SSEN Transmission

Bingally 400 / 132 kV Substation

Environmental Appraisal

Volume 3

Appendix F

February 2025

APPENDIX F – HABITATS SURVEY RESULTS

Woodland and Scrub

1.1.1 Thirty parcels of Ancient Woodland of semi-natural origin listed on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)[1] occur within 1 km of the Site, with one woodland block present within the Site itself, to the extreme north of the Site, where it is intersected by the existing access track. The majority of this woodland has been disturbed by commercial forestry and is no longer a natural woodland (now dense scrub or plantation); however, a parcel of native birchwood is present. Parcels of AWI woodland located outside the Site are mainly present to the west of the Site.

1.1.2 Four parcels of Long-established Woodland of Plantation Origin occur within 1 km of the Site, with none occurring within the Site. The closest area of Long-established Woodland of Plantation Origin is located c. 70 m to the west of the Site, west of the proposed access track and north of the proposed substation site. The majority of these woodland parcels are located to the south and west of the Site.

1.1.3 Three parcels of other "Roy" Woodland sites (i.e. parcels shown as unwooded on the 1st edition maps but as woodland on the Roy maps) occur within 1 km of the Site with none occurring within the Site itself. These parcels are present c. 300-800 m to the west of the Site, with the northern most parcel present beyond the River Affric.

1.1.4 The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS)[2] also holds records of woodland within the ZoI. Six parcels of Native Woodland are present within the Site itself, intersected or directly adjacent to the proposed access track. Plantation on Ancient Woodland (PAWS) is present within the ZoI, with one parcel within the Site to the extreme north of the Site, intersected by an existing forestry track.

1.1.5 Two notable wooded habitats were identified during field survey across the Site these are:

- Wet woodland; and
- Upland birchwood.

1.1.6 Areas of coniferous / mixed / broadleaved plantation/natural scrub are represented by:

- Other broadleaved woodland;
- Other mixed woodland;
- Other Scots pine woodland;
- Other conifer woodland; and
- Mixed scrub.

1.1.7 Wet woodland of the NVC type W4 is present in three localised areas within the central section of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet d**), of which one parcel is directly adjacent to the proposed access track. A large parcel of woodland is present in the north of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet b**) which is in a mosaic of W17 woodland (described below in **Section** Error! Reference source not found.), W4 woodland and bracken (of the NVC type U 20). The proposed access track bisects this large woodland parcel. The W4 woodland is dominated by downy birch *Betula pubescens*, with no other tree species except rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* in the larger parcel. The ground flora is dominated by purple moor-grass. Drier areas within this woodland have locally abundant bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* with hard-fern *Blechnum spicant*, tormentil *Potentilla erecta* and rough meadow-grass *Poa trivialis*. More acidic and peaty areas instead possess bog myrtle *Myrica gale* and heather *Calluna vulgaris,* with mosses including *Sphagnum palustre* and *Sphagnum fallax*.

[1] NatureScot (2024). A guide to understanding the Scottish Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)https://www.nature.scot/doc/guide-understanding-scottish-ancient-woodland-inventory-awi [Accessed: 30 August 2024]

[2] Scottish Forestry (2024). Native Woodland Survey of Scotlandhttps://forestry.gov.scot/forests-environment/biodiversity/native-woodlands/native-woodland-survey-of-scotland-nwss [Accessed: 30 August 2024]

1.1.8 Upland birchwood of the NVC types W11 and W11c are present on gently to moderately-steep sloping ground on moderately deep acid-neutral mineral soils, the bulk of which are in the north of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet a, b and c**). The access track bisects this woodland type approximately 3.5 km up the proposed access track from the north. Here the habitat is a sparsely wooded edge of a large parcel that is a mosaic of W11c, W17c and M25a. W11 woodlands within the Site are either dominated by silver birch *Betula pendula,* downy birch or a mix of both species, with rowan rarely occurring. Bracken is commonly found and sometimes is dominant in the field layer. Relatively species-poor examples (e.g. from dominance of bracken or impact from fire damage), were unable to be assigned to an NVC sub-community. Relatively species-rich examples were assigned the NVC type W11c. The ground flora of W11c is grassy, with species including wavy hair-grass *Avenella flexuosa*, common bent *Agrostis capillaris*, sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, sweet vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum* and tufted hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa*. The ground flora is moderately herb-rich, with common dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, wood anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, chickweed winter-green *Lysimachia europaea*, bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, tormentil, hairy wood-rush *Luzula pilosa, hard-fern* and wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella,* over a carpet of mosses including *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*, *Pseudoscleropodium purum*, *Hylocomium splendens* and *Thuidium tamariscinum*.

1.1.9 Upland birchwood of the NVC types W17, W17b and W17c are present on steep-sloping, rocky ground on relatively thin, acidic soils. The bulk of these woodlands are in the north of the Site, as well as at higher altitudes within the Site in central and southern areas of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet b, c, d, e and g**). These woodlands are generally dominated by downy birch. Relatively species-poor examples (e.g. as a result of impacts from fire damage), were unable to be assigned to a sub-community. Some W17 woodlands are very heathy, with a field layer dominated by heather and bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* (as well as possessing some of the species associated with W11c, including bracken, mosses and, in lesser abundance, some forbs), these were assigned to W17b. Grassier parcels of this woodland correspond to the NVC type W17c which have sweet vernal grass, common bent, wavy hair-grass, purple moor-grass, beech fern *Phegopteris connectilis*, with mosses *Hylocomium splendens* and *Dicranum scoparium*. The forbs present in W17 (additional to those found in W11, but at lower abundance) include devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis* and milkwort *Polygala vulgaris*.

1.1.10 Other broadleaved woodland (that can be loosely assigned to W11 and W4 or those that do not correspond to an NVC type), are present within the area of the proposed substation platform and in the north of the Site, within commercial plantation forestry (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet h**). The stands that are the most natural in character are dominated by downy or silver birch, with grasses such as tufted hair-grass and wavy hair-grass, over a moss layer including *Polytrichum commune* and *Hylocomium splendens*. In damper areas (pertaining to the NVC type W4) the ground flora has soft rush *Juncus effusus* and/or purple moor-grass and occasionally the mosses *S. fallax* and *S. palustre*.

1.1.11 Other mixed woodland is present in northern and southern areas of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet a, b, c, g and h**), some of which borders the proposed access track. These woodlands are presumably managed as commercial plantation. The most natural examples of these are of the NVC type W18, dominated by mature Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* with a minor component of the canopy dominated by silver or downy birch. The field layer possesses bracken, over a mossy ground flora with *T. tamariscinum*, *Polytrichum formosum* and *P. purum*, under sparse purple moor-grass with rarely occurring hard fern and wood sorrel. Other mixed woodland of no NVC type were a mix of birch and Sitka spruce, some stands possessed alder *Alnus glutinosa* and had a heathy, grassy or bracken-dominated ground flora.

1.1.12 Other Scots pine woodland was a broad habitat type in areas of commercial plantation (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet a, b, d, f, g and h**), the majority of which were found outside of

the proposed substation site, with one parcel found in the north of the Site. In one location in the south of the Site, this woodland type borders the proposed access track. These woodlands mostly corresponded to the NVC type W18 (with only one stand with little to no ground flora not being attributed to an NVC type). These woodlands were dominated by Scots pine, with a ground flora of bilberry and heather, with bracken and / or wavy hair-grass over a thick carpet of pleurocarpous mosses including *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus*. In some stands, the ground flora resembled the NVC type M25a and rarely (and more locally) a bog vegetation, such as M19 or M20. The woodland mimics a natural pine wood, but were found to be in poor condition and had poor vertical structure, a lack of different age classes of trees, and a paucity of standing and fallen deadwood and no rare plants.

1.1.13 Other conifer woodland is present in large blocks outside of the Proposed Development to the west and south of the Site. These areas of Sitka spruce-dominated commercial plantation forestry are generally species-poor monoculture of no NVC type. The ground flora was generally bare or very thin, but may have patches of scattered species of grasses, mosses and ferns from remnants from former woodland or peatland, especially in more open areas. One area of felled Other conifer woodland in the north of the Site corresponds to the NVC type U2a. This habitat is largely avoided by the proposed access track. This felled woodland supports wavy hair-grass, sheep's fescue, sweet vernal-grass, heath bedstraw *Galium saxatile*, Yorkshire-fog *Holcus lanatus*, soft rush, tormentil, hard-fern and foxglove *Digitalis purpurea*.

1.1.14 Mixed scrub of the NVC type W23 are outside of the proposed substation site. These are dense stands of gorse *Ulex europaeus*, bordered by wet heath-type vegetation.

1.1.15 Mixed scrub with no NVC are mostly in areas of commercial plantation forestry to the north. These habitats are largely dominated by birch in a dense thicket, some over bracken or a type of vegetation reminiscent of the NVC type U2. One localised area to the south of the proposed substation platform is a low-growing thicket of eared willow *Salix aurita* over an M25a-type ground flora. Fragments of such vegetation are occasionally present associated with M25a habitats to the north of the Site in small valleys. These areas of eared willow are best described as scattered scrub (rather than dense scrub or wet woodland).

Blanket Bog

1.1.16 The desk study of the carbon and peatland map returned several areas of peat gleys and peaty podsols, both within 1 km of the Site and within the Site itself. The proposed access track runs through some of these areas, of which, mainly to the north of the Site, are Class 2 nationally important carbon-rich soils (areas of potentially high conservation value and restoration potential). The desk study data broadly corresponds with peatland habitats identified during field surveys, but the dataset is considered to be incomplete, given that the vast majority of the Site was found to be clothed in peaty soils, including substantial areas of deep blanket bog.

1.1.17 From the field survey, the Site was found to contain the following notable bog habitats:

- Blanket bog (SBL priority, Annex I 7130 Blanket bogs); and
- Degraded blanket bog (SBL priority, non-priority Annex I 7130 Blanket bogs).

1.1.18 Blanket bog in Moderate to Good / pristine condition were present across the Site in all but the very north of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet b-h**), often in large expanses in a near-natural mosaic with heathlands, acid grassland and native woodland. Blanket bog on the flattest, deepest and wettest peat is assigned to the NVC type M17a. These bogs are commonly dominated by deer-grass *Trichophorum cespitosum*, with abundant cross-leaved heath *Erica tetralix*, with frequent bog myrtle and *Sphagnum papillosum* and rarely *Sphagnum magellanicum*. M17a bogs also have locally frequent hare's-tail cotton-grass and *Sphagnum palustre*. Bog pools of the NVC type M2/M2a are occasional to frequent within these bogs, dominated by *Sphagnum cuspidatum* and rarely supporting white-beaked sedge

Rhynchospora alba. Bog pool edges/flushed areas support the moss *Scorpidium scorpioides*, bog asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, round-leaved sundew D*rosera rotundifolia* and the notable plant great sundew *Drosera anglica*[3]. No great sundew was recorded within the area of the Proposed Development. Higher and drier areas possess the lichen *Cladonia portentosa* and occasionally the moss *Sphagnum capillifolium* and rarely *Sphagnum tenellum.* Blanket bog of the NVC type M17b are on slightly drier peats, compared to M17a. They are similar in composition but have a greater prevalence of *Cladonia portentosa* and a reduced abundance of species commonly associated with bog pools / flushed areas.

1.1.19 Blanket bog on deep peat, in areas of gently sloping to moderately-sloping ground, assigned to the NVC type M19, are present in a localised areas in a centre of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet d**) and M19a in scattered patches south of the proposed substation site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet h**). These bogs have abundant heather and hair's-tail cotton grass with frequent cross-leaved heath and occasional bilberry, over a carpet of mosses including *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *Hylocomium splendens*, *Pleurozium schreberi* and *Hypnum jutlandicum*. M19a communities also rarely support the notable plant dwarf birch *Betula nana*[4]. No dwarf birch was recorded within the area of the Proposed Development.

1.1.20 Degraded bogs (in Poor condition) are mostly found in felled commercial plantation forestry within the southern parts of the Site, within the area of the proposed substation platform (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet g and h**), but also in more scattered patches in the central section (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet c, d, and e**). Indeed, the proposed substation site largely comprises degraded bog. These bogs have suffered major impacts from drainage caused by the creation of drainage grips and furrows. The degraded bogs in this area mostly correspond to the NVC type M15* (the asterisk denotes a non-bog type habitat on deep peat) and are co-dominated by heather and purple moor-grass, with other species including *P. commune*, cross-leaved heath, *Sphagnum capillifolium* and occasionally common cotton-grass and pleurocarpous mosses such as *Pleurozium schreberi*. Degraded bogs of the type M25* are present around the proposed substation site and are dominated by purple moor-grass with few other species such as heather, bog myrtle, tormentil, and occasionally acid grasses and pleurocarpous mosses.

1.1.21 Degraded bogs are present in a localised area of the central part of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet d**), which were found to be damaged by intensive grazing / trampling caused by an area where sheep are supplementarily fed near the proposed access track. Degraded bogs are also found in a localised area that had been subject to burning (refer to Secondary code **'**105 - burnt' on **Volume 2, Figure 8-3**), these habitats were clearly hydrologically impacted because they were not wet near the surface (compared to other bogs in the area), during the time of survey. The degraded bogs correspond to the NVC types M17, M19, M19a, M20 and M20b. Degraded bogs assigned to the NVC types M17 and M19 were not assigned a sub-community, as they were generally in Poor condition and lacked any characteristic species of the potential sub-communities. One such bog, assigned the NVC type M17, is within the proposed substation platform itself. Degraded bogs assigned to the NVC type M20/M20b had a thick sward of hair's-tail cotton-grass with common cotton-grass and remnant bog vegetation including heather, bilberry, deer-grass, *P. commune*, *S. capillifolium* and *C. portentosa*. Degraded bogs assigned to M19a possessed occasional cross-leaved heath. The proposed access track bisects the edge of one such bog within the open habitats of the northern section of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet c**).

[3] Great sundew is on the IUCN Red list as Near Threatened. GB Red List: Near Threatened. Local frequency in region (Not Locally Scarce on The Rare Plant Register in Vice County 96 East Inverness-shire), but much more common in north-west Scotland, rare elsewhere in Britain. On a trend of decline in Britain and internationally. Source: Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (2024). https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020. [Accessed: 31 July 2024].

[4] Dwarf birch is on the IUCN Red list as Near Threatened. Local frequency in region (Not Locally Scarce on The Rare Plant Register in Vice County 96 East Inverness-shire), GB Scarce. On a trend of decline internationally. Source: Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (2024). https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020. [Accessed: 31 July 2024].

Heathland

1.1.22 Open areas on thin, peaty soils very often contain the following habitats:

- Wet heathland (SBL priority, Annex I 4010 Northern Atlantic wet heaths with (Erica tetralix)); and
- Dry heaths (SBL priority, 4030 European dry heaths).

1.1.23 Wet heathland is the most common broad habitat type within the Site and is present across all areas. Heathlands are represented by M15, M15a, M15b and M15c. Wet heathland of the NVC type M15b is the most common of these wet heathland NVC types, which is frequently distributed across the Site. A mix of heather, deer-grass and purple moor-grass dominate the sward with bog myrtle, cross leaved-heath, *S. capillifolium* and rarely *Sphagnum tenellum*. In the higher, drier and rocky places of the central and southern areas of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet c, d, f, g and h**) is wet heathland that corresponds to the NVC type M15c. For both M15b and M15c, in shorter swards, the notable plant petty whin *Genista anglica*[5] was rarely found. Also, a notable plant, interrupted clubmoss *Lycopodium annotinum*[6], is present to the far east of the Site in heathland (well outside of the Proposed Development). No petty whin or interrupted clubmoss was recorded within the area of the Proposed Development. In M15c, deer grass dominates in a thin sward with frequently occurring heather, purple moor-grass and *C. portentosa*, with cross-leaved heath, tormentil, milkwort, and locally frequent *Racomitrium lanuginosum*. Wet heathland of the NVC type M15a occurred within localised areas across the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet b, d, e, f, g and h**), in flushed areas, often between rocky outcrops, in the low points of sloping ground. These heathlands resemble M15b or M15c wet heaths but possess species including bog asphodel, carnation sedge *Carex panicea*, star sedge *Carex echinata*, butterwort *Pinguicula vulgaris* and *Sphagnum denticulatum*. Wet heathland that has suffered burning are present in the central and northern areas of the Site (refer to Secondary code '105 - burnt' on **Volume 2, Figure 8-3**) and have not been assigned to a sub-community, these habitats are recognisable as wet heathland, but the impacts of burning have impoverished the flora. The proposed access track in the open habitats of the northern section are, to a large extent, composed of M15/M15b, much of which has suffered from fire damage.

1.1.24 The majority of Dry heaths found correspond to the NVC type H12a, present in central and southern parts of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet d, e, f, g and h**), on the thin, peaty soils of moderately to steeply sloping ground. Many areas of H12a are within the area of the proposed access track. This dry heath habitat is dominated by a thick sward of mature heather, with bilberry and cowberry *Vaccinium vitis-idaea* with hard-fern, over mosses such as *Pleurozium schreberi, Rhytidiadelphus loreus, Hylocomium splendens* and *H. jutlandicum*. In shorter swards, the notable plant petty whin was rarely present. This heathland often has scattered bracken and/or is in a mosaic with patches of dense bracken. On damper, north-facing slopes, a closely associated damp heathland, of the NVC type H21a, shared the above species but included frequent *Sphagnum capillifolium*, green-ribbed sedge *Carex binervis* and rarely occurring cross-leaved heath. Localised areas of hillside that are preferentially-grazed by sheep, adjacent to acid grassland patches, are in the central and southern parts of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet d, e and f**) which correspond to the NVC type H12c sub-community. One of these habitat parcels is adjacent to the proposed access track. This heath is as H12a but shares species with that of U2a grassland such as sheep's fescue *Festuca ovina*, mat-grass *Nardus stricta*, sweet vernal-grass, heath bedstraw, milkwort and chickweed winter-green. Dry heathland that has suffered disturbance from the impacts of plantation

[5] Petty whin is on the GB Red List: Near Threatened. Frequent in region (Not Locally Scarce on The Rare Plant Register in Vice County 96 East Inverness-shire). Source: Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (2024). https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020, https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020, https://bsbi.org/easterness. [Accessed: 31 July 2024].

[6] Interrupted clubmoss is on the IUCN Red list as Near Threatened (NT). Local frequency in Vice County 96 East Inverness-shire, but on a trend of decline in Britain and internationally. Source: Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (2024). https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020, https://bsbi.org/easterness. [Accessed: 31 July 2024].

forestry are present in the southern areas of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet h**) and have not been assigned to a H12 sub-community, these habitats are recognisable as dry heathland, but the flora is impoverished. Two patches of heathland are present on an area of disturbance caused by the formation of a rough vehicle track in a central part of the Site and in an area of commercial forestry in the south of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet e and h**). These correspond to the NVC type H10c, a grassy form of dry heath dominated by heather with frequent bell heather *Erica cinerea* and acid grasses.

Calcareous Grassland

1.1.25 In one localised area there is an extensively grazed species-rich grassland with mat-grass (SBL priority, Annex I 6230 Species-rich *Nardus* grassland). Species-rich grassland with mat-grass in upland areas of the NVC type CG10a occurs very locally (and very little in the context of the area surveyed) amongst sloping base-rich grassland on thin soils, in the central area of the Site, outside of the area of the proposed access track (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet e**). This calcareous grassland has abundant mat grass, sheep's fescue, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, wild thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, lady's bedstraw *Galium verum*, eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* and locally frequent white clover *Trifolium repens.* There are very few base-rich habitats within the Site, except for this and also M10a flushes (described below).

Upland Flush

1.1.26 Highly localised areas of Upland flush fall into two sub-divisions:

- Upland flush (surface flush or rill or soakaway); and
- Upland flush (soligenous, poor fen).

1.1.27 Upland flush (surface flush or rill or soakaway) is present as base-rich stony flushes of the NVC type M10a (SBL Priority, Annex I 7230) within central and southern areas of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet e, g and h**). Three of these M10a flushes are within the Site, two are downslope of the proposed access track and one immediately adjacent to the proposed access track. These are moderately species-rich flushes which include carnation sedge, star sedge, yellow sedge *Carex demissa*, flea sedge *Carex pulicaris*, distant sedge *Carex distans*, yellow saxifrage *Saxifraga aizoides,* butterwort, purple moor-grass, cross-leaved heath, sweet vernal-grass, tormentil, bog asphodel, devil's-bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, bulbous rush J*uncus bulbosus*, heath wood-rush *Luzula multiflora*, self-heal, heath spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza maculata*, round-leaved sundew, great sundew, and the mosses *Campylium stellatum*, *S. scorpioides* and *Calliergon cuspidatum*.

1.1.28 Upland flush (soligenous, poor fen) is present within the proposed substation platform itself, and to the north and south of the proposed substation site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet g and h**), within localised patches. These M6c acid flushes have abundant soft rush and a carpet of *P. commune* and *S. fallax*, with other species including bottle sedge *Carex rostrata*, cross-leaved heath and locally frequent purple moor-grass.

Swamp and Aquatic Habitats

1.1.29 Loch Caoirach possesses a thin band of bottle sedge dominated S9a swamp and A7 white waterlily *Nymphaea alba* community. Loch na Beinne Moire has a thin strip of common reed *Phragmites australis* dominated S4 swamp, in addition to S9a swamp and scattered patches of broadleaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans* patches. Loch a' Ghreidlein has S9a patches, floating bur-reed *Sparganium angustifolium* was present in localised areas in floating patches, along with broad-leaved pondweed and sparse S10 swamp dominated by water horsetail *Equisetum fluviatile* and (although outside of the survey area to the east of the lochan) an area (c. 0.002 ha) of A7 white waterlily *Nymphaea alba* community. None of these swamp / aquatic communities are within the Proposed Development area.

Purple Moorgrass and Rush Pasture, and Non-calcareous Grassland

1.1.30 Wetlands that fall into the habitat type of purple moor-grass meadows (SBL priority habitat) that are best described as 'rush pasture' were assigned the NVC type M23b. Five of these habitats were found, three in the south of the Site, outside of the proposed substation site and two downslope of the proposed access track in the central-southern area of the Site. These habitats are dominated by soft rush with species including grasses such as Yorkshire-fog and sweet vernal grass, with forbs including tormentil, self-heal, meadow buttercup, marsh violet *Viola palustris*, marsh thistle *Cirsium palustre*, common sorrel *Rumex acetosa*, meadow sweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, devil's-bit scabious, creeping forget-me-not *Myosotis secunda* and cuckoo flower *Cardamine pratensis,* the mosses *Sphagnum palustre* and *Calliergonella cuspidata*, and rarely occurring lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, carnation sedge and star sedge.

1.1.31 Sloping and dry to damp ground with thin, mineral soils and habitats associated with thin, peaty soils within small valleys contain Other upland acid grassland. Other upland acid grassland corresponding to the NVC type M25a is the most common vegetation community within this broad habitat type on Site. This community of plants is perhaps best described as a mire, present on thin, damp, peaty soil – however, the community is species-poor and dominated by dense tussocks of purple moor-grass, which places it into Upland acid grassland. M25a was present in large swathes across the northern section of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet a-d**). M25a is often associated with minor watercourses. Here, the proposed access track frequently bisects this grassland, largely avoiding woodlands, as the track is preferentially sited in this habitat. M25a is present with a more patchy distribution elsewhere within the Site; downslope of the proposed access track in central and southern parts of the Site, and outside of the proposed substation site in the south of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet e-h**). M25a communities typically are dominated by purple moor-grass with a scrub layer of dense bog myrtle. Heath and bog species are present in M25a and include heather, cross-leaved heath, hare's-tail cotton-grass, *S. capillifolium*, common cotton-grass and pleurocarpous mosses. Very rarely the closely associated NVC community M25b occurs, as a mosaic with other communities in the south of the Site. M25b is a grassy form of M25 mire which, along with purple moor-grass and bog myrtle, had species including sweet vernal-grass, Yorkshire-fog, tormentil, marsh bedstraw *Galium palustre*, marsh violet, marsh thistle, soft-rush, meadow buttercup *Ranunculus repens*, betony *Stachys officinalis,* devil's-bit scabious and the moss *P. purum*.

1.1.32 Other upland acid grassland of the NVC type U4a and U4b is present within central and southern parts of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet b, e f and h**). These grassland types are preferentially grazed by sheep and deer. In the central part of the Site, they form a patchwork amongst heathland on hilltops and hillsides, often bordering the existing access track and within the proposed access track. The areas to the south of the Site are outside of the proposed substation platform. U4a grasslands on Site are nutrient-poor and possess a mix of grass species including sheep's fescue, red fescue, viviparous fescue *Festuca vivipara*, common bent, sweet vernal-grass, tufted hair-grass, purple moor-grass, wavy hair-grass, mat-grass, with heath bedstraw, tormentil, heath wood-rush, heath-rush *Juncus squarrosus*, and the mosses *Hylocomium splendens*, *Pleurozium schreberi*, *Rhytidiadelphus triquetrus* and *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*. Partially nutrient-enriched U4b grasslands have a lower abundance of the forbs listed above, they are less mossy and include agricultural species such as Yorkshire-fog, crested dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, white clover, meadow buttercup, mouse ear *Cerastium fontanum* and meadow buttercup. A notable plant, juniper *Juniperus communis*[7] was present (as a single bush) north of Loch a'

[7] Juniper is listed on the Scottish Biodiversity List. Frequent in region (Not Locally Scarce on The Rare Plant Register in Vice County 96 East Inverness-shire). Source: Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (2024). https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020, https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020, https://bsbi.org/easterness. [Accessed: 31 July 2024].

Ghreidlein, noted adjacent to wet heath. No juniper was recorded within the area of the Proposed Development.

1.1.33 Other upland acid grassland coded as the non-NVC type 'Je' (as described in Averis, 2015[8]) was present in central and southern parts of the Site (**Volume 2, Figure 8-3 Sheet e and h**). Je grassland communities have abundant soft rush, over grasses such as wavy hair-grass, common bent, purple moor-grass and Yorkshire-fog. In areas associated with preferentially-grazed grassland of the NVC type U4b, the community possesses low abundance of nutrient-enriched grassland forbs such as common nettle *Urtica dioica* and white clover. In areas of commercial plantation forestry, Je grasslands also had rosebay willowherb, scattered heather and the moss *P. commune*.

Bracken

1.1.34 Open areas associated with upland acid grassland and / or heathland also occasionally contain Bracken, a non-notable habitat. Bracken habitats corresponding to the NVC type U20 were present in southern and central areas of the Site, associated with grasslands on grassy hillsides / in mosaics with W11 woodland, in mosaics with heathlands and associated with commercial plantation forestry. These bracken habitats in respect to the mosaics listed above ranged from grassy examples that shared some of the species found within U4 grassland communities, heathy examples that shared some species of those found in H12 heathland communities, to species-poor examples with little or no other species other than bracken.

Other Habitats

1.1.35 Largely unvegetated and of no note are the existing access tracks for the existing Beauly-Denny 400 kV overhead line, corresponding respectively to the UKHab category artificial unvegetated unsealed surface. The proposed access track is sited along much of this habitat type.

[8] Averis, B. and Averis, A. (2015). Plant Communities Found In Surveys By Ben And Alison Averis But Not Described In The UK National Vegetation Classification. Unpublished document.