

Report on Consultation - Route Selection

Project: Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm

Connection

Date: November 2024

REF: LT000503



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GLOSSARY

Term	Definition
Alignment	A centre line of an overhead line OHL, along with location of key angle structures.
Amenity	The natural environment, cultural heritage, landscape and visual quality. Also includes the impact of SSEN Transmission's works on communities, such as the effects of noise and disturbance from construction activities.
Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWIs)	The Ancient Woodland Inventory identifies ancient woodland using presence or absence of woods from old maps, information about the wood's name, shape, internal boundaries, location relative to other features, ground survey, and aerial photography.
Conductor	A metallic wire strung from structure to structure, to carry electric current.
Consultation	The dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based on a genuine exchange of views and, normally, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.
Corridor	A linear area which allows a continuous connection between the defined connection points. The corridor may vary in width along its length; in unconstrained areas it may be many kilometres wide.
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	A formal process set down in The Electricity Works (EIA) (Scotland) Regulations 2000 (as amended in 2008) used to systematically identify, predict and assess the likely significant environmental impacts of a proposed project or development.
Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDLs)	The Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes lists those gardens or designed landscapes which are considered by a panel of experts to be of national importance.
Habitat	Term most accurately meaning the place in which a species lives, but also used to describe plant communities or agglomerations of plant communities.
Kilovolt (kV)	One thousand volts.
Listed Building	Building included on the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest and afforded statutory protection under the 'Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997' and other planning legislation. Classified categories A – C(s).
Micrositing	The process of positioning individual structures to avoid localised environmental or technical constraints.
Mitigation	Term used to indicate avoidance, remediation or alleviation of adverse impacts.
National Scenic Area (NSA)	A national level designation applied to those landscapes considered to be of exceptional scenic value.
Overhead line (OHL)	An electric line installed above ground, usually supported by lattice steel towers or poles.
Plantation Woodland	Woodland of any age that obviously originated from planting.
Riparian Woodland	Natural home for plants and animals occurring in a thin strip of land bordering a stream or river.
Route	A linear area of approximately 1 km width (although this may be narrower/wider in specific locations in response to identified pinch points / constraints), which provides a continuous connection between defined connection points.

Term	Definition
Routeing	The work undertaken which leads to the selection of a proposed alignment, capable of being taken forward into the consenting process under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989.
Scheduled Monument	A monument which has been scheduled by the Scottish Ministers as being of national importance under the terms of the 'Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979'.
Semi-natural Woodland	Woodland that does not obviously originate from planting. The distribution of species will generally reflect the variations in the site and the soil. Planted trees must account for less than 30% of the canopy composition
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Areas of national importance. The aim of the SSSI network is to maintain an adequate representation of all natural and semi-natural habitats and native species across Britain.
Span	The section of overhead line between two structures.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	An area designated under the EC Habitats Directive to ensure that rare, endangered or vulnerable habitats or species of community interest are either maintained at or restored to a favourable conservation status.
Special Landscape Area (SLA)	Landscapes designated by The Highland Council which are considered to be of regional/local importance for their scenic qualities.
Special Protection Area (SPA)	An area designated under the Wild Birds Directive (Directive74/409/EEC) to protect important bird habitats. Implemented under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
Stakeholders	Organisations and individuals who can affect or are affected by SSEN Transmission works.
Study Area	The area within which the corridor, route and alignment study takes place.
Terminal Structure	A structure (tower or pole) required where the line terminates either at a substation or at the beginning and end of an underground cable section.
The National Grid	The electricity transmission network in the Great Britain.
Underground Cable (UGC)	An electric wire installed underground.
Volts	The international unit of electric potential and electromotive force.
Wayleave	A voluntary agreement entered into between a landowner upon whose land an overhead line is to be constructed and SSEN Transmission.
Wild Land Area (WLA)	Those areas comprising the greatest and most extensive areas of wild characteristics within Scotland.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission) undertook consultation in September 2024 to request comments on proposals to construct and operate a 132 kV overhead line (OHL) to connect the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm to the existing Fyrish 132 kV Substation. The proposed route options for the development consist of OHL and a short section of underground cables and have been appraised against environmental, engineering and cost criteria. This Report on Consultation presents a summary of the consultation undertaken.

The consultation process included the publication of a Consultation Document (August 2024) (**Appendix B**) to describe the evaluation of the different routeing options and invited interested parties to provide their views. A face-to-face consultation event took place on 3rd September at Evanton Jubilee Hall between 3pm and 7pm. All comments were requested before 4th October 2024.

A full description of the OHL Routeing Selection process is provided in the Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm Connection Consultation Document, August 2024 (**Appendix B**).

The optioneering process for selection of a Preferred Route considered three overhead line Route Options. This Report on Consultation Document summarises the comments provided by stakeholders including statutory consultees and members of the public on the three Route Options under consideration and details the actions taken by SSEN Transmission in response to the comments provided. The preferred Route Option that will be taken forward to the optioneering stage is Route Option 2.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Document

SSEN Transmission is proposing to construct and operate a 132 kV overhead line (OHL) connection to connect the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm to the existing Fyrish 132 kV Substation (the 'Proposed Development'). The Proposed Development comprises approximately 8.4 km of OHL and approximately 1 km of underground cable (UGC). The UGC length will be confirmed at alignment stage. The Proposed Development incorporates a single circuit 132 kV trident wood "H" pole arrangement supporting the overhead line. The typical height of the trident poles would be 10 to 18 m, with a typical span of between 75 - 100 m.

Three Route Options with corridors of circa 1.5 km in width were identified by SSEN Transmission and a Preferred Route was initially selected according to environmental, engineering and cost appraisal findings detailed in the Consultation Report (**Appendix B**).

A programme of consultation was designed to engage with key stakeholders including statutory and non-statutory consultees, local communities, landowners, and individual residents to invite feedback on the rationale for and approach to, the selection of the Preferred Route.

This document reports on the responses received from the publishing of the Consultation Document and consultation events, identifying key issues and how they have been considered in finalising the proposed route.

1.2 Document Structure

This report is comprised of six sections as follows:

1. Introduction – setting out the purpose of the Report on Consultation Document;
2. The Proposals within the Consultation – outlines the background/context to the project and provides a description of the Preferred Route;
3. The Consultation Process - describes the framework for consultation and methods which have been employed;
4. Stakeholder Consultation Responses – summarises the range of responses, key comments and issues arising through the consultation process;
5. SSEN Transmission's Responses to Consultation – describes how the comments and issues raised during consultation will be addressed; and
6. Next Steps – provides a summary of the conclusions reached and actions going forward.

2. THE PROPOSALS

2.1 Project Background

Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc who, operating and known as SSEN Transmission, holds a licence under the Electricity Act 1989 to develop and maintain an efficient, co-ordinated, and economical system of electricity transmission in the north of Scotland and remote islands.

The developer of Abhainn Dubh Renewable Energy Development has submitted a Planning Application under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for a ~ 75 MW wind farm, which has a contracted connection date of 2029¹. SSEN Transmission has a statutory duty under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 to connect the new development to the transmission network by the contracted connection date.

2.2 Project Description

The Abhainn Dubh Renewable Energy Development is an onshore wind project comprising up to 13 wind turbines and associated infrastructure located approximately 4.5 km west of Evanton, 7 km north-east of Strathpeffer and 4 km north-west of Dingwall.

The Proposed Development comprises approximately 8.4 km of OHL and approximately 1 km of underground cable (UGC) connecting the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm Substation to the existing Fyrish 132 kV Substation (**Figure 2.1, Appendix A**). The UGC will be located at the Fyrish Substation to the east and the Developer's Substation in the west of the Route, and the length will be confirmed at alignment stage.

Three Route Options with corridors of circa 1.5 km in width have been identified. The environmental constraints present, and potential impact of the Route Options have been assessed in the Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm Connection Consultation Document².

The Proposed Development incorporates a single circuit 132 kV trident wood "H" pole arrangement supporting the overhead line running over a distance of approximately 8.4 km. The typical height of the trident poles would be 10 to 18 m, with a typical span of between 75 - 100 m. Typical designs for a trident wood pole can be seen in **Plate 2.1**.

Plate 2.1. Example 'H' Trident Wood Poles



¹ Energy Consents Unit (2024) Application Details, [online] Available at: <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00004732> [Accessed: October 2024]

² SSEN Transmission, 2024, 'Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm Connection' [online] Available at: <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/abhainn-dubh-wind-farm-connection/#:~:text=Connecting%20Abhainn%20Dubh%20Wind%20Farm,and%20supporting%20net%20zero%20targets.> [Accessed: October 2024]

2.2.1 Construction Activities

Key tasks during the construction would include:

- Establishment of suitable laydown areas for material and installation of temporary track solutions as necessary;
- Establishment of temporary construction compounds/welfare units;
- Upgrades to existing tracks and potentially new tracks where required;
- Delivery of structures and materials to site;
- Assembly and erection of wood pole structures and stays; and
- Stringing of conductors using hauling ropes and winches.

Installation of the wood poles would involve the following tasks:

- Excavation of a suitable area for the wood poles, and backfilling after installation of the pole (backfilling would generally be carried out the same day as excavation so that no open excavations are left overnight). The exact area would depend on the ground conditions at each pole;
- In some pole locations, it may be necessary to add imported hardcore backfill around the pole foundations to provide additional stability where the natural sub soils have poor compaction qualities;
- In some pole locations where shallow bedrock is present, it may be necessary to break or remove rock to accommodate pole foundations;
- Conductors would be installed on the wood poles using full tension stringing to prevent the conductor coming into contact with the ground; and
- Remedial works would be carried out to reinstate the immediate vicinity of the structure, and any ground disturbed, to pre-existing use.

Installation of the underground cable would require the excavation of a trench in which to lay the cable.

- Establish a working corridor centred on the cable centreline;
- Installation of an access haul road and bridges where/if required;
- Excavate a trench up to 1.5 m in depth and 2 m wide, widening through benching and battering where stability and safety concerns arise;
- Clear out all materials likely to damage cable ducts, e.g. clods, rocks, stones and organic debris, and employ use of pumps to remove any water;
- Installation of ducting within the trench, surrounded by engineered backfill, with protection tile and warning tape placed above the cable line, reinstatement to sub-soil level;
- Excavation and formation of power cable joint bays with above ground electrical link pillars and associated demarcation; reinstate excavated surface layers in reverse order;
- Transportation of and installation of power cable;
- Mobilisation of jointing containers and jointing of power cable;
- Reinstatement of joint bays and installation of fencing at link pillar locations; and
- Reinstatement of excavated surface layers in reverse order.

2.2.2 Forestry Removal

Any woodland removal which may be required prior to the construction work will be identified and described after a Proposed Alignment has been identified. Any removal of sections of commercial forest would be undertaken in consultation with the relevant landowners. After felling, any timber removed that is commercially viable would be sold and the remaining forest material would be dealt with in a way that delivers the best practicable environmental outcome and is compliant with waste regulations.

An operational corridor would be required to enable the safe operation and maintenance of the Proposed Development. This will vary depending on the type of woodland (based on species present) in proximity to the Proposed Development. In areas of native woodland, it is usually possible to provide a narrower corridor due to a reduced risk of trees falling on the Proposed Development.

2.2.3 Access

The access strategy has not yet been determined. It is anticipated that minimal access track would be required to be installed in close proximity to the OHL to enable construction and maintenance.

More detailed plans for access during construction will be prepared once a Proposed Alignment has been identified and the preferred support structure type selected. Where possible, existing access tracks will be used and upgraded as required. New access tracks may be required and where there is a justified long-term requirement they will be left in place.

Where ground conditions permit, it is preferable to construct the infrastructure without an access track (e.g. on dry and level pasture). Temporary matting may be used in sensitive areas subject to an assessment of gradients and ground conditions. Preference will be given to lower impact access solutions including the use of low pressure tracked personnel vehicles and temporary track solutions in boggy / soft ground areas to reduce any damage to, and compaction of, the ground.

2.2.4 Programme

It is anticipated that construction of the Proposed Development would take place over an 18 to 22 months period, following the granting of consents, although detailed programming of works would be the responsibility of the Principal Contractor in agreement with SSEN Transmission. The programme for the project is currently under development, an indicative programme is as follows:

- Construction Start: June 2027; and
- Operation: July 2029.

2.3 Route Options

The approach to Route selection was informed by SSEN guidance which aims to balance environmental, engineering and economic considerations throughout the Route Options process.

This section provides a summary of the three Route Options, Route Options 1, 2 and 3 (**Figure 2.2, Appendix A**).

2.3.1 Route Option 1

Route Option 1 begins at the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm Substation and travels north-east and curves around and adjacent to the north of the Novar Estate. The Route travels south for approximately 3 km towards the Fyrish 132 kV Substation. Route Option 1 is approximately 15 km in length.

2.3.2 Route Option 2

Route Option 2 begins at the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm Substation and travels north-east, to the south of Cnoc Fyrish until it meets at the Fyrish 132 kV Substation. Route Option 2 is approximately 11 km in length.

2.3.3 Route Option 3

Route Option 3 begins at the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm Substation and travels south-east, crossing the River Sgitheach. The Route Option continues eastwards, to the south of Cnoc Fyrish and Swordale Hill, finishing at the Fyrish 132 kV Substation. Route Option 3 is approximately 13 km in length.

2.4 Identification of a Preferred Route

The Preferred Route presented within the Consultation Document (Route Option 2) was selected on the basis that it was considered to provide an optimum balance of environmental, engineering and economic factors.

From an environmental perspective, all Route Options have similar constraints to cultural heritage assets in terms of their impacts to the Ardress Castle and Novar Estate Garden & Designed Landscapes. However, Route Option 2 has a lower impact on Foulis Castle and Fyrish Monument compared to the other Route Options (**Figure 5.2, Appendix A**).

In addition to lower impact on cultural heritage assets, Route Option 2 is further away from residential properties and recreation routes than the other Route Options and does not intersect ancient woodland areas, which the other Route Options do (**Figure 5.1, Appendix A**). Therefore, Route Option 2 is the environmentally Preferred Route.

From an engineering perspective, Route Option 2 is the Preferred Route as it is the least flood prone, does not cross any area of Class 1 and Class 2 peatland, and has the lowest percentage of lengths above 200 m of elevation gain.

The economic appraisal identified all Route Options are within 120% of the lowest capital and operational cost option, therefore all Route Options are considered acceptable from a cost perspective.

On balance and using professional judgement, Route Option 2 has been considered to be the overall Preferred Route for the connection between the proposed Abhainn Dubh Wind Farm to the existing Fyrish 132 kV Substation. This is mainly due to Route Option 2 having a lower impact of the cultural heritage assets in the area, being located further away from settlements and the recreation routes, having the least terrain challenges, and having a lower risk of flooding.

3. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

3.1 Overview

SSEN Transmission places great importance on, and is committed to, consultation and engagement with all parties and stakeholders likely to have an interest in proposals for new projects such as this. Stakeholder engagement is an essential part of an effective development process.

In accordance with the SSEN Transmission guidelines and as set out in the routeing strategy report for the project, a process of consultation on the Preferred Route was implemented. This is described in the sections below.

3.2 Methods of Consultation

Following identification of a Preferred Route, a Consultation Document on the route selection was produced and distributed for comment in August 2024². The Consultation Document presents the findings of an environmental, engineering and cost appraisal of the three Route Options identified by SSEN Transmission and describes the process by which a Preferred Route for the OHL has been selected.

The consultation process comprised the following:

- The Consultation Document and covering letter were submitted to key statutory and other relevant stakeholders inviting comments in August 2024;
- The Consultation Document was made available on the SSEN Transmission website² on 26th August 2024;
- A summary information booklet was also made available on SSEN Transmission website and during the public consultation event detailed below;
- A public consultation event was held at Victoria Diamond Jubilee Hall in Evanton on 3rd September between 3pm and 7pm; and
- A poster advertising the public consultation event was made available on the SSEN Transmission website² on 22nd August 2024.

The consultation period closed on 4th October 2024. Responses were received via a variety of methods, including completed feedback forms, emails, comments via the project website and written letters.

3.3 Consultees

Table 3.1 lists the statutory organisations and other relevant stakeholders invited to consider the Consultation Document.

Table 3.1. List of Statutory Consultees, Community Councils, and Affected Landowners

Stakeholders	
Statutory Consultees	
NatureScot	Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS)
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)	Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
The Highland Council (THC)	
Community Councils	
Kiltearn Community Council	
Evanton Wood Community Company	
Ardross Community Council	
Affected Landowners	
Highland Rural - <i>on behalf of Novar Estate</i>	
Bidwells - <i>on behalf of Drummond Farm</i>	
Bidwells - <i>on behalf of Foulis Estate</i>	
Swordale Forest	

Stakeholders were invited to provide feedback through the following methods:

A series of questions were asked within the Consultation Document requesting comments on specific aspects of the project as follows:

1. Do you feel sufficient information has been provided to enable you to understand what is being proposed and why?
2. Which of the three Route Options would you consider the best option for SSEN Transmission to develop? Please provide an explanation of your answer.
3. Which of the three Route Options would you consider the least preferable option for SSEN Transmission to develop? Please provide an explanation of your answer.
4. Are there any potential risks or benefits associated with this project, that you believe have not been included in the Consultation Document?
5. Do you have any other comments on the Proposed Development?

A feedback form was also provided on the project webpage allowing users to submit comments.

3.4 Public Consultations

The public consultation event was advertised to 23 households within the vicinity of the Proposed Development, and an email was sent inviting the Community Council and Ward Councillors asking them if they could share the details on social media to promote the event, including the project details as provided in **Appendix B**. The public consultation event provided a forum to share information about the project and the Preferred Route Option.

All members of the public were invited to complete a feedback form (see **Appendix C**).

21 members of the public attended the public consultation exhibition held in the Victoria Diamond Jubilee Hall (Evanton). A total of 7 completed feedback forms were received following the exhibitions.

4. CONSULTATION RESPONSES AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 Summary of Comments

In total, 10 consultation responses were received during the consultation process: 4 statutory consultees, 3 members of community councils and 4 affected landowners. A list of the consultees set out in **Table 4.1** (in alphabetical order).

Table 4.1 Consultees Responded

Consultees	Response status
Statutory	
FLS	Response received 26 th August
HES	No response received
Nature Scot	Response received 25 th October
SEPA	Response received 4 th September
THC	Response received 26 th August
Community Councils	
Ardross Community Council	Response received 10 th September
Kiltearn Community Council	Requested email feedback on communities' views
Evanton Wood Community Company	Response received 9 th September
Affected Landowners	
Landowner 1	Response received 26 th August
Landowner 2	Response received 15 th August
Landowner 3	Response received 15 th August
Landowner 4	Response received 16 th August

Table 4.2 sets out the feedback received for the grid connection from statutory consultees, community council members, and landowners following the consultation period. A response to the feedback is also provided by SSEN Transmission in the table, together with confirmation of the action to be taken, where relevant.

Table 4.2: Statutory and Other Consultee Feedback on Grid Connections

Stakeholder	Feedback	Response by SSEN Transmission
Statutory consultees		
FLS	In response to SSEN Transmission's consultation document, FLS confirmed the proposed project appears to have no impact on land manage by Forestry and Land Scotland on behalf of Scottish Ministers.	SSEN Transmission welcome FLS's confirmation of this.
NatureScot (A Survey methodology statement was issued to NatureScot to obtain their views on the proposed survey methods)	<p>NatureScot noted that all three proposed route options are very close to, or may even slightly overlap with, Novar Special_Protection Area (SPA), which is protected for breeding capercaillie. Capercaillies may also use areas of woodland outside the SPA and survey and assessment will be required to determine the potential for disturbance and displacement to lekking, breeding, roosting and foraging birds in the SPA and other nearby woodland, as well as habitat loss/change and collision risk. Survey work should also cover potential access routes. The proposed development should aim to avoid direct and indirect impacts to capercaillie and their supporting habitats.</p> <p>NatureScot recommended for our assessment to consider potential impacts from disturbance (during construction but also the potential for new access tracks to increase recreational disturbance), displacement (during construction but also any potential for displacement from the operational line) and collision risk from either the overhead line itself or the supporting structures. They highlighted that there is evidence to suggest that Capercaillie may be displaced by operational wind turbines, and the possibility of painting wind turbine tower bases to increase their visibility and reduce the risk of collision for woodland grouse has been trialled abroad. NatureScot were unsure what research shows about displacement from the presence of structures such as overhead lines.</p> <p>NatureScot also recommended that our assessment should include a comprehensive review of available desk study information and habitat suitability. It was positively noted that SSEN had already requested desk study information from the RSPB (the Capercaillie Project Officer). They highlighted that there may also be existing survey work from other proposals in the area.</p> <p>In terms of proposed survey work, NatureScot noted the importance of liaising with the Capercaillie Project Officer to check which areas are already surveyed so as to avoid duplication and unnecessary disturbance. They also recommended that once desk study information and details of existing coverage</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge NatureScot's comments in respect to ornithology at the Novar SPA.</p> <p>SSEN Transmission are aware of the capercaillie within the Novar SPA and surrounding area. RSPB have been contacted to obtain most recent field data, which will inform the survey efforts required in the Spring season. SSEN Transmission will ensure that the risk of disruption to capercaillie is reduced to as low as practicable.</p> <p>SSEN Transmission welcome NatureScot's advice and guidance on capercaillie displacement research and will ensure the Capercaillie Project Officer at RSPB is approached. SSEN Transmission will be in further contact with NatureScot once the desk study information has been gathered.</p> <p>SSEN Transmission are aware of the Ceislein Wind Farm Scoping submission and are looking into co-ordinating survey efforts in the area to minimise the potential disturbance to protected species.</p> <p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge the ornithological risks associated with Route Option 1 and as the Project develops, SSEN Transmission will mitigate the risk of collision should Route Option 1 be progressed.</p>

Table 4.2: Statutory and Other Consultee Feedback on Grid Connections

	<p>has been obtained, that we also agree the proposed survey and assessment methods with us in advance, given the sensitivity of this area.</p> <p>With regards to Capercaillie, NatureScot also noted there has been some woodland creation to the north of the SPA which may provide future suitable habitat for capercaillie to expand into. There is also the potential for flights to occur along the north edge of the SPA. NatureScot made the point that Route 1 is therefore potentially higher risk, but would require further information to give a view on this. NatureScot would expect the route selection process to be informed by survey and assessment so that the proposed route aims to avoid direct or indirect impacts to the SPA.</p> <p>NatureScot noted that Ceislein wind farm is currently at scoping and is located to the north of the SPA. Furthermore, it would be useful to engage with the consultants there to ensure coordination on survey work.</p> <p>It was advised by NatureScot that the location of and access to the proposed vantage points should avoid disturbing Capercaillie, and that desk survey information should help to plan an appropriate route that avoids this risk. This advice also applies to other survey work.</p> <p>NatureScot commended that Routes 2 & 3 are potentially closer to the existing power lines and this should also be considered in assessment given potential for dispersal.</p> <p>Potential for cumulative impacts will also be a consideration for this SPA, particularly the potential for cumulative disturbance and displacement from other proposals in the area.</p>	
	<p><u>Cromarty Firth Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and SPA</u></p> <p>NatureScot advised that whooper swans are also included in list of target species. They noted it would also be beneficial to record foraging geese and swans close to the proposed overhead line routes during the course of other survey work. Some of the agricultural fields between the Firth and Novar SPA are likely to be used for foraging.</p> <p>The SSSI is protected for a range of coastal habitats which also provide valuable foraging habitats for wintering SSSI and SPA birds. As there is potential hydrological connectivity with the overhead line route, NatureScot would expect</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge the response from NatureScot regarding the whooper swans, and geese and will update the list of target species.</p> <p>SSEN Transmission welcome NatureScot's response regarding the SSSI and SPA. SSEN Transmission have consulted with SEPA to regarding the potential hydrological connectivity and impacts from the Proposed Development.</p>

Table 4.2: Statutory and Other Consultee Feedback on Grid Connections

	<p>any future application to demonstrate how impacts to these habitats would be avoided through, for example, adverse changes to water quality.</p> <p>NatureScot noted the potential for osprey to breed within the survey area. If they are recorded, potential connectivity with the SPA should be considered and potential impacts assessed.</p> <p>Although aspects will be more relevant for marine projects you might find this document useful: https://www.nature.scot/doc/habitats-regulations-appraisal-hra-moray-firth-guide-developers-and-regulators.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission have commissioned 12 months' worth of bird surveys (Sept 24 – Sept 25). All bird surveys are undertaken as per NatureScot guidance and will cover the protected species noted. During the consenting stage of the project ornithological impacts will be assessed and appropriate mitigation measures determined.</p>
	<p><u>Alness River Valley SSSI</u></p> <p>NatureScot commented that the edge of the Route 1 corridor overlaps with this SSSI which is protected for its ash woodland habitat. They advised that the proposals aim to avoid direct or indirect impacts to this site.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission note NatureScot's concern with Route Option 1. Further assessment will be conducted, ensuring any potential risks are minimised.</p>
	<p><u>Ornithology surveys</u></p> <p>Noting the points above, NatureScot noted they were broadly content with the survey methods proposed, and they would be happy to review vantage point locations and viewsheds once finalised.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission will engage with NatureScot further to discuss the Vantage Point locations.</p>
	<p><u>General advice</u></p> <p>Although more aimed at wind farm developments, NatureScot provided guidance which elements may be useful for the proposed connection project.</p> <p>www.nature.scot/doc/naturescot-pre-application-guidance-onshore-wind-farms.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission welcome the guidance provided by NatureScot.</p>
	<p><u>Habitats</u></p> <p>NatureScot recommended a habitat survey along the route, with Annex 1 habitats mapped to NVC level. Peatland habitat assessment should follow NatureScot guidance at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/advising-peatland-carbon-rich-soils-and-priority-peatland-habitats-development-management.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge NatureScot's comments in respect to peatland habitats.</p> <p>At each step in the design process we look to increase our understanding of site sensitivities through desk study, consultation and eventually specific site surveys. At each step in the process as these sensitivities become better understood the design is adjusted to reduce and minimise impacts (balanced against other factors).</p>

Table 4.2: Statutory and Other Consultee Feedback on Grid Connections

		<p>For the Proposed Development SSEN will undertake habitat surveys of the Proposed Alignment when it is developed, these will be used to inform any impact assessment (and appropriate mitigation) undertaken as part of the consent application, particularly in respect to any Annex 1 habitats. A peat probing survey will be undertaken within the preferred Route where peat is likely to be present. Further to this these surveys will inform our internal Biodiversity Net Gain objectives for the project.</p> <p>SSEN acknowledge NatureScot's recommendations on guidance for peatland survey and assessment and will use this to inform such documents as part of the consent application.</p>
	<p>Protected Species</p> <p>Survey and assessment should follow NatureScot's standing advice at: https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development/planning-and-development-advice/planning-and-development-protected-species.</p> <p>The west end of the assessment area is within the Strathpeffer Wildcat Priority Area. Survey and assessment for wildcats should follow NatureScot's guidance at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/standing-advice-planning-consultations-wildcats.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission welcome NatureScot's comments in respect to protected species and specifically the Wildcat Priority Area. SSEN have commissioned a suite of protected species surveys which will look to confirm presence / likely absence of species within the Proposed Route (including identification of shelters) and use the results of these surveys to inform impact assessments to accompany the consent application and any required licensing in advance of construction.</p>
SEPA	<p>SEPA noted they were unable to express a definite preference considering all of their interests until detailed proposals are put forward in terms of the associated infrastructure required (access roads, construction compounds etc) and exact pole and cable positions. However, on balance, SEPA highlighted they are likely to prefer Route Option 2 or Route Option 3 due to less impact on carbon rich soils.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission welcomes SEPA's response and acknowledges SEPA's standard comments to mitigate the impacts to carbon rich soils. SSEN will implement SEPA best practice guidance during the next phase of the assessment. SSEN have commissioned a phase 1 peat probing survey to be undertaken within the preferred Route.</p>
The Highland Council (THC)	<p>THC noted they would be happy to provide a response should a subsequent consultation be forthcoming from the ECU.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge the response received by The Highland Council and welcomes the opportunity to consult further.</p>

Table 4.2: Statutory and Other Consultee Feedback on Grid Connections

Community Councils		
Ardross Community Council	<p>This consultation event clashed with another consultation event taking place at the Ardross Community Hall for a BESS.</p> <p>In support of Route Options 2 & 3 as set out within the Public Consultation booklet dated 3rd September 2024. Do not support Route Option 1 for a variety of reasons including depth of peat, altitude, impact on Ardross Castle's designation etc.</p> <p>SSEN should be examining the merits of a small substation connected to either of the 132kV or 275kV OHL say between Fluchlady NH55497 61920 and NH56665 63034. These co-ordinates are only given as an example. It is the principle of making the connection by a small substation avoiding the difficulty and environmental cost of putting a double pole line behind Evanton and up to the Fyriish substation that we are interested in examining. This principle is not a new one as the Ardross Community Council were consulted on a similar connection at the Aultnamain for the Beinn Tharsuinn Connection on the Struie Road (B9176) that SSEN were involved with.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission welcome the views of the Ardross Community Council. It was unfortunate that the consultation date for the Routeing Stage clashed, however, there will be further opportunity to consult on the Alignment Phase of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>SSEN has a duty to provide a connection to the Wind Farm developments in the area. Currently, SSEN Transmission are in discussion regarding the infrastructure required in the area, and a strategic plan will be implemented. A smaller substation option will be discussed, however, the future planning and expansion of the connection network required to be considered to provide the most economic and efficient solution.</p>
Evanton Wood Community Company	<p>Prefer route to avoid Evanton Wood. If either Route Option 2 or 3 are adopted, we will insist that the transmission infrastructure avoids the main body of the wood and, instead, cross the narrow stretch of wood at the western end, near the existing pylons.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission welcome the views of the Evanton Wood Community Company. Further environmental assessment will be undertaken to thoroughly consider the Alignment Options within the Preferred Route Option and which take into consideration Evanton Wood Community's preferences.</p>
Kiltearn Community Council		<p>SSEN Transmission will endeavour to issue an email response to the Kiltearn Community Council during the next round of Public Engagement.</p>
Landowners		
Landowner 1	<p>Preferred route is the corridor coloured orange (Route 1). Concerns regarding the yellow route (Route 3) due to the arable fields it would impact.</p> <p>Request to keep updated on the progression.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge the preference of Route Option 1 and the concerns regarding Route Option 3. SSEN Transmission have undertaken RAG Rating as part of the optioneering process which takes into account a number of parameters.</p>

Table 4.2: Statutory and Other Consultee Feedback on Grid Connections

Landowner 2	<p>Preference for orange coloured corridor (Route 1). Concerns regarding the yellow route (Route 3) due to the areas of forestry it would impact.</p> <p>Request to keep updated on the progression.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge the preference of Route Option 1 and the concerns regarding Route Option 3. SSEN Transmission have undertaken RAG Rating as part of the optioneering process which takes into account a number of parameters.</p>
Landowner 3	<p>Recognise the geographical location of the Fyrish substation with respect to industry connections, and will try to facilitate these connections where they are located sympathetically and along a route we can work with. Noted have been a constructive stakeholder in a number of grid connections to nearby substations, and hopes to continue to be so.</p> <p>Particular objection to use of OHL for the proposed connection. Route Option 1 has a significant range of constraints and technical, commercial and legal challenges to overcome, but there is a possibility a route through that corridor could be supported.</p> <p>Route Option 3 is least preferred and considered disastrous. It is very difficult to see a route within Route Option 2 that could be tolerated.</p> <p>Unless project pivots to underground cable and drop Route Options 2 and 3, it is assumed that we will strenuously object to your application. This would be a matter of personal regret, however unable to comprehend the rationale for an OHL coming through low ground.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge the preference of Route Option 1. The Proposed Development has been restricted since commencement, as noted by a lack of Corridor Optioneering Assessment due to a lack of alternative options. Whilst it is regrettable that the landowner is hosting a large proportion of the Route, SSEN are very limited on the Route of infrastructure for this Proposed Development.</p>
Landowner 4	<p>Preference for OHL to be taken in the yellow corridor (Route Option 3). Anything within the blue corridor (Route Option 2) would not be of preference; if it was the case would expect to be undergrounded.</p>	<p>SSEN Transmission acknowledge the preference of Route Option 3. SSEN are very limited on the Route of infrastructure for this Proposed Development, however, alternative infrastructure will be considered.</p>

4.2 Issues Emerging from Consultation Feedback

Responses covered a range of topics with a number raising specific issues in relation to the Preferred Route connection option.

Common themes emerging from the consultation responses received related to:

- The proposed infrastructure to be utilised within a Preferred Route Option; and
- The potential environmental and social impact within the Preferred Route Option.

5. PROJECT RESPONSES TO CONSULTATIONS

5.1 Overview

This section of the report documents how the Preferred Route Option, set out within the Consultation Document, has subsequently responded to the issues emerging from the consultation feedback.

5.2 Design Responses

As the Proposed Development progresses, there will be opportunity to refine the Preferred Route Option to protect the sensitive areas within the Route Option. Once alignments have been developed, further environmental assessments will be conducted and modification to the design will be made, if required. SSEN Transmission will endeavour to amend the Alignment Options in line with the comments received during the routeing Public Consultation.

5.3 Proposed Route

Based on the consultation responses received, no changes to the Preferred Route Option corridor selection process are necessary. Route Option 2 will now be taken forward as the Proposed Route for further refinement in the alignment process.

5.4 Responses Relevant to Subsequent EIA

SSEN received some consultation responses that related directly to specific environmental issues which would be appropriate to consider when defining and delivering the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Table 4.2 displays the key issues raised and identifies how SSEN Transmission proposes to respond to address the main concerns.

6. CONCLUSION

This Report on Consultation documents the consultation process which has been undertaken for the project in September 2024. The programme of consultation was designed to engage with stakeholders including statutory and other consultees to invite feedback on the rationale for and approach to, the selection of the Preferred Route.

A number of stakeholder responses provided information on further material to be considered for the alignment appraisals. The specific comments raised will be incorporated in the further assessment work to be undertaken. The points raised include:

- The proposed infrastructure to be utilised within a Preferred Route Option; and
- The potential environmental and social impact within the Preferred Route Option.

To address these points, SSEN Transmission will seek to undertake further environmental assessments to understand fully the environmental impacts of the Proposed Development and continue to consult with statutory consultees and key non-statutory consultees to design and mitigate potential impacts.

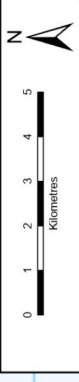
The Consultation Document concluded that Route Option 2 was the Preferred Route. The consultation process further highlighted that Route 2 has lowest impact. Route 2 will now be taken forward as the Proposed Route.

6.1 Next Steps

The project will now be taken into Stage 3 (Alignment Selection), commencing with identification of alignment options within the Proposed Route. These will be informed by this document and further consultation exercises, and through detailed surveys, which may identify any additional and / or currently unknown engineering, environmental or land use constraints

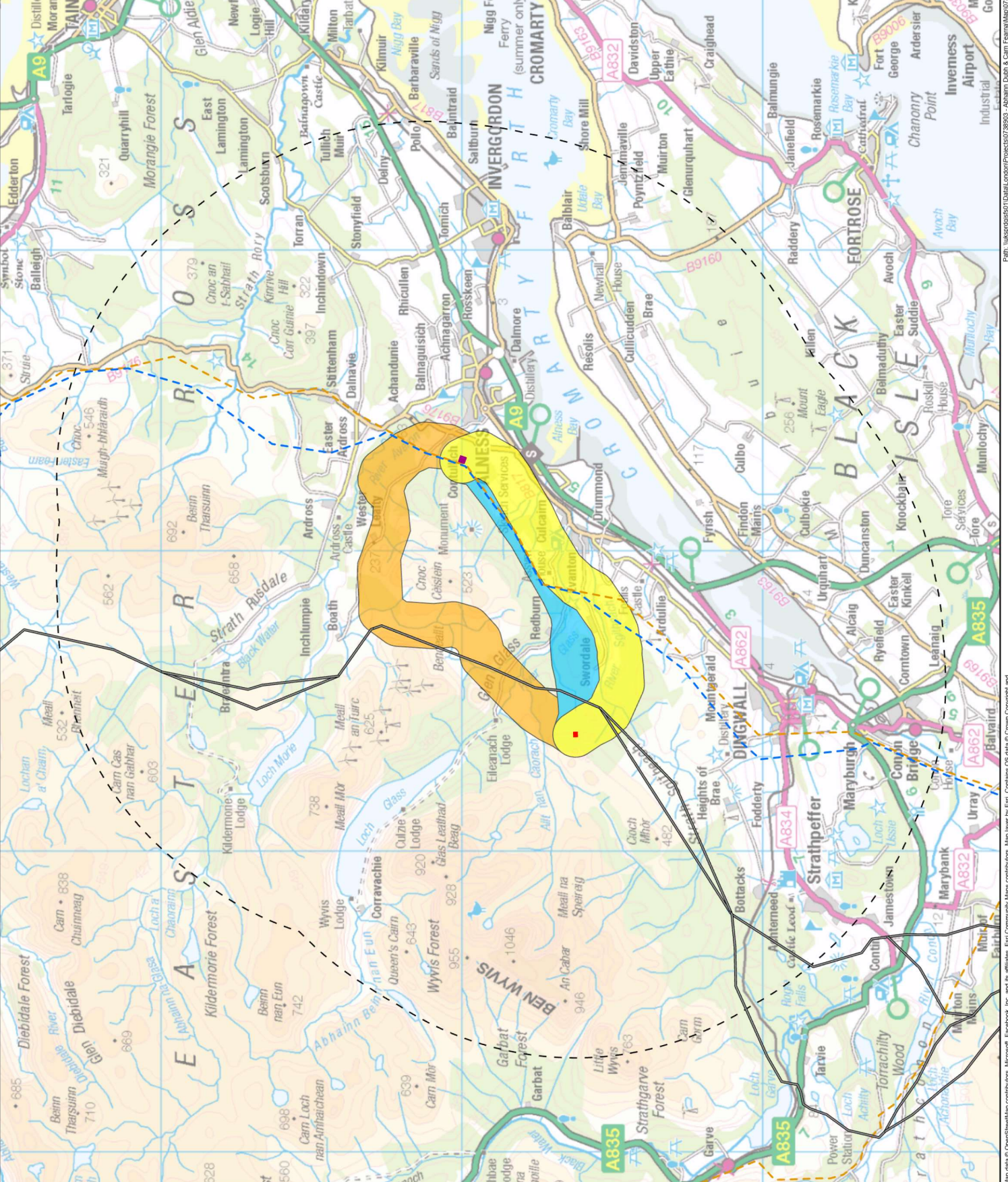
APPENDIX A – FIGURES

- █ Abhainn Dubh - Proposed Substation
- █ Fyrish Substation
- █ Proposed Route Options
- █ Route Option 1
- █ Route Option 2
- █ Route Option 3
- - - Abhainn Dubh - Proposed Route Options - 10km Buffer
- Proposed Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beaulie OHL
- Existing OHL
- Existing 132kV OHL
- Existing 275kV OHL

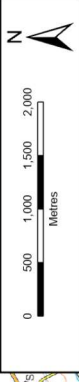


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 APPROVED: KG

Figure 2.1
Study Area

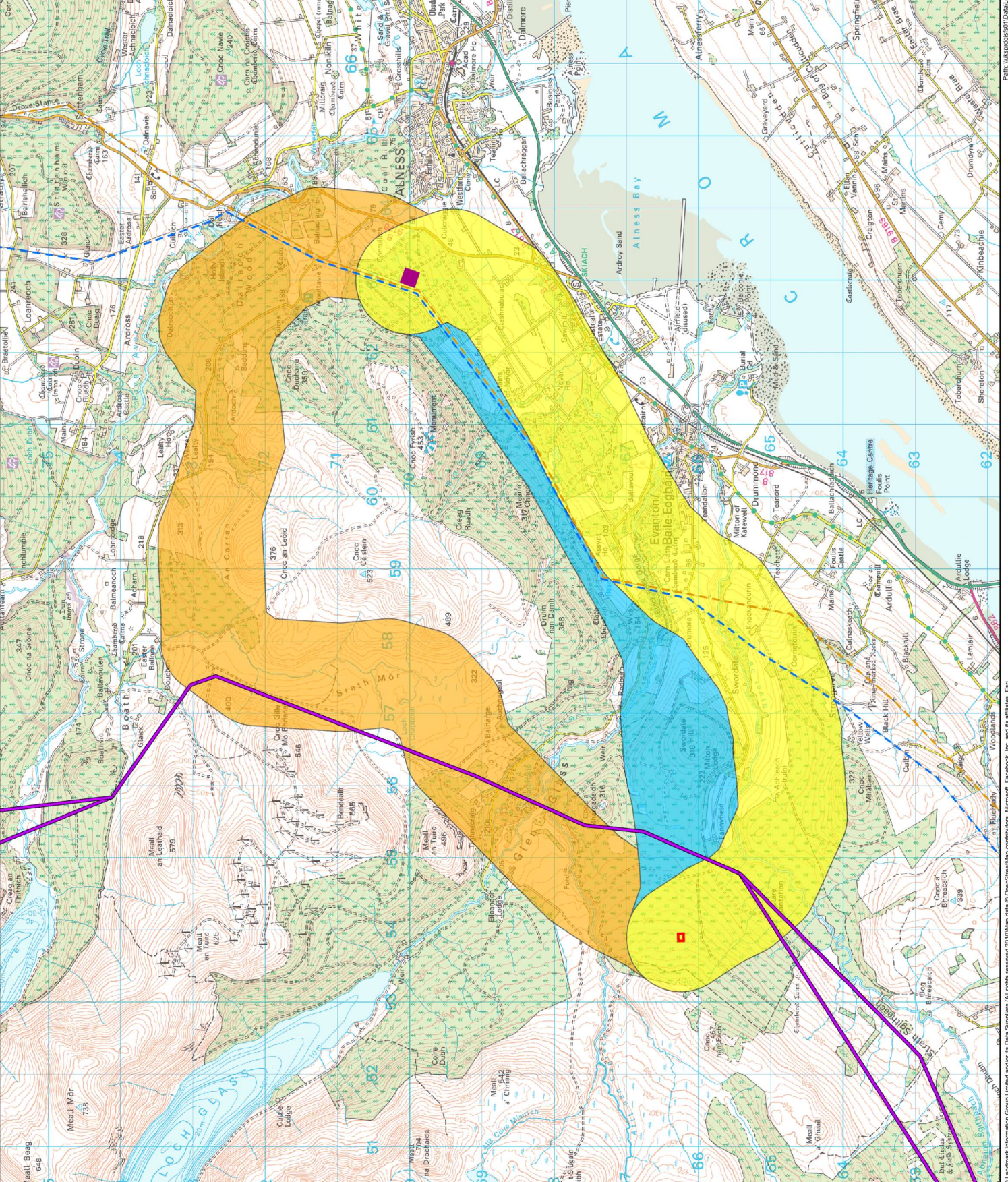
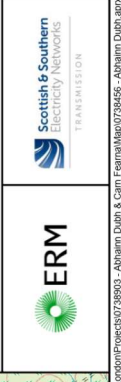


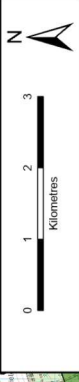
- Proposed Route Options**
- Route Option 1
 - Route Option 2
 - Route Option 3
 - Route Option 3
 - Abahinn Dubh Proposed Substation
 - Fyrish Substation
 - Proposed Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly OHL
 - Existing OHL
 - Existing 132KV OHL
 - Existing 275KV OHL



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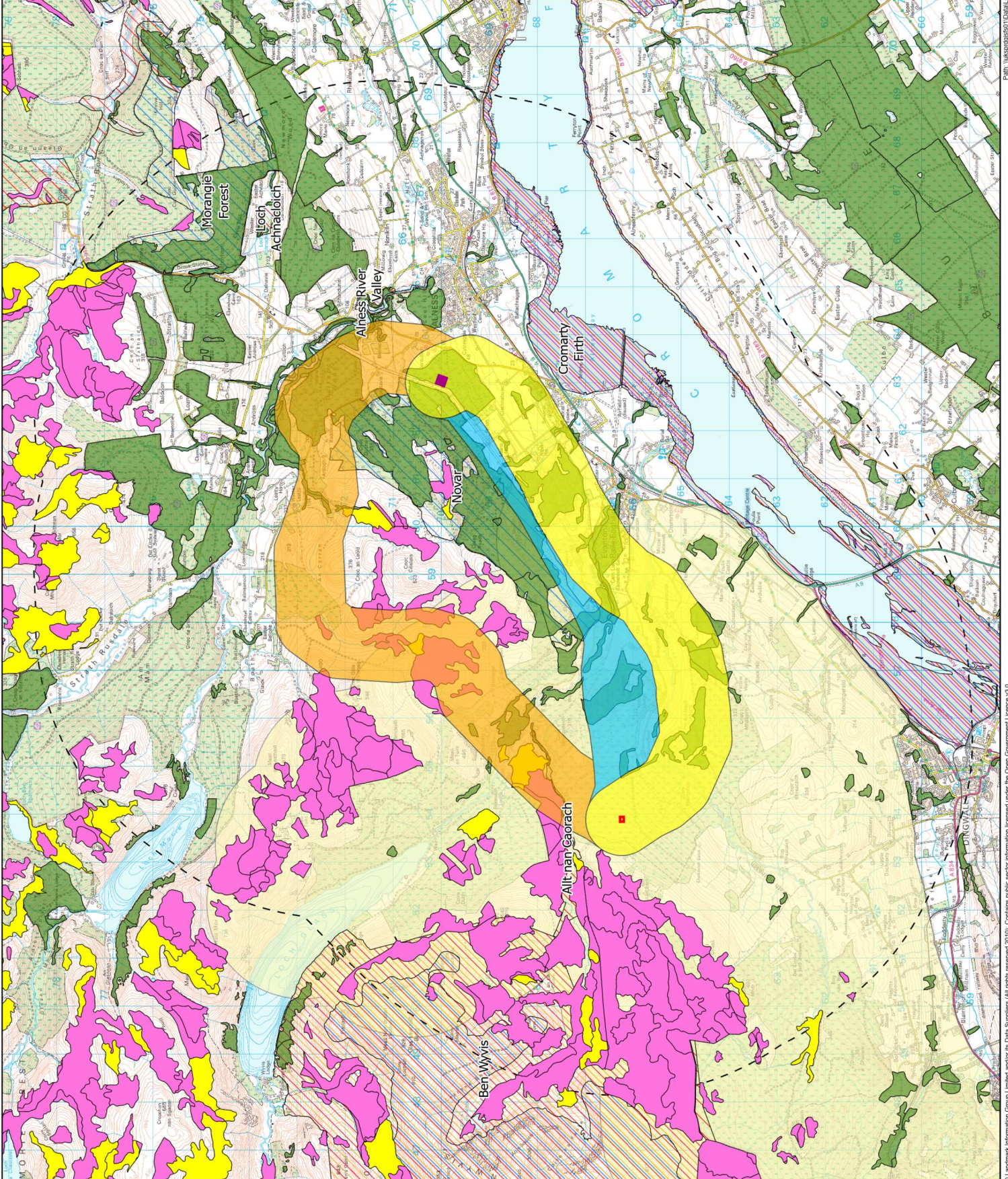
Figure 2.2
Route Options

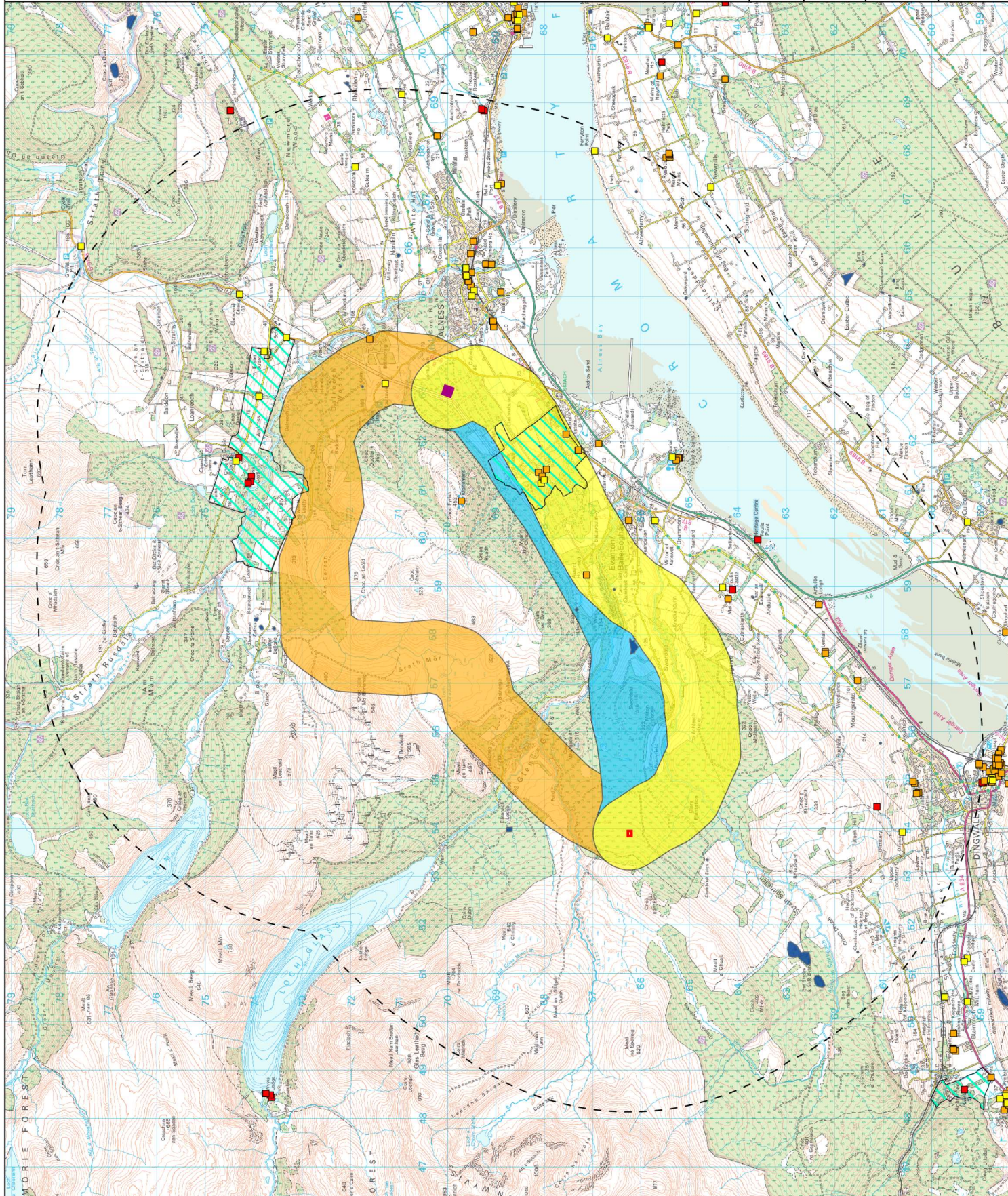




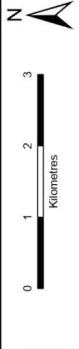
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Figure 5.1
Natural Heritage Constraints





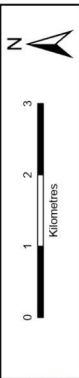
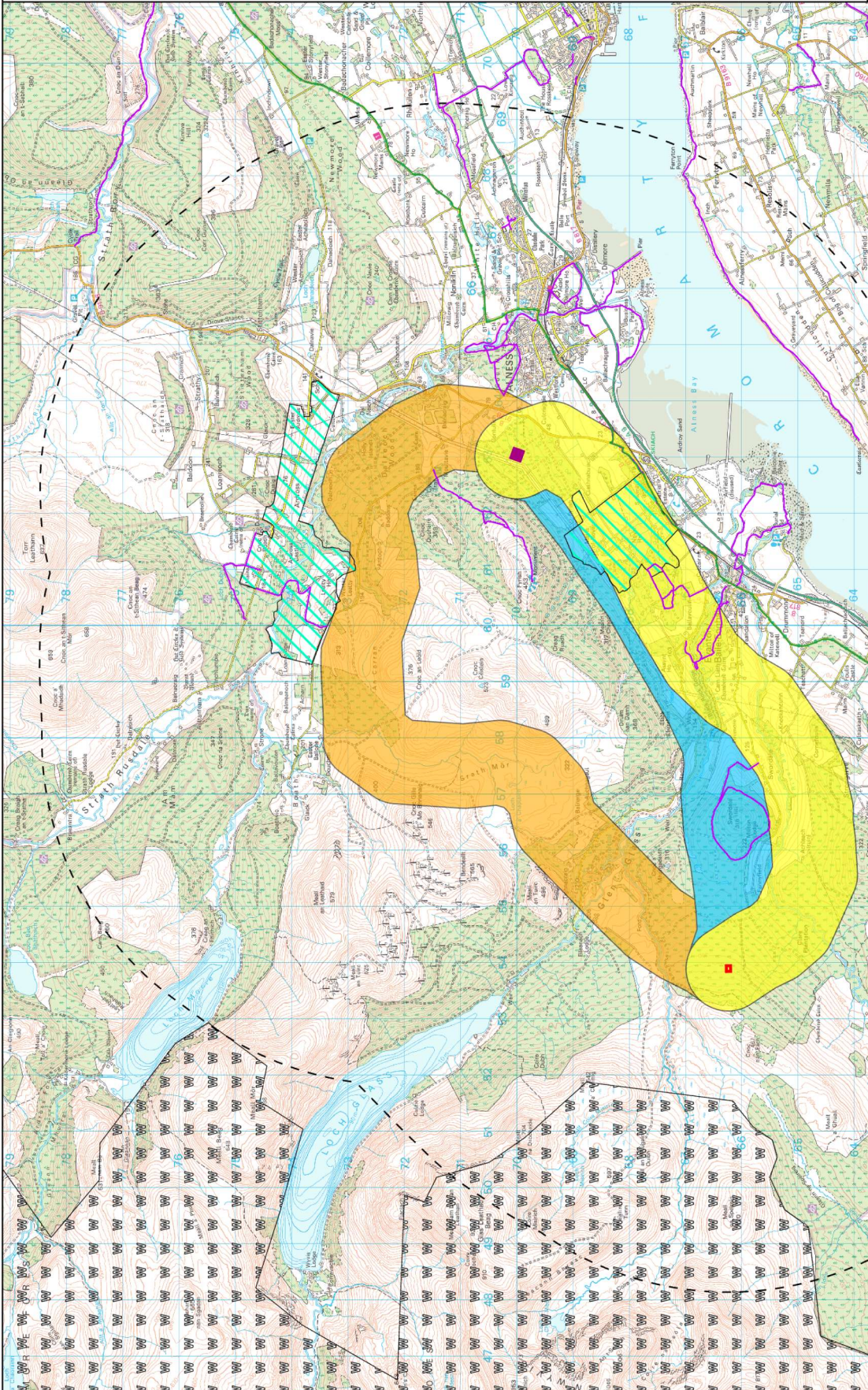
- Abhainn Dubh Proposed Substation
- Fyrish Substation
- Proposed Route Options
- Route Option 1
- Route Option 2
- Route Option 3
- Abhainn Dubh Proposed Route Options 5km Buffer
- Cultural Heritage Constraints
- Scheduled Monument
- Garden and Designed Landscape
- Category A Listed Building
- Category B Listed Building
- Category C Listed Building



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DATE: 21/10/2024	APPROVED: KG

Figure 5.2
Cultural Heritage Constraints





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Figure 5.3 Landscape and Visual Constraints