Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

Dunoon to **Loch Long** 132 kV OHL Rebuild

Environmental Impact Assessment

Technical Appendix 12.3

Native Woodland Management Strategy

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Contents

1 Introduction

This Native Woodland Management Plan is applicable to the construction of the Dunoon to Loch Long 132 kV OHL Rebuild Project.

This Native Woodland Management Plan sets out the methodology and process that will be followed to limit the removal of ancient and native woodland resulting from the construction and operation of the Proposed Development.

An assessment of the impacts on forestry and woodland has been undertaken by Galbraith Forestry in line with The UK Forestry Standard [1] guidance and areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland identified along the route of the overhead line (OHL). A commitment has been given to further assess these areas in relation to the OHL design and safety requirements, to identify possible woodland/tree retentions.

Prior to felling within the native woodland/tree areas, mitigation measures will be identified to retain native woodland/trees where safe and practical within the operational corridor (OC). During the assessment of potential mitigation measures, emphasis will be placed on the native woodland/tree retentions objective.

An SSE appointed Forest Operations Manager will co-ordinate the native woodland assessments in consultation with the project team and relevant stakeholders.

2 Report Scope

During the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, areas of ancient and native woodland impact by the OC have been identified. A commitment has been included in the EIA Report to assess the possible mitigation measures that can be established to minimise the felling of these areas. Assessment and prescription of any tree felling mitigation measures such as retention, must ensure that the OHL can be constructed safely and that the subsequent operation and maintenance of the OHL is not compromised.

This report explains the management strategy that will be undertaken by the SSEN project team prior to and during the OHL construction phase, to assess what can be done and implemented to minimise the felling/removal of the Native Woodland areas within the new OC.

[1] The UK Forest Standard, Forestry Commission (2017)

3 Legislation

The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 specify safety standards to protect the general public and consumers from danger of overhead electricity powerlines. These standards outline minimum safety clearances and the duty of the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) to maintain these clearances.

The regulations also contain requirements on quality and continuity of supply to ensure an efficient and economic service to customers and consumers.

Further legislation arrived in 2006 with the ESQCR Amendments, which extended the above duties of the DNO to make overhead powerlines resilient to the effect of major storms. This includes reducing the risk of falling trees and branchwood hitting the electricity network.

The result of this legislation is that, in addition to maintaining the vegetation to minimum safety clearances, the DNO must now seek to achieve further clearances for trees which may be affected during storms.

4 Native Woodland Areas and Considerations

The permanent loss of ancient and semi-natural woodland areas as part of the Proposed Development will be mitigated where possible by retaining shrub/understorey layers in areas where existing tree cover doesn't breach safety clearances.

It is noted that the direct loss of ancient and semi-natural woodland could potentially be further avoided or reduced through the forthcoming detailed design of the OHL tower positions where a combination of factors (e.g. topography, tower height, tree species and height) may reduce the area of ancient and semi-natural woodland defined as being within the OC. For example, the extent of tree felling may be reduced where it can be demonstrated through further detailed survey that the trees can be safely overflown by the Proposed Development or that the trees can be accommodated within closer proximity to the Proposed Development with either no work being required or a degree of crown reduction only.

The total area of ancient and semi-natural woodland potentially impacted to form the OC, including creation of access tracks and temporary OHL diversions, is assessed as 14.83 ha as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Total Potential Loss of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland within OC

Habitat Type	Area (ha)
Broadleaved semi-natural woodland	11.39
Nature Scot AWI – Ancient Woodland (of Semi-Natural origin) (Type 1a)	0.84
Nature Scot AWI – Ancient Woodland (of Semi-Natural origin) (Type 2a)	2.24
Nature Scot AWI – Other 'Roy' Woodlands	0.36
Total	**14.83**

Considering the tree species relevant to the Proposed Development:

- The area of native woodland is dominated by birch with oak and secondary species also represented, including alder, rowan, willow, beech and sycamore.
- Birch tends to coppice poorly but oak, willow and alder coppice well as long as regrowth is not suppressed by deer browsing. This issue should be considered.
- Other native tree species such as bird cherry, wild cherry, crab apple, hawthorn, holly, yew and blackthorn generally offer little risk to the OHL and are usually more suitable for regular crown reductions by competent arborists.
- The growth heights and structure of the native tree species oak, birch, ash, aspen and Scots pine and non-native broadleaves such as beech and sycamore bring an increased threat to OHL safety. Generally, oak is a windfirm species due to its tap root and crown reduction is often possible whilst maintaining a healthy tree.

Before removing all native trees within the OC, tree and woodland surveys will be conducted to identify potential opportunities for tree retention or crown reduction, although it is generally accepted that species such as birch, aspen and Scots pine usually do not lend themselves aesthetically to being crown-reduced. Where native shrub species are located within the OC construction zones, a pragmatic assessment will be carried out for their possible translocation to a more suitable location within the OC.

5 OHL Construction Requirements and Native Woodland Survey

The construction of the Proposed Development requires various work zones of differing area dimensions, to be free of all tree and shrub vegetation to allow the safe access and undertaking of the construction works and provide the necessary land area to install the OHL infrastructure.

The work zone categories are:

a) Upgrading of existing access track corridors with passing places.
b) New build access track corridors with passing places.
c) Tower build worksite compounds.

d) Conductor winches worksite compounds.
e) Overhead line conductor wiring corridor.
f) Operational Corridor worksite zone.
g) Temporary OHL diversions.
h) Borrow pits

Prior to tree felling operations assessments will be conducted and documented of the native woodland areas in relation to the construction phase works. Tree health, quality and habitat will be visually appraised and risk assessed in relation to the construction works and OHL dimensions. Mitigation measures will be identified with the aim of retaining as much native woodland as practical. The assessment of mitigation measures will include:

i. The minor re-routing within project parameters of new access track builds, to avoid the felling of mature native tree species where possible.
ii. Identify the minimal requirements/width of the OHL wiring corridor and review work methods in relation to maximising native woodland retentions.
iii. The assessment of new build OHL heights across native woodland areas, to identify possible tree/woodland retentions and minimise tree felling through the arboricultural crown reduction of trees where suitable.

The SSE appointed Forest Operations Manager will co-ordinate the native woodland assessments in liaison with the project team and relevant stakeholders.

6 Conclusion

The implementation of the management items as detailed in this report, will allow a balanced and practical approach to identifying suitable mitigation measures in relation to native tree and woodland retentions and the construction, operation and subsequent ongoing maintenance of OHL.

Following Final Energisation of Phase 1, a set of plans will be produced and submitted to the Scottish Ministers including all areas of Ancient and broadleaved semi-natural woodland within the OC, with those areas that have been retained clearly marked.