The EA has been prepared to accompany an application for consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 ("the 1989 Act").
- 1.1.2 The application seeks consent under section 37 of the 1989 Act to construct and operate a new single circuit 132 kV overhead line (OHL) between Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm and Fort Augustus Substation the location of which is shown on **Figure 1.1**. Deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 for the new OHL and ancillary infrastructure is also sought.
- 1.1.3 The project is being driven by the requirement to provide a grid connection for the consented Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm.
- 1.1.4 The project, hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development', would comprise the following elements as shown on **Figure 1.2**:
- Approximately 3 km of UGC between the Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm on-site substation (OS grid reference 239211, 821003) and a new CSE wood pole structure to the east of Bhlaraidh Dam, south of the operational Bhlaraidh Wind Farm;
  - Wood pole OHL connection between the Cable Sealing End ("CSE") wood pole structure east of Bhlaraidh Dam (Ordnance Survey (OS) grid reference 237598, 819319) to another CSE wood pole structure approximately 2 km north-west of Fort Augustus substation (OS grid reference 234670, 810070), totalling approximately 14.5 km; and
  - Underground cable ("UGC") between the CSE wood pole structure approximately 2 km north-west of Fort Augustus substation and Fort Augustus substation itself (OS grid reference 235584, 808417).

## 1.2 Background

- 1.2.1 The consented Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm (comprising 15 turbines and a total capacity of 84 MW) located approximately 10 km north of Fort Augustus in the Scottish Highlands requires connection to the electricity transmission network at Fort Augustus substation by April 2026. It is proposed that this would be achieved via the construction and operation of a new 132 kV single circuit connection, between the wind farm's on-site substation and Fort Augustus substation, being the Proposed Development (see **Figure 1.1**).

### *Routeing process*

- 1.2.2 As described in **Chapter 2** of this EA Report, the Proposed Development was subject to a routeing process in which alternative routes for connection between the Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm and Fort Augustus substation were compared to find the best option based on the most appropriate balance between environmental, engineering and cost factors.
- 1.2.3 Following this, a study of alignment options within the chosen route was carried out to further refine the design of the Proposed Development.
- 1.2.4 Section 1.6 of this Chapter provides an overview of the consultation carried out with statutory consultees and members of the public, and **Chapter 2** outlines how the routeing and alignment processes responded to

consultations undertaken. Each technical chapter includes a table detailing the consultation responses relevant to the topic and how they have been addressed.

### 1.3 Legislative and Statutory Context

1.3.1 Consent for the OHL and CSE components of the Proposed Development is sought from Scottish Ministers under section 37 of the 1989 Act. The 1989 Act is the primary legislation governing the electricity supply industry in Great Britain and places statutory obligations upon a licence holder.

1.3.2 Installation of the UGC falls under the Applicant's permitted development rights<sup>1</sup>. As such these works do not require specific express consent. The assessment of impacts likely to arise from installation of the UGC are therefore included in **Appendix 1.1**, rather than within the main EA Report, given that they fall under the applicant's permitted development rights.

### 1.4 The Need for Environmental Appraisal

1.4.1 Applications under section 37 of the 1989 Act are subject to the requirements of the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, hereafter referred to as 'the EIA Regulations'.

1.4.2 The Proposed Development is classified as Schedule 2 development under the EIA Regulations by virtue of it being classed as:

*"The carrying out of development (other than development which is Schedule 1 development) to provide any of the following -*

*(2) an electric line installed above ground –*

*(a) with a voltage of 132 kilovolts or more"*

1.4.3 A Screening Opinion was sought from Scottish Ministers as consenting authority for consideration under the EIA Regulations to determine whether the section 37 application for the OHL would constitute 'EIA Development'. The Screening Request was submitted in November 2021. A Screening Opinion was received on 9 March 2022, noting that a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report would not be required. The Screening Opinion is included as **Appendix 1.2**.

1.4.4 The Applicant recognises that the Proposed Development may give rise to some environmental effects. As such, whilst a formal EIA is not required, a voluntary Environmental Appraisal (EA) has been undertaken, including a number of environmental studies, the results of which are detailed in this EA. The comments and advice received as part of the Screening Opinion informed the assessments carried out and information presented within this EA.

1.4.5 The assessment of potential environmental effects and preparation of the EA has been co-ordinated by environmental and landscape consultants ASH on behalf of SSEN Transmission. The core ASH team has been supported by sub-consultants providing specialist inputs on terrestrial ecology (habitats and mammals), ornithology, water environment, soils, cultural heritage and forestry.

1.4.6 Other inputs relating to construction and future maintenance of the Proposed Development have been provided by SSEN Transmission.

### 1.5 Structure of the Environmental Appraisal

1.5.1 The EA is reported in one volume including text, figures and appendices, as listed on the table of contents.

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<sup>1</sup> Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992

1.5.2 The EA is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background
- Chapter 2 – Routeing Process and Alternatives
- Chapter 3 – The Proposed Development
- Chapter 4 – Landscape and Visual;
- Chapter 5 – Ecology;
- Chapter 6 – Ornithology;
- Chapter 7 – Geology, Hydrology and Hydrogeology;
- Chapter 8 – Cultural Heritage;
- Chapter 9 – Forestry; and
- Chapter 10 – Schedule of Mitigation.

1.5.3 These Chapters are supported by a series of figures and appendices, as appropriate.

1.5.4 Assessment of impacts likely to arise from installation of the UGC are included in **Appendix 1.1**, rather than within the chapters noted above given that they fall under the Applicant's permitted development rights.

## 1.6 Consultation

1.6.1 Consultation with statutory consultees has been undertaken as required during the EA process to confirm the proposed scope of environmental surveys and / or assessments associated with the Proposed Development. The statutory consultees included as part of preliminary consultations included NatureScot, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Scottish Forestry, and Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS), along with additional communication with The Highland Council (THC) following receipt of the Screening Opinion. Further details are included in the relevant technical chapters of this EA.

### *Public Consultation*

1.6.2 The approach to public consultation has ensured that the local community has been given the opportunity to comment on the proposals and provide feedback throughout its development. This has enabled locally important issues and concerns to be identified and subsequently considered. Consultation feedback has been pivotal in the design evolution of the site.

1.6.3 SSEN Transmission organised a public exhibition within the local area to allow members of the general public to obtain information and pass comments upon the Proposed Development. Under normal circumstances, consultation on the Proposed Development would involve public engagement events held in the local area. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in accordance with Scottish Government's Guidance on pre-application consultation for major planning applications<sup>2</sup> during the COVID-19 emergency period<sup>3</sup>, this was not possible.

1.6.4 To continue engagement on the project, SSEN Transmission developed an online consultation tool and hosted virtual consultation events during November 2020 and June 2021 during the route and alignment selection stages of the project, to enable the local community to experience the full exhibition from home on a computer, tablet or mobile device. The online exhibitions were designed to look and feel like a real consultation in a

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<sup>2</sup> Public events and pre-application consultation is not a statutory requirement for Electricity Act applications, but the Scottish Government consider such engagement to be important for large scale projects and direct Applicants of such projects to the relevant advice on pre-application engagement for major planning applications.

<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-planning-guidance-on-pre-application-consultations-for-public-events/> (last accessed 25/03/22)

community hall, with exhibition boards, maps, interactive videos and the opportunity to share views on the proposals.

1.6.5 Visitors were able to engage directly with the project team, via a live chat function, where they could ask any questions they might have about the project and share their feedback on the route and alignment options presented.

1.6.6 The virtual consultation events took place via the project website <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/bhlaraidh-extension-windfarm-connection/> at the following times:

*Routeing Consultation*

- 10 November 2020; 13:00 – 15:00 and 17:00 – 19:00; and
- 11 November 2020; 14:00 – 16:00.

*Alignment Consultation*

- 23 June 2021; 12:30 – 15:00;
- 23 June 2021; 16:30 – 19:00; and
- 24 June 2021; 13:00 – 15:00.

1.6.7 Further details of the consultation process can be found in the Routeing Report on Consultation<sup>4</sup> and the Alignment Report on Consultation<sup>5</sup>. Both are available via the project website <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/bhlaraidh-extension-windfarm-connection/>.

## 1.7 Representations to the Application

1.7.1 Representations with respect to the section 37 application should be made to the ECU. These can be made via the ECU's case search webpage at: <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationSearch.aspx>.

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<sup>4</sup> Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm Grid Connection Report on Consultation – Route Options (January 2021)

<sup>5</sup> Bhlaraidh Extension Wind Farm Grid Connection Report on Consultation – Alignment Options (April 2022)