VOLUME 1: CHAPTER 6: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

6. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

6.1 Executive Summary

6.1.1 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been undertaken for the Proposed Development within a study area of 2.5 km from the proposed overhead line (OHL), which is considered appropriate to identify all potential significant effects. The LVIA has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect and Landscape Assistant at horner + maclennan, a registered practice with the Landscape Institute, in accordance with best practice guidance, the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3).

6.1.2 This Chapter presents the summary of the findings of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). It describes the key sensitivities and potential changes to the physical and visual environment arising from the Proposed Development. The receptors within this Chapter are categorised in the following sections:

- Landscape character, landscape designations and protected landscapes; and
- Visual Amenity[1] of those present within the landscape, including established views from residential areas and travel routes.

6.1.3 The Proposed Development is required to transmit electricity generated by Strathy Wood Wind Farm, and this wind farm has therefore been considered as part of the assessment baseline.

6.1.4 The LVIA also gives consideration to cumulative effects occurring as a result of the addition of the Proposed Development to other infrastructure developments within the study area that form part of the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections. These include:

- Wind Farms
  - Strathy South Wind Farm (including on-site substation);
  - Melvich Wind Energy Hub (including on-site substation); and
  - Kirkton Energy Park (including on-site substation).
- Grid Infrastructure
  - Strathy South Wind Farm 'Southern Section' Grid Connection;
  - Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection;
  - Melvich Wind Energy Hub Grid Connection;
  - Kirkton Energy Park Grid Connection; and
  - Strathy Switching Station.

6.1.5 Mitigation measures, including landform and vegetation restoration through best practice construction techniques, are proposed to help minimise effects of the Proposed Development. The residual effects of the Proposed Development with proposed mitigation measures have been assessed after 10 years, allowing for the landscape and vegetation reinstatement to establish.

Summary of Effects

Landscape Effects

6.1.6 The assessment of potential landscape effects has considered the Landscape Character Types (LCTs) identified by NatureScot and designated and protected landscapes, including Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) and Wild Land Areas (WLAs). There would be no effects on either the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA or the East Halladale Flows WLA. There would be temporary Moderate Adverse (significant) direct and indirect

[1] Defined in GLVIA 3 as *'The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provided an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area'*

effects for LCT 134 (Sweeping Moorland and Flows) during construction due to the loss of landcover to temporary working areas and access tracks and an increase in the level of activity from that associated with Strathy North and Strathy Wood wind farms and forest extraction operations. There would be no predicted significant landscape effects for this LCT during operation.

6.1.7 No significant effects are predicted for any other LCT, designated or protected landscapes within the study area as a result of the Proposed Development during either construction or operation.

Visual Effects

6.1.8 The assessment of potential visual effects has considered views from visual receptors in and around buildings, on access tracks and at recreational locations.

6.1.9 Receptors at Building B3: Bowside Cottage (also known as Gamekeepers Cottage) would experience Moderate adverse (and significant) effects during construction, but no significant adverse effects are predicted during operation.

6.1.10 There would be no significant effects for receptors at Buildings B1: Bowside Lodge, B2: The Bothy or B4: Dallangwell during either construction or operation.

6.1.11 Users of Route R1: Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy would experience Moderate adverse (and significant) effects during both construction and operation.

6.1.12 There would be no significant visual effects during construction or operation for receptors using Route R2: Access Tracks from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation or Recreation Location Rec 1: River Strathy.

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

6.1.13 The cumulative landscape and visual assessment carried out for the Proposed Development has considered the potential landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development when added to two cumulative baseline scenarios.

- **Cumulative Scenario 1** comprises the consented and proposed wind farm developments and their associated grid infrastructure (associated with the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections) assuming the Proposed Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (and not the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub or the Alternative Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection); and
- **Cumulative Scenario 2** comprises the consented and proposed wind farm developments and their associated grid infrastructure (associated with the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections) assuming the Alternative Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection and the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub (and not the Proposed Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection).

6.1.14 No significant effects greater than those effects assessed for the Proposed Development (described above) in isolation have been identified as a result of the addition of the Proposed Development for either cumulative scenario.

6.2 Introduction

6.2.1 This Chapter presents the findings of the LVIA for the Proposed Development. The purpose of the LVIA is to identify and describe potential significant effects which may occur as a result of the Proposed Development to views obtained by those living, working and visiting in the area, and to the wider landscape resource, and the residual predicted significance of effects after mitigation. This Chapter considers potential effects, including cumulative effects, of the Proposed Development on visual amenity and landscape character during construction and operation. As described in **Chapter 3 - The Proposed Development**, it is anticipated that the effects associated with the construction phase could be considered to be representative of worst-case decommissioning effects on visual amenity and landscape character. As such, a separate assessment of potential decommissioning effects is not included in this Chapter.

6.2.2 The LVIA has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect and a Landscape Assistant at horner + maclennan (h+m) a registered practice with the Landscape Institute. The assessment has been undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance, the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA)[2]. A table presenting relevant qualifications and experience of key staff involved in the preparation of this Chapter is included in **Appendix 5.1: EIA Team**, contained within Volume 4 of this EIA Report.

6.2.3 The LVIA considers the potential changes to the character of the landscape which can include both physical changes and changes to perceptual qualities associated with the experience of the landscape and its value. Landscape and visual impacts are inter-related but are considered separately.

6.2.4 Visual impact assessment relates solely to the effect of a proposed development on views and visual amenity. All visual receptors are people.

6.3 Scope of Assessment

Study Area

6.3.1 The study area comprises the area where any potentially significant effects resulting from the Proposed Development would be likely to occur and has been established through consideration of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) (see paragraphs 6.3.2 to 6.3.5 below), and professional judgement. A ZTV run to 10 km from each tower and pole position has been produced in order to help establish the study area. Following review of this wider ZTV (see **Figure 6.1**) alongside site verification, and based on site analysis of the perceptibility of similar existing developments in the landscape, a focussed LVIA study area of 2.5 km from the Proposed Development has been considered appropriate to identify all potential significant effects (see **Figure 6.1**).

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

6.3.2 As an aid to establishing the scope for the LVIA, a ZTV has been produced for the Proposed Development and is presented in **Figures 6.1**[3]. The ZTV is a computer generated diagram which uses a terrain model to indicate areas from which the Proposed Development would be theoretically visible. The ZTV for the Proposed Development has been generated using ESRI ArcGIS software based on a terrain model using Ordnance Survey (OS) T5 Digital Terrain Model (DTM) data.

6.3.3 The ZTV has been run using the designed heights for each tower and pole, as identified in the Indicative Tower and Pole Schedule (see **Appendix 3.1**).

[2] Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. (2013). *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition*

[3] The ZTV and visualisation (in accordance with NatureScot and THC visualisation standards) has been produced by ASH design+assessment Ltd.

6.3.4 The ZTV has been prepared based on a viewer height of 2 m above ground, with earth curvature and light refractivity, set to 0.075 in accordance with NatureScot guidance[4].

6.3.5 Whilst the ZTV is a useful tool for the identification of potential effects, it is not indicative of an effect in itself. The ZTV does not take into account the potential screening effects of woodland and other localised features such as buildings, trees or local landform which are not captured by the OS T5 data. Nor does it give indication of the way in which a development may relate to its broader landscape context and the receding scale and visibility of features with distance. However, consideration of these aspects is taken into account during the landscape and visual impact assessment including through professional judgement (see paragraph 6.5.2).

Visualisation

6.3.6 A visualisation has been produced to support the LVIA[3], in accordance with NatureScot[4] and THC visualisation standards[5] and as described in **Appendix 6.1: Technical Methodologies for Visual Representation**. This shows the predicted appearance of the Proposed Development during operation. The visualisation is from the following location:

- Visualisation Location 1: Bowside Cottage (also known as Gamekeepers Cottage) (OS Grid Reference: 283071, 961060); (see **Volume 3a, Figure VL 1 a-c** and **Volume 3b, Figure VL1 a-e**).

6.3.7 The visualisation has been produced from a location agreed with The Highland Council to support the LVIA work and is intended to show the appearance of the Proposed Development within the landscape setting and was selected as it is representative of users of the Scottish Hill Track and visual receptors at Bowside. The Visualisation Location has not been assessed as a viewpoint. The visual assessment is a receptor-based assessment (giving consideration to all potential visual receptors) rather than a viewpoint-based assessment.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 The scope of the assessment has been determined through a combination of professional judgement, reference to the relevant guidance documents (noted in paragraph 6.2.2) and consultation with stakeholders, through scoping, and pre-application advice.

6.4.2 The Scoping Opinion of the Scottish Ministers was issued in August 2024[6] (see **Appendix 4.3**).

6.4.3 **Table 6.1** summarises the scoping and consultation responses relevant to the LVIA and provides information on where and/or how points raised have been addressed in this assessment.

Table 6.1: Consultation Responses

Organisation and Date	Summary of Consultation Response	EIA/Design Response to Consultee
The Highland Council 27th June 2024	The Highland Council (THC) outline the need for the distinction between landscape and visual contexts, and so therefore require separate assessments.	This LVIA considers and assesses the subjects of landscape and visual amenity separately. Section 6.9 includes an assessment of likely significant landscape effects and Section 6.10 includes an assessment of likely significant visual effects.

[4] Scottish Natural Heritage (2017) Visual Representation of Wind Farms (Version 2.2). Available at: https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-09/Guidance%20-%20Visual%20representation%20of%20wind%20farms%20-%20Feb%202017.pdf
[5] The Highland Council (2016) Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/12880/visualisation_standards_for_wind_energy_developments
[6] Scottish Government (August 2024) Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection Scoping Opinion

Organisation and Date	Summary of Consultation Response	EIA/Design Response to Consultee
	THC are generally content with the viewpoints proposed in the Scoping Report. The purpose of the selected and agreed viewpoint shall be clearly identified and stated in the supporting information.	Paragraph 6.3.6- 6.3.7 identifies and describes the viewpoint used for production of the photomontage to support and inform the LVIA.
	THC suggest that photomontages should be prepared to Highland Council Standards. Separate volumes of visualisations should be prepared to both Highland Council Standards and NatureScot guidance. These should be provided in hard copy and request that for THC's volume, these are provided in an A3 ring bound folder for ease of use.	A photomontage to assist with the assessment of the LVIA is included in accordance with NS guidance in **Volume 3a** and in accordance with THC guidance in **Volume 3b** of the EIA Report. It covers all relevant impacts of all elements of the Proposed Development. As described in paragraph 6.3.7, the visual assessment is receptor-based and considers all potential receptors within the study area rather than a small number of viewpoints, which provides a more detailed and robust assessment.
	The EIA should include the expected visual impact of all elements associated with a Proposed Development (including the tracks, substations, battery storage and on-site borrow pits).	This landscape and visual assessment considers the impacts of all elements associated with the Proposed Development.
	The LVIA should clearly set out the methodology with a clear matrix approach supported by descriptive text setting out how conclusions have been reached.	The LVIA has been carried out in accordance with best practice guidance The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA3) and criteria used are in accordance with this guidance in terms of identification and presentation of significant effects as set out in Section 6.5.
	THC require that all core paths and long-distance trails, are assessed when considering the impacts on recreational routes.	The visual assessment in Section 6.10 considers the impacts on route based receptors including recreational users of paths, tracks and other established walking routes.
	THC expect that LVIA refers to the Councils Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance and expect an assessment of the proposal against the criterion set out within this guidance.	The LVIA has taken into account the ten criteria set out in The Highland Council's Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, November 2016 and Addendum, December 2017.
	THC expect that the LVIA assesses the impacts on any landscapes designated at a national and local scale.	There are no areas designated for landscape quality or Wild Land Areas within the study area.

Organisation and Date	Summary of Consultation Response	EIA/Design Response to Consultee
	THC consider it appropriate to include an assessment of the special qualities of the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra Special Landscape Area (SLA) within the LVIA.	The Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA lies almost 5 km from the Proposed Development to the north and would have limited intervisibility with the Proposed Development. Nevertheless, it has been considered in the landscape assessment in Section 6.9.
	THC expect that an assessment of the impact on all potentially effected Wild Land Areas (WLAs) be included in the EIAR, given the proximity to a number of WLAs and the theoretical visibility of the scheme from within the WLAs.	The Wild Land Area (WLA) 39: East Halladale Flows lies more than 6 km from the Proposed Development to the east and would have no intervisibility with the Proposed Development and is therefore not included in the landscape assessment.
	The residential visual amenity should be assessed for all properties, settlements, housing groups within 2 km of the development within the LVIA. THC agree that given Braerathy Lodge is derelict and is to be demolished, it is acceptable to scope out of the assessment.	Potential effects of the Proposed Development on visual amenity during construction and operation is set out in Section 6.10.

6.5 Methodology

Assessment Guidance

6.5.1 The LVIA has been prepared with reference to the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment,* Third Edition (GLVIA3)[2] and Landscape Character Assessment: *Guidance for England and Scotland*.[7]

Professional Judgement

6.5.2 GLVIA3 places a strong emphasis on the importance of professional judgement in identifying and defining the significance of landscape and visual effects. As part of this assessment, professional judgement has been used in combination with structured methods and criteria to evaluate landscape value (as defined in paragraph 6.5.12 and **Table 6.2**) and landscape and visual sensitivity (as defined in paragraph 6.5.25 – 6.5.27 and **Table 6.3**), magnitude of change (as defined in paragraphs 6.5.28-6.5.29 and **Table 6.4**), and significance of effect (as defined in paragraphs 6.5.30 – 6.5.34 and **Table 6.5**). The assessment has been undertaken and verified by two Landscape Professionals (one Chartered Landscape Architect and one Landscape Assistant) to provide a robust and consistent approach.

Key Stages of the Assessment

6.5.3 GLVIA3 advises that landscape and visual effects should be assessed from a clear understanding of the development proposed and any mitigation measures which are being adopted.

6.5.4 The GLVIA3 methodology for landscape assessment involves an appreciation of the existing landscape resource, the susceptibility of its key components to accept the change proposed, and an understanding of the potential effects which could occur and how these could affect these key components.

[7] Scottish Natural Heritage, The Countryside Agency. (2002). *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*.

6.5.5 Familiarity with the site and the extent, nature and expectation of existing views by visual receptors is a key factor in establishing the visual sensitivity in terms of the development proposed. The guidelines require evaluation of magnitude of change to views experienced by sensitive receptors, comprising individuals living, working, travelling and carrying out other activities within the landscape, and the subsequent evaluation of the significance of effects.

6.5.6 The potential to mitigate adverse effects should also be considered for both landscape and visual assessment.

6.5.7 There are five key stages to the assessment:

- Establishment of the baseline;
- Appreciation of the development proposed;
- Identification of key landscape and visual receptors;
- Identification of potential effects; and
- Assessment of significance of effect.

Desk Study

6.5.8 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through a combination of desk study and site appraisal. The desk review has involved a review of the following general documents and sources:

- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)[8];
- The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (THC, 2012)[9] and Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) (THC, 2018)10;
- Scoping responses and other consultation responses for the Proposed Development (see **Table 6.1**);
- Online mapping and aerial photography resources from Ordnance Survey, Google, Bing and National Library of Scotland; and
- The ZTV for the Proposed Development (see **Figure 6.1**).

Field Survey

6.5.9 Site survey for the Proposed Development was undertaken in April 2024.

6.5.10 In addition, the following specific tasks were undertaken for the assessment of landscape and visual effects:

Landscape Assessment Baseline Tasks

6.5.11 The desk review for the landscape assessment has included a review of the following additional documents and resources:

- NatureScot Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Descriptions[11] (SNH, 2019 [online]); and
- Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas (horner + maclennan and Wood, 2011)[12].

[8] National Planning Framework (NPF) 4. Available at: National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

[9] The Highland Council (2012) *Highland-wide Local Development Plan.* Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan [May 2024]

[10] The Highland Council (2018) *Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan.* Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/19712/casplan_adopted

[11] NatureScot: (2019): Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions [ONLINE] https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions [accessed April 2024].

[12] Horner + Maclennan and Wood, M (2011) Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas, The Highland Council.

Identification of Baseline Landscape Value

6.5.12 The value of the landscape is an important consideration in informing later judgement of the significance of effects. Landscape value concerns the perceived importance of the landscape when considered as a whole, and within the context of the study area, and is established through consideration of the following factors:

- Presence of landscape designations, other inventory or registered landscapes/landscape features or identified planning constraints;
- The scenic quality of the landscape;
- Perceptual aspects, such as wildness or tranquillity;
- Conservation interests such as cultural heritage features or associations, or if the landscape supports notable habitats or species;
- Recreational value; and
- Rarity, either in the national or local context, or if it is considered to be a particularly important example of a specific landscape type.

6.5.13 It should be noted that absence of a designation does not necessarily mean that a landscape or component is not highly valued, as factors such as accessibility and local scarcity can render areas of nationally unremarkable quality highly valuable as a local resource.

6.5.14 Criteria for the allocation of perceived landscape value are outlined in **Table 6.2** below:

Table 6.2: Landscape Value Criteria

Landscape Value	Criteria
High	• The landscape is closely associated with features of international or national importance which are rare within the wider context; • The landscape is of high scenic quality and forms a key part of an important designated landscape or planning constraint; and/or • The landscape is an example of a scarce resource within the local context and is of considerable local importance for its, scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Medium	• The landscape forms part of a designated landscape or is associated with other features of importance but is not rare or distinctive within the local context; and/or • The landscape is one of a number within the local context appreciated for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Low	• The landscape characteristics are common within the local and regional context and the landscape is not associated with any particular features or attributes considered to be important; and/or • The landscape is of poor scenic quality and is not appreciated for any recreational or cultural associations.

Visual Assessment Baseline Tasks

6.5.15 A combination of desk and field survey was used to establish the range and distribution of potential visual receptors within the study area. Visual receptors can be defined as individuals occupying and using the study area with the potential to obtain views of the Proposed Development. Potential visual receptors included in the assessment have included those experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes, and popular viewpoints used by the public.

6.5.16 The following additional resources were used to enhance understanding of the use of the study area by potential visual receptors:

- The Highland Council (THC) Core Paths Interactive Map[13] [online];
- Scottish Hill Tracks (Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways), 2011)[14]; and
- Other web based and published sources providing information on local resources and activities within the study area (see the list of references in Section 6.15).

6.5.17 Site visits were undertaken to verify the visual receptors identified through desk study, identify any further potential receptors which had been missed and to collate information on baseline visual amenity, including information on the types and activities of visual receptors likely to be present, and the nature of the existing views which are obtained. Site recording involved the completion of standardised recording forms and annotation of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey plans, supported by a photographic record of views from key receptor locations.

Appreciation of the Development Proposed

6.5.18 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline landscape, and any peripheral or ancillary features proposed. Analysis of the proposed activities and changes which would take place leads to an understanding of the potential effects that may occur to the landscape and visual resource.

6.5.19 This stage has included review of all available desk-based information relating to the Proposed Development in terms of its long-term physical appearance and requirements for construction and access, as detailed in **Chapter 3**.

Identification of Key Landscape and Visual Receptors

6.5.20 The identification of key landscape and visual receptors with the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development is the first step in the analysis of the potential for significant effects to occur. Landscape and visual receptors can be described as follows:

- **Landscape receptors** comprise key characteristics or individual features which contribute to the value of the landscape and have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. Landscape receptors are identified through analysis of baseline characteristics when considered in relation to the impacts which might result from a development of the type proposed.
- **Visual receptors** comprise individuals experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes and popular viewpoints used by the public. Potential visual receptors are identified through analysis of desk resources, mapping and field survey, as described under 'Establishment of the Baseline' above. A review of the ZTV in the context of site survey is used to identify the potential for visual receptors to be affected by the Proposed Development.

Identification of Potential Effects

6.5.21 The next step in the assessment process involves the identification of potential effects which may occur as a result of the interaction of the Proposed Development with the identified landscape and visual receptors.

[13] The Highland Council, Core Paths Interactive Map [ONLINE]: https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fd3fc9c72d545f7bcf1b43bf5c8445f [accessed April 2024].
[14] The Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways) (2011): Scottish Hill Tracks (Fifth Edition) Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

6.5.22 The assessment takes into account direct effects upon existing views, landscape elements, features and key characteristics and, also, indirect effects which may occur secondarily to changes affecting another landscape component or area. The identification of potential effects is a two-fold process, giving consideration as to how these effects may arise from aspects of the Proposed Development and how they may be accommodated by the existing baseline features.

6.5.23 Where it is established that potential effects could be limited by mitigation measures, these are also given consideration.

6.5.24 Potential effects are evaluated through the allocation of criteria for sensitivity and magnitude.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivity

6.5.25 Sensitivity concerns the nature of the baseline landscape or visual receptor, and the ability to accommodate development of the type proposed without compromising the key characteristics and/or composition.

6.5.26 There are two aspects which contribute to the evaluation of landscape and visual sensitivity: value and susceptibility to change. The consideration of these two separate aspects in the differing assessments for landscape and visual amenity are outlined below:

- Landscape
  - Value: The baseline value of the landscape and the contributory value of individual landscape receptors to the landscape as a whole; and
  - Susceptibility: The ability of landscape receptors to accommodate development of the type proposed without changing the intrinsic qualities of the landscape as a whole.
- Visual Amenity
  - Value: The baseline value of a particular view to the visual receptor, including the perceived; and
  - Susceptibility: The susceptibility of the viewer to changes to the view, giving consideration to the particular activity they may be involved in and also the composition of the baseline view and importance of the proposed area of change as a part of the view.

6.5.27 Criteria for the evaluation of sensitivity to change are presented in **Table 6.3**.

Table 6.3: Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Criteria

Sensitivity Rating	Landscape Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
High	A highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present.
Medium	A reasonably valued landscape with a composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view

Sensitivity Rating	Landscape Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
		and/or where some detracting features are present; • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and/or where some detracting features are present; • roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and • workplaces where the changed aspect is an important element of the view and there are no detracting features present.
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape which is potentially tolerant of a large degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and/or numerous detracting features are present; • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and/or where numerous detracting features are present; • roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and/or where some detracting features are present; and • workplaces where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and/or where some detracting features are present.

Landscape and Visual Magnitude

6.5.28 Magnitude of change concerns the extent to which the existing landscape character or view would be altered by the Proposed Development. Elements specific to the evaluation of magnitude of change for the differing assessments of landscape and visual amenity are detailed below:

- Landscape
  - The degree to which features or characteristics may be removed, altered or added within the landscape;
  - The geographical extent of proposed changes;
  - Whether changes would be direct or indirect; and
  - The potential duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).
- Visual Amenity

- The scale or extent of proposed changes within the view;
- The location of proposed changes within the view, relevant to other existing features;
- The extent to which this may alter the composition or focus of the view; and
- The duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).

6.5.29 Criteria for the evaluation of magnitude of change are presented in **Table 6.4.** In recognition of the differing changes that would occur over time, two ratings for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and approximately 10 years post construction, once landscape/habitat reinstatement has had time to establish. The magnitude considers a baseline situation where the turbines of the consented Strathy Wood Wind Farm would be in situ, as the OHL would be dependent on this development.

Table 6.4: Landscape and Visual Magnitude of Change Criteria

Magnitude Rating	Landscape Magnitude	Visual Magnitude
High	Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive change over a more limited area.	The Proposed Development would result in a very noticeable change in the existing view.
Medium	Perceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to notable change in a localised area.	The Proposed Development would result in a noticeable change in the existing view.
Low	Virtually imperceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or perceptible change in a localised area.	The Proposed Development would result in a perceptible change in the existing view.
Negligible	No discernible change in any landscape characteristics or components.	The Proposed Development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view.

Assessment of Significance of Effects

6.5.30 Evaluation of the predicted significance of effect has been carried out through the analysis of the anticipated magnitude of change in relation to the landscape or visual sensitivity, taking into account any proposed mitigation measures, and is established using professional judgement.

6.5.31 In recognition of the potential for effects to vary over time, the assessment has been undertaken at two different stages: during the construction phase, and during operation, once landscape/habitat reinstatement measures have been allowed to establish. This is assumed to be approximately 10 years after the completion of construction and reinstatement works.

6.5.32 The significance of effect for landscape and visual elements is considered as follows:

- Landscape Effects
  - The assessment takes into account identified effects upon existing landscape receptors and assesses the extent to which these would be lost or modified in the context of their importance in determining the existing baseline character.
- Visual Effects

- The assessment takes into account likely changes to the visual composition, including the extent to which new features would distract or screen existing elements in the view or disrupt the scale, structure or focus of the existing view.

6.5.33 The assessment takes into consideration the potential for effects to be adverse, where changes such as the addition of new distracting features, or the removal of existing positive features, are anticipated to negatively affect the landscape or view; or beneficial, where changes, such as the removal of existing distracting features or the addition of associated planting or other mitigation measures are anticipated to positively influence the landscape or view.

6.5.34 Criteria used for the assessment of effects are presented in **Table 6.5**. For the purposes of the LVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.

Table 6.5: Landscape and Visual Significance of Effect Criteria

Effect/ Significance	Landscape Effect	Visual Effect
Major Adverse/ Significant	The Proposed Development is at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and would be a dominant feature, resulting in considerable reduction in scenic quality and large scale change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would become a prominent and very detracting feature and would result in a very noticeable deterioration to an existing highly valued and well composed view.
Moderate Adverse/ Significant	The Proposed Development is out of scale with the landscape, or inconsistent with the local pattern and landform and may be locally dominant and/or result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would introduce some detracting features to an existing highly valued view or would be more prominent within a pleasing or less well composed view, resulting in a noticeable deterioration of the quality of view.
Minor Adverse/ Not Significant	The Proposed Development does not quite fit with the scale, landform or local pattern of the landscape and may be locally intrusive but would result in an inappreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a perceptible but not detracting feature within a pleasing or valued view or would be a prominent feature within a poorly composed view of limited value, resulting in a small deterioration to the existing view.
Negligible/ Not Significant	The Proposed Development sits well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and/or would not result in any discernible reduction or improvement in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a barely perceptible feature within the existing view and/or would not result in any discernible deterioration or improvement to the view.
Minor Beneficial/ Not Significant	The Proposed Development would add/remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a small or localised improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a fairly attractive feature and/or remove a fairly detracting feature from an existing less well composed view, resulting in a small improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.

Effect/ Significance	Landscape Effect	Visual Effect
Moderate Beneficial/ Significant	The Proposed Development would add/remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would become a new attractive feature within, or result in the removal or partial removal of an existing detracting feature from, a poorly composed or less well composed view leading to a noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.
Major Beneficial/ Significant	The Proposed Development would add/remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a very noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a prominent new attractive feature within, or result in the removal of an existing very detracting feature from, a poorly composed view leading to a very noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.

6.6 Limitations and Assumptions

6.6.1 The LVIA is subject to the following limitations and assumptions:

- The prominence of the Proposed Development in the landscape and views will vary according to the prevailing weather conditions. The LVIA has been carried out, as is best practice, by assuming the 'worst case' scenario i.e. on a clear, bright day in early spring, when neither foreground deciduous foliage nor haze can interfere with the clarity of the view obtained.
- The assessment of operational effects assumes a situation where the turbines of the consented Strathy Wood Wind Farm would be in-situ and operational, because the Proposed Development would be dependent on this other development.
- The assessment of operational effects assumes that disturbed areas not required for the operation of the Proposed Development (temporary tracks, working areas, excavations for tower, pole and cable sealing end (CSE) compound foundations etc.) would be successfully reinstated to reflect, as far as possible, similar vegetation types and appearance to that present prior to construction. It is noted that these vegetation types may not necessarily comprise identical habitat types and value to those previously present. Habitat change is discussed separately in **Chapter 7 - Ecology**.
- ZTVs are used to inform the landscape, visual and cumulative assessments. The limitations and technical specifications for production of ZTVs are included in paragraphs 6.3.2 to 6.3.5 and **Appendix 6.1**.
- The field assessment of visual effects has been undertaken from public roads, footpaths or open spaces. For residential receptors, assumptions have been made about the types of rooms in buildings and about the types and importance of views from these rooms. For there to be a visual effect, there is the need for a viewer and therefore only buildings that are in use have been considered in the visual assessment.
- The assessment of effects on visual receptors occupying buildings such as residences and public buildings includes consideration of potential for views from exterior areas associated with the building including gardens where appropriate. These effects are referenced where relevant.
- The assessment reflects the baseline situation at the time of site work (April 2024) and therefore does not take account of any changes to the landscape fabric which may have occurred after this time.
- The cumulative assessment is limited to permanent effects as it is unlikely that temporary construction operations for the Proposed Development and other cumulative developments would occur concurrently.

6.7 Landscape Baseline Conditions

Overview

6.7.1 The study area for the Proposed Development lies approximately 2 km to the south of the settlement of Strathy. It comprises a 5 km wide corridor (2.5 km either side of the OHL centreline) which runs approximately parallel to, and largely to the east of, the River Strathy. To the west of the river the land rises to a height of approximately 180 m AOD and is almost entirely occupied by a commercial forest plantation. Within this forest there are 33 wind turbines with a blade tip height of 110 m and rotor diameter of 82 m (Strathy North Wind Farm). An additional 11 wind turbines with a blade tip height of 180 m and a rotor diameter of 137 m have been consented (Strathy Wood Wind Farm) and these have been included in the baseline for the assessment of operational effects as the Proposed Development is required to transmit the electricity generated from the turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm.

6.7.2 To the east of the River Strathy, the land rises to Beinn Ruadh (254 m AOD) and neighbouring low summits. The landcover is predominantly moorland with a series of lochs and lochans to the east of the hills.

6.7.3 Existing man-made elements comprise a wide track which runs southwards to the east of the river before forking to head west across the river via a baillie bridge to access the buildings at Dallangwell, the Strathy North Substation, and the wind farm itself. There are three other buildings at Bowside which are understood to be occupied as holiday rentals although one is currently undergoing refurbishment.

Landscape Designations

6.7.4 Landscapes can be ascribed an international, national, regional or local designation that recognises the importance of the landscape for its scenic interest or attractiveness. Areas of landscape may also be protected by planning policy at either a national or regional level.

6.7.5 There are no areas designated for landscape quality or Wild Land Areas within the study area. The Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA lies just under 5 km to the north of the Proposed Development. It is 47 km^2 in extent and the Special Qualities (SQs) of the SLA are:

- SQ1 – Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea;
- SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic;
- SQ3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views; and
- SQ4 – Historical Dimension.

6.7.6 Effects on the SQs as a result of the Proposed Development are described in Section 6.9 of this Chapter.

6.7.7 The Wild Land Area (WLA) 39: East Halladale Flows is more than 6 km to the east of the Proposed Development but has no theoretical visibility and is therefore not included in the assessment.

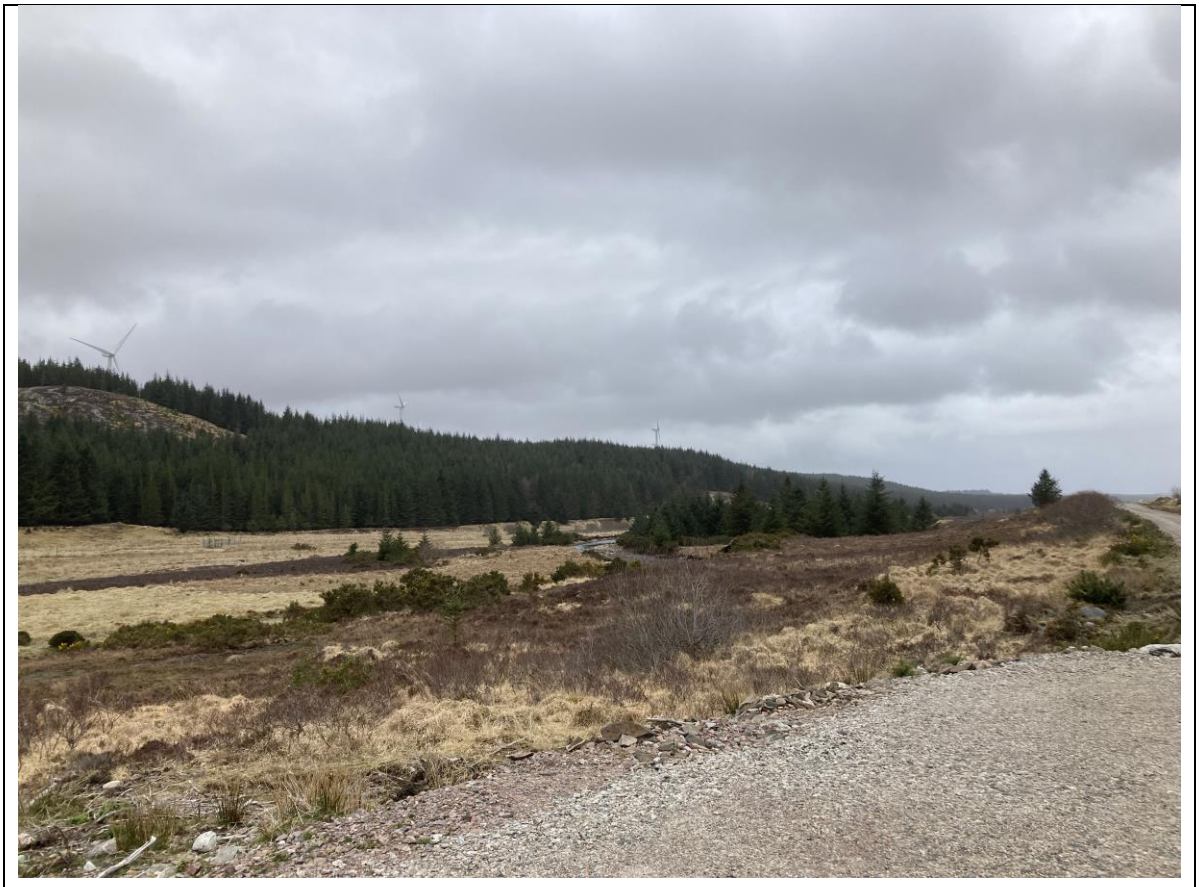
Landscape Character

6.7.8 NatureScot has undertaken detailed review and classification of various landscape areas and types of Scotland (SNH, 2019 [online][11]). Two individual Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are identified within the 5 km study area corridor for the Proposed Development as follows (see **Figure 6.2**):

- LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows; and
- LCT 136 Rocky Moorland and Hills.

6.7.9 These are described in further detail in **Tables 6.6** and **Table 6.7** below, along with the key characteristics which have been identified by NatureScot. Characteristics of specific note and relevance within the study area are also identified.

Table 6.6: LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows

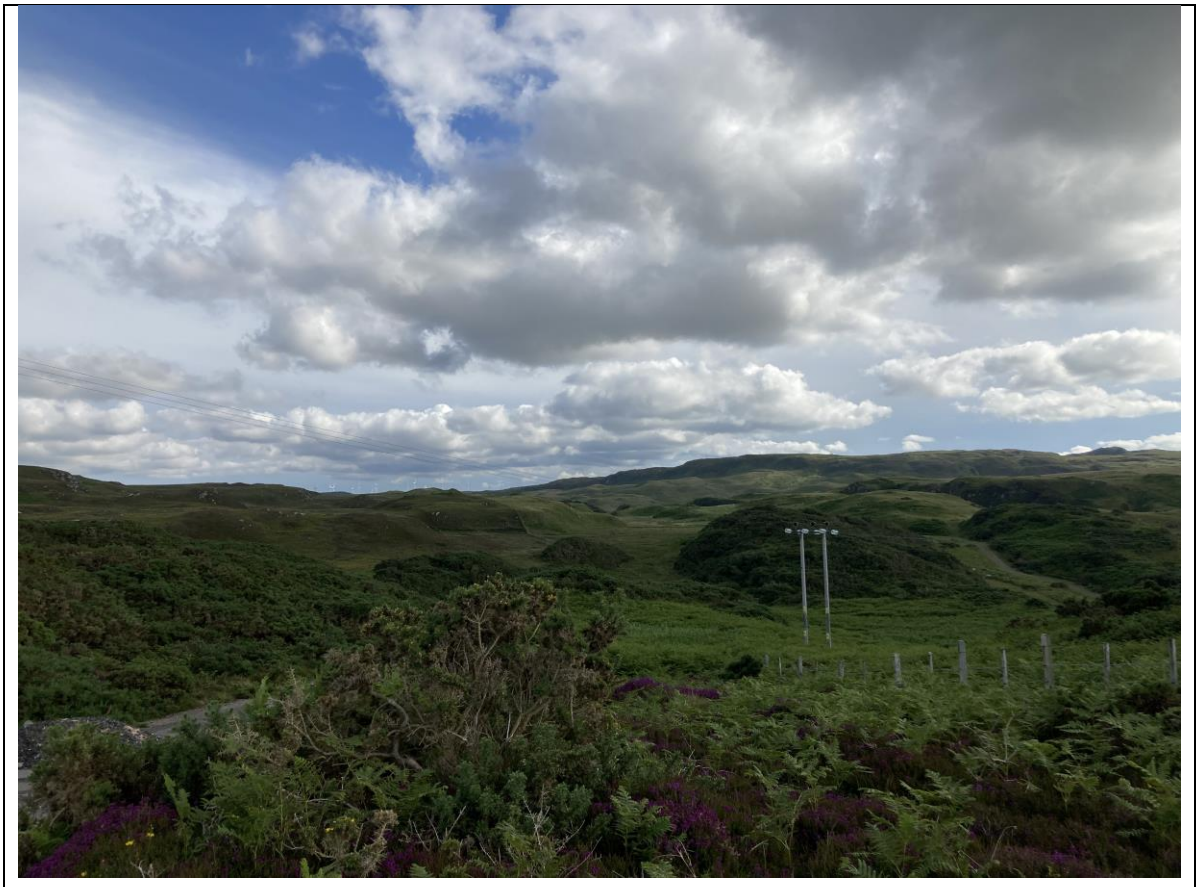


View over LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows from the access track/Hill Track 344 (NC 82789, 57138)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Gently sloping or undulating landform which lies generally below 350 m. • Occasional isolated hills of limited height form local landmark features. • Lochs and mature, meandering rivers. • Very distinct flora, dominated by sphagnum mosses, produced by the wetness and infertility of the flows. • Areas of peat cuttings and hagging. • Pockets of improved grazing, mainly within the outer fringes of sweeping moorland. • Coniferous forest forming a dominant characteristic within some parts of this landscape character type. • Ribbons of broadleaf woodland occasionally run along the water courses and loch edges. • Very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath. • Vehicular tracks within parts of the landscape. • Wind farms, transmission lines, the A9 and a network of minor roads are key features within the more modified outer fringes within Caithness. • Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space. • Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland. • Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau. • A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.

Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT occurs extensively throughout East Sutherland and Caithness covering more than 2,000 km^2. Just over 40 km^2 of this LCT lies within the study area lying to the west of Strath Halladale and occupies approximately the vast majority (over 90%) of the study area. All of the Proposed Development lies within this LCT.
Description	This flat, generally smooth and gently undulating landform largely coincides with areas of blanket bog supporting a diverse range of wet heath, grassland and mire. Lochs, lochans and the meandering River Strathy sit within the shallow valleys and basins as focal features. Large areas of flatter peatlands are patterned with a dominant intricate network of water courses, dubh lochans and a diverse range of pool systems, with wet, spongy, vegetation. The landcover is a simple composition of moorland and mire forming low, smooth and largely uninterrupted skylines. Coniferous forestry has a strong presence in the western half of the study area. There are fragmented areas of broadleaf scrub woodland. The area is extremely sparsely settled with buildings at Bowside and Dallangwell, and evidence of past habitation in the form of hut circles and sheep folds. Vehicular tracks are used mainly to provide access for deer stalking, to forests and fishing lochs and the wind farm at Strathy North. The wind turbines at Strathy North are prominent above the forest canopy to the west of the Proposed Development site and those at Strathy Wood would also be noticeable. Wood pole mounted overhead lines, forest access tracks and vehicle movements associated with timber harvesting detract from any strong sense of naturalness and remoteness experienced in other incidences of this LCT in East Caithness and Sutherland. Beinn Ruadh which rises to 254 m AOD is a locally prominent hill within the study area. Although outwith the study area, Ben Griam Mòr and Ben Griam Beg are prominent hill summits lying more than 12 km to the south.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Landform generally below 350 m with gentle slopes and undulations. • Lochs, lochans and the meandering River Strathy. With associated pockets of semi-improved grazing. • Coniferous forest forms a dominant feature within the western part of the study area. • Very sparsely settled. • Vehicular tracks and forest accesses. With associated vehicle movement. • Wind turbines are prominent features with transmission lines noticeable features particularly where they break the skyline. • Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines. • Sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau. • A strong sense of remoteness is diminished by the presence of forest tracks and timber harvesting activity.
Landscape Value	This LCT does not lie within any area designated for landscape value and it is experienced largely by local residents, visitors, forest employees and walkers on the Scottish Hill Track 344 - Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy. The landscape value of this LCT within the study area is considered to be **Medium**.

Table 6.7: LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland



View over LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland towards Strathy North Wind Farm from near Armadale. (NC 79894, 63877)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Rough landcover with an abundance of scattered rocks, boulders and rock outcrops. • Many lochans sited within rocky-edged cavities contributing to the complexity of the rocky moorland. • Pockets of broadleaf woodland and scrub accentuating the rough texture of the rocky moorland. • Particularly distinctive rocky hills lying on the fringes of the Kyle of Tongue and at the head of Loch Eriboll. • A number of often prominent rocky hills outcropping along the coast, increasing scenic diversity. • Extensive moorland found in the Cape Wrath area with less exposed bedrock and some large areas of more gently undulating peatland. • Currently largely uninhabited landscape, although abutting more settled coasts and loch shores. • Numerous prehistoric and historic environment features, with concentrations around the straths and coasts. • Highly visible from the coast road around north-west Sutherland. • Provides the foreground to spectacular views over the coast and sea and also inland to the Lone Mountains. • Feeling of containment and seclusion, increased by small knolls, dips and narrow valleys.

Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT is principally found in the far northwest of Scotland, in a broad coastal band west of Bettyhill to Cape Wrath, and around the Kyle of Tongue and Loch Eriboll. It covers approximately 70 km^2. Just under 3 km^2 of this LCT lies within the study area, to the west of the Proposed Development site, occupying approximately 6% of the study area.
Description	The lower-lying moorland is patterned with crags and has a rough, complex landform with many rocky knolls, dips, lochans and narrow craggy gorges. The landscape is uninhabited with no evidence of past habitation. Most of this LCT within the study area is afforested with forest access tracks providing access to several of the Strathy North wind turbines which sit within the southern part of this LCT.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Scattered boulders, rocks and rock outcrops. • Complex rocky moorland. • Largely uninhabited landscape. • Wind turbines at Strathy North are prominent features in the adjoining LCT and those at Strathy Wood would also be noticeable. • Landform is largely blanketed with the coniferous plantation.
Landscape Value	This LCT does not lie within any area designated for landscape value and it is experienced largely by forest employees. The value of this LCT is considered to be **Low**.

6.8 Visual Baseline Conditions

Interpretation of ZTV

6.8.1 The ZTV (see **Figure 6.1**) indicates that there is relatively widespread theoretical visibility within a corridor extending no more than approximately 1.6 km to the east of the Proposed Development and fragmented theoretical visibility throughout the wider study area to the west. Inevitably, the greatest number of towers would be seen from areas in close proximity to the Proposed Development with the highest concentration of towers being visible from the southern end of the OHL.

6.8.2 The ZTV takes no account of the screening effects of vegetation and, as much of the area to the west of the River Strathy and a small area to the east at the southern end of the study area, is under forest cover, the actual level of visibility would be considerably less.

Visual Receptors

6.8.3 Visual receptors within the study area comprise residents (permanent or temporary) or others present in and around buildings and those using access tracks and recreational routes or features. The locations of all visual receptors are shown on **Figure 6.3** and described below.

Building Based Receptors

6.8.4 Building-based receptors within the study area are very limited and include:

- Bowside Lodge;
- The Bothy;
- Bowside Cottage (also known as Gamekeepers Cottage); and
- Dallangwell.

6.8.5 Bowside Lodge, The Bothy and Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) are all available as rental accommodation from Bowside Fishing[15], although it is understood that Bowside Lodge and Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) are currently being renovated.

Route Based Receptors

6.8.6 Route based visual receptors include those using public roads and recreational users of paths, tracks and other established walking routes. Views from the following routes have been identified within the study areas for inclusion within the assessment:

- Scottish Hill Track 344 Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy; and
- Access tracks (from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation).

Recreational Based Receptors

6.8.7 Potential recreational viewing receptors include those using public viewpoints and local recreational stops. Recreational receptors of the Scottish Hill Track 344 are assessed under route-based receptors. There is one further visual receptor location included in this category that will be included in the assessment: anglers on the River Strathy.

6.8.8 The baseline conditions for each of the visual receptors noted above is described in **Table 6.8.**

Table 6.8: Description of existing views for Visual Receptors

Receptor No.	Receptor	Description of Existing View
Building 1 (B1)	**Bowside Lodge** Visitors to the accommodation *Note this property is currently undergoing renovation.*	The orientation of this property is west – east with principal windows on the ground and first floors on these façades (assumed for west elevation). Views are curtailed by mainly coniferous trees in the grounds but there are some views westwards to the forested hillside and views along the driveway to the track and rising ground to the east. Views southwards from outside the property within the garden ground would include the upper parts of turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm (once constructed).
Building 2 (B2)	**The Bothy** Visitors to the accommodation	This property is orientated north – south with principal windows on the south façade looking over the garden grounds with the upper slopes of the distant hills to the south and the upper portions of wind turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm (once constructed) seen above the garden boundary vegetation. There are secondary windows on the western and eastern sides which look over the garden area with views west curtailed by vegetation; views east are also limited by garden vegetation although there is a narrow slot view along the access track to the hill slope to the east. Bedroom windows face north and views are limited to the garden ground due to the presence of mature trees along the northern boundary.

[15] https://bowside.fishing/accommodation/

Receptor No.	Receptor	Description of Existing View
Building 3 (B3)	**Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage)** Visitors to the accommodation *Note this property is currently undergoing renovation.*	The orientation of this property is north – south with windows on the southern façade and a skylight on the northern side of the property. There is a north facing window in an outbuilding to the north of the cottage. Views south and south-west are along the access track over moorland vegetation and towards the operational Strathy North Wind Farm, the turbines of which are visible above the forest canopy. The turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm (once constructed) would also be visible interrupting the view towards Ben Griam Mòr and Ben Griam Beg; the view south would be of a man modified landscape dominated by wind turbines and commercial forest.
Building 4 (B4)	**Dallangwell** Employees / Residents *Note: Formerly a keeper's cottage, this building was in use as site accommodation at the time of survey. It has been assumed for the purposes of the assessment that it will revert to residential accommodation post-construction of Strathy South Wind Farm (i.e. after 2027) as advised by the Strathy South Wind Farm developer.*	There are views eastwards from some parts of this property over moorland towards Beinn Ruadh. Forest felling and haulage activity can be seen looking down across the strath. Turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm (once constructed) would be visible looking to the south.
Route 1 (R1a and R1b)	**Scottish Hill Track 344 Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy** Cyclists, Walkers, Forest workers	This track is orientated north – south and runs parallel and to the east of the River Strathy. It is currently being used as the haul track for forest extraction as well as forming the access to the properties described above, to the Strathy North Wind Farm and the substation buildings. It would also be used to access Strathy Wood Wind Farm. The view for cyclists and walkers, heading south, historically focussed on the long-range view to Ben Griam Mòr and Ben Griam Beg but the baseline view for the assessment would include the turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm which, together with the turbines at Strathy North Wind Farm would dominate the view. Views west are over the River Strathy flood plain, with small stands of scrub woodland to the forested rising slopes west of the river. The wind turbines at Strathy North Wind Farm are dominant man-made, moving features in the view. Other man-made elements include the few scattered buildings, the existing Strathy North 132 kV trident 'H' wood pole OHL and the track itself. The turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm (once constructed) would also be prominent.

Receptor No.	Receptor	Description of Existing View
		The view for cyclists and walkers heading north is dominated by the wind turbines in the forest to the west of the River Strathy. Receptors using the track would also pass in close proximity to Strathy Wood Wind Farm turbines and on-site substation (once constructed). Other man-made elements would be notable as cyclists and walkers approach the scattered settlement at Bowside. Views east for people travelling in both directions are curtailed by the rising moorland and grass covered slopes below Beinn Ruadh and lower summits to the north and south.
Route 2 (R2)	**Access tracks (from Route 1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation)** Forest and Wind Farm / Substation workers	Receptors using this route from the junction with the Scottish Hill Track 344 cross the strath of the River Strathy with views from the bailie bridge looking north and south along the forest edge, with wind turbines at Strathy North and Strathy Wood (once constructed) wind farms being prominent moving, man-made elements in views south. There are views towards the works compound and buildings at Dallangwell and the electricity substation buildings and perimeter fence, before the track enters the forest and views, are curtailed by vegetation.
Recreational Viewpoint 1 (Rec1)	**River Strathy** Fly fishers and ghillies	Fly fishers and ghillies' attention would be focussed on the river and immediate environs which comprise moorland and rough grassland interspersed with pockets of deciduous scrub as patches of self seeded conifers. Bridges crossing the river at Dallangwell and Braerathy are notable features from adjacent beats. Wind turbines at Strathy North and Strathy Wood wind farms would be prominent features looking southwards from some stretches of the river.

6.9 Assessment of Likely Significant Landscape Effects

6.9.1 This section provides an assessment of the effects that the Proposed Development would have on the landscape character of the study area during both construction and operation where operational effects are assessed 10 years after completion, in accordance with the effects criteria set out in Section 6.5.

6.9.2 Less than 1.37 km^2 (less than 3%) of the total area of the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA (47 km^2) has theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development (see **Figure 6.1**). Assessment of potential effects on the Special Qualities (SQs) of the SLA are presented in **Table 6.9**.

Table 6.9: Potential Effects on the key characteristics and special qualities of Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA

Underpinning landscape characteristics to inform detailed SQ descriptions	Impacts of the Proposed Development on underpinning key characteristics and the effects on SQs
SQ1 – Dramatically intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea	
1. This is a distinctive stretch of rocky coastline which is typically viewed from the cliff tops and enclosed sandy beaches or from the sea by passing vessels. It is deeply eroded by the sea to form a complex assemblage of headlands, cliffs, promontories, stacks, arches, caves and ravines which combine to form unique features along the coastal edge. 2. This coast can be an awe-inspiring, particularly during extreme weather or heavy oceanic swells. Access to the cliffs and coastline is readily available and allows opportunities to experience the sea's force and scale at close proximity. 3. By contrast the sandy bays which alternate with the harsher cliffs and headlands provide a more focused and tranquil setting due to their low lying location and the shelter afforded by flanking cliffs. 4. The lighthouse at Strathy is a popular attraction to visitors and is approached via the minor road which serves the string of crofts and houses along the eastern side of the promontory. 5. Traditional netting stations now largely abandoned elsewhere in Highland are still notable around Strathy Point whilst the sheltered harbour at Portskerra is still well-used by local fishermen.	The Proposed Development would not affect the first underpinning characteristic as it would not impinge on views of the rocky coastline from the cliff tops and beaches. People experiencing the second underpinning characteristic would be looking out to sea and the Proposed Development would have no effect on the experience of the sea's force and scale. The Proposed Development would not be seen from the beaches at Armadale, Strathy or Melvich bays and the third underpinning characteristic would be unaffected. The Proposed Development would not affect the fourth underpinning characteristic as it would not be seen from the approach to the lighthouse. The fifth underpinning characteristic would not be affected by the Proposed Development.
SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic	
1. Rolling landforms trending towards the coast and opening out over bays provide a distinctive contrast of sequential views and experience of the landscape - enclosed or exposed, framed or open, intimate or expansive. 2. There is a rich tapestry of moorland and crofting settlements with the pattern of buildings and various land cover creating a diverse mix of colour, texture, and form.	For the first underpinning characteristic, the Proposed Development would only be visible from the A836 for a short stretch of the road west of Armadale Bay and very briefly just west of Strathy Bridge and would have no perceptible effect on the contrasting sequential views and experience of the landscape. The Proposed Development would not result in any changes to the patterns of landcover and landuse of the SLA.

Underpinning landscape characteristics to inform detailed SQ descriptions	Impacts of the Proposed Development on underpinning key characteristics and the effects on SQs
SQ3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views	
1. There is a distinct perception and experience of immense space and dynamism, strongly influenced by the combination of big skies, and the distinctive coastal light, and the constantly changing influence of the weather. Fine conditions allow impressive and extensive views to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head while in contrast poor weather restricts views and highlights the sense of remoteness of the landscape. The buildings and structures at Dounreay form prominent features in views from Strathy Point.	The Proposed Development would be visible only in views inland from parts of the coast west of Armadale Bay and small fragmented areas on Strathy Point. It would not impinge on views to Orkney and along the coast.
SQ4 – Historical Dimension	
1. The remains of Borve Castle situated on a natural promontory with a defensive bank built across the neck and with some ramparts and some masonry from the keep walls still visible, is one of the few surviving medieval (c.16th-17th century) defended promontory forts in this part of the north coast.	The Proposed Development would have no effect on this SQ as there is no theoretical visibility from Borve Castle.
Summary of effects on SQs, implications for the SLA and possible future effects on SQs and recommendations for further mitigation	
SQ1 – Dramatically intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea	No effect
SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic	No effect
SQ3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views	No effect
SQ4 – Historical Dimension	No effect

6.9.3 Assessment of potential effects on the two LCTs within the study area (see **Figure 6.2**) are presented in **Tables 6.10** and **6.11**. All effects are adverse unless stated otherwise.

Table 6.10: Potential Effects on LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this LCT which could be affected by the Proposed Development comprise: • The importance of the meandering River Strathy; • The strength of the low, isolated hills providing local landform features; • The long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines; and • The strong sense of remoteness which is already diminished to some extent by the presence wind turbines, forest plantation, forest tracks and timber harvesting activity.
Landscape Sensitivity	**Medium:** The landscape is reasonably valued (by walkers on Scottish Hill Track 344) and has a composition (generally smooth and gently undulating landform) and characteristics (the presence of existing wind turbines at Strathy North and Strathy Wood Wind Farms and wood pole mounted OHLs and the potential screening effects of forest plantations) tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.
Potential Effects	Potential effects to landscape receptors may include: • The temporary loss of moorland/grassland to working areas and access tracks; • The permanent loss of moorland/grassland to permanent tracks;

	• The extension southwards of OHLs, leading to an increased influence of this type of development on the landscape character of the area; • The introduction of the Proposed Development in the foreground of views towards the River Strathy from areas to the east; • The diminishment in the perceived scale of low hills which form local landform focal points by the introduction of large vertical man-made structures; • The interruption of views by the Proposed Development towards the hills to the south of the study area (Ben Griam Mòr and Ben Griam Beg); • The appearance of the Proposed Development breaking the skyline; and • An increased diminishment of the sense of remoteness by the introduction of additional activity during construction and further man-made objects during operation.
Nature and Magnitude of Change	The Proposed Development would lie entirely within this LCT and would result in direct and indirect effects during both construction and operation. Direct temporary effects would result from the loss of vegetation cover as a result of the construction working areas at the tower / pole locations (approximately 55,500 m^2), CSE compound (1,500 m^2) and the access tracks (2.75 km length at 5 m width) and an increase in the level of vehicle movements and activity. Direct permanent effects would result from the presence of the Proposed Development and associated permanent access tracks (2.46 km at 6.5 m width). Indirect temporary effects would arise from construction operations being visible on the skyline in some locations, in views towards the River Strathy, interrupting views towards Ben Griam Mor and Ben Griam Beg which would already be compromised by the presence of turbines at Strathy North and Strathy Wood Wind Farms, and a further reduction in the sense of remoteness. Indirect permanent effects would include changes to the perceived scale of the low hills to the east of the river with the towers providing scale comparators where none presently exist. Views towards the River Strathy would be interrupted by the Proposed Development when seen from areas to the east. Focal views to the Bens Griam from Scottish Hill Track 344 would be further interrupted by the presence of towers, poles and conductors in the view which would also include wind turbines, most notably at Strathy Wood Wind Farm (once constructed). From lower lying parts of this LCT, towers would be seen breaking the skyline and the sense of remoteness, already reduced by the presence of Strathy North Wind Farm, forest tracks and existing OHL infrastructure, plus the turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm (once constructed), would be further diminished. Direct changes during construction would be perceptible over the route of the Proposed Development (loss of land cover to temporary working areas and access tracks) and the magnitude of change would be Medium. Indirect changes during construction would be perceptible, with theoretical visibility (bare ground – i.e. taking no account of the screening effects of forestry) of increased activity from the addition of construction operations associated with the Proposed Development in addition to existing activity over 21.86 km^2. This represents 52.73% of the portion of the LCT which lies within the study area and less than 1% of the LCT as a whole. Construction activity would be seen in the context of forest extraction and vehicle movements associated with Strathy North and Strathy Wood wind farms and Strathy North Substation would also be visible, and notable in localised areas at each tower location. The magnitude of change would be Medium. Direct changes during operation would result from the presence of towers, poles, CSE compound and associated permanent access tracks which would be perceptible over the LCT and notable over the route of the Proposed Development and the magnitude of change would be Low - Medium. Indirect changes during operation would be perceptible with theoretical visibility (bare ground – taking no account of the screening effects of forestry) of the Proposed Development over 21.86 km^2 (52.73%) of the portion of the LCT which lies within the

	study area and notable in localised areas where towers, poles and conductors would breach the skyline, interrupt views from areas of higher ground to the east and views towards the distinctive landform features of Ben Griam Mor and Ben Griam Beg in the context of the wind turbines at Strathy Wood Wind Farm. Effects on the LCT as a whole would be considerably less (less than 1%). The magnitude of change would be Low - Medium.
Effect and Significance	The Proposed Development would be locally prominent and would result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area during construction and a perceptible change during operation. The level of effects during construction would be **Moderate (direct and indirect) adverse and significant.** The level of effect during operation would be **Minor - Moderate (direct and indirect) adverse and not significant.**

Table 6.11: Potential Effects on LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this LCT which could be affected by the Proposed Development comprise: • The sense of remoteness perceived as a result of the lack of habitation.
Landscape Sensitivity	**Low:** This LCT does not lie within any area designated for landscape value and it is experienced largely by forest employees. It has a composition (low lying moorland and the presence of forest cover) tolerant of a degree of change of the type proposed.
Potential Effects	The Proposed Development would not lie within this LCT and potential effects would be limited to indirect effects. Potential effects to landscape receptors may include: • The introduction of further man-made objects into the western landscape context which already includes forestry, forest tracks and wind turbines, diminishing the sense of perceived remoteness due to the lack of habitation.
Nature and Magnitude of Change	Indirect temporary effects would arise from construction operations being visible from 1.22 km^2. This represents 45.19% of the portion of the LCT which lies within the study area and just under 2% of the LCT as a whole. Construction operations would be seen in the context of other activity associated with Strathy North and Strathy Wood wind farms and Strathy Wood forest plantation. The open, uninhabited landscape to the west would be unaffected. The magnitude of change during construction would be Negligible**.** Indirect permanent effects would arise from the Proposed Development being visible from 1.22 km^2 (45.19%) of the portion of the LCT which lies within the study area in the context of the turbines at Strathy North and Strathy Wood wind farms and Strathy Wood forest plantation. The open, uninhabited landscape to the west would be unaffected. Effects on the LCT as a whole would be limited to less than 2% of the total area. The magnitude of change during operation would be Negligible**.**
Effect and Significance	Construction and operation of the Proposed Development would not result in any discernible reduction in the scenic quality or to the intrinsic landscape character of the LCT. The level of effect during both construction and operation would be **Negligible (indirect) and not significant.**

Summary of Landscape Effects

6.9.4 A summary of the predicted effects on the LCTs during construction and operation is provided in **Table 6.12**. Effects which are significant are shaded in grey.

Table 6.12: Summary of Landscape Effects

Period	Construction		Operation	
Receptor	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**
Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA	None	None	None	None
LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows	Moderate Adverse direct Moderate Adverse indirect	Significant Significant	Minor - Moderate Adverse direct Minor - Moderate Adverse indirect	Not Significant Not Significant
LCT 136: Rocky Hills and Moorland	Negligible indirect	Not significant	Negligible indirect	Not significant

6.10 Assessment of Likely Significant Visual Effects

6.10.1 This section of the Chapter provides an assessment of the effects that the Proposed Development is predicted to have on the visual amenity of identified receptors within the study area during both construction and operation (with operational effects being assessed 10 years after completion), in accordance with the effects criteria set out in **Table 6.5**.

6.10.2 Detailed assessment of potential effects on the building based, route based and recreational based receptors are presented in **Appendix 6.2: Visual Assessment**.

Summary of Visual Effects

6.10.3 A summary of the significance of effects on the visual receptors during construction and operation is provided in **Table 6.13**. Effects which are significant are shaded in grey.

6.10.4 Scottish Hill Track 344 is a linear route which may be travelled in either direction (or may be a 'there and back' route) and it has therefore been assessed separately for each direction of travel.

Table 6.13: Summary of Visual Effects

Period	Construction		Operation	
Receptor	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**
B1 Bowside Lodge **Visitors to the accommodation**	Negligible Adverse	Not significant	Negligible Adverse	Not significant
B2 The Bothy **Visitors to the accommodation**	Negligible Adverse	Not significant	Negligible Adverse	Not significant
B3 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) **Visitors to the accommodation**	Moderate Adverse	Significant	Minor Adverse	Not Significant

Period	Construction		Operation	
B4 Dallangwell **Employees / Residents**	Minor Adverse	Not significant	Minor Adverse	Not significant
R1 (a and b) Scottish Hill Track 334 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy **Both Directions of travel** **Cyclists, Walkers, Forest workers**	Moderate Adverse	Significant	Moderate Adverse	Significant
R2 Access Tracks from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation Forest and Wind Farm/Substation workers	Minor Adverse	Not Significant	Minor Adverse	Not Significant
Rec1 River Strathy **Fly fishers and ghillies**	Minor Adverse	Not Significant	Minor Adverse	Not Significant

Summary of Significant Effects

6.10.5 Significant construction effects for B3: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) are predicted to arise due to the fact that construction activity would be seen from the south facing windows in the context of the wind turbines at Strathy North and Strathy Wood, the existing access track, and traffic moving on it, at distances exceeding 400 m.

6.10.6 Significant effects are predicted for R1a and R1b: Scottish Hill Track 334 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy for both south-bound and north bound travellers. For south-bound travellers (R1a), the temporary and permanent works would be seen in the context of the wind turbines at Strathy North and Strathy Wood wind farms from approximately 1 km north of Bowside until passing the southern end of the scheme, when users of the track would be heading away from Proposed Development. For north bound travellers (R1b), the temporary and permanent works would be seen from the approach to the baillie bridge through Strathy Wood Wind Farm at the southern end of the study area until passing Bowside there would be continuous visibility of towers, poles and conductors, generally in close proximity to the track for approximately 5 km until just north of Bowside when users of the track would be heading away from the works.

Summary of Not Significant Effects

6.10.7 No significant effects are predicted for B1: Bowside Lodge and B2: The Bothy during both construction and operation due to the screening effects of vegetation within the curtilage of these properties,

6.10.8 No significant effects are predicted for B4: Dallangwell which would have views of construction activity and the Proposed Development during operation but at a distance of 700 m and with landform backclothing. The Proposed Development would not detract from the existing views during either construction or operation.

6.10.9 No significant effects are predicted for R2: Access Tracks from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation. Construction works and the Proposed Development would be perceptible in views from this route but would not detract from the existing views.

6.10.10 Receptors using Rec1: River Strathy would not accrue significant effects during either construction or operation. The focus of users of the fly fishing beats would be on the river itself. Visibility of construction activity, and the Proposed Development during operation, would vary depending on which section of the river is being used and may be perceptible but would not detract from the existing views.

6.11 Cumulative Effects

6.11.1 The cumulative assessment is presented for two scenarios comprising other known developments as of 31st July 2024:

- Cumulative Scenario 1 – comprises the consented and proposed wind farm developments and their associated grid infrastructure (associated with the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections) assuming the Proposed Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (and not the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub or the Alternative Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection); and
- Cumulative Scenario 2 – comprises the consented and proposed wind farm developments and their associated grid infrastructure (associated with the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections) assuming the Alternative Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection and the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub (and not the Proposed Alignment for the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection).

6.11.2 The assessment is limited to permanent effects as it is unlikely that construction operations for the Proposed Development and other cumulative developments would occur concurrently.

6.11.3 The assessment is restricted to those receptors predicted to accrue effects from the Proposed Development in isolation greater than negligible. It is considered that receptors which would experience negligible effects from the Proposed Development in isolation would be unlikely to experience greater levels of effect from the addition of the Proposed Development to other developments than those arising from the other developments in isolation or in combination.

6.11.4 The cumulative assessment scenarios are therefore limited to the addition of the Proposed Development to other developments for the following receptors (the effects stated are those arising from the Proposed Development during the operational phase):

- Landscape Receptors
  - LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows (Minor - Moderate Adverse direct and indirect).
- Visual Receptors
  - B3 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage (Minor Adverse);
  - B4 Dallangwell (Minor Adverse);
  - R1 Scottish Hill Track 334 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy (Moderate Adverse);
  - R2 Access Tracks from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation (Minor Adverse); and
  - Rec 1 (Minor Adverse).

Cumulative Scenario 1

6.11.5 Cumulative Scenario 1 comprises:

- Strathy South Wind Farm and on-site substation (consented);
- Strathy South Wind Farm 'Southern Section' Grid Connection;
- Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (Proposed Alignment) (scoping);
- Strathy Switching Station (pre-scoping);
- Kirkton Energy Park and on-site substation (proposed); and

- Kirkton Energy Park Grid Connection (pre-scoping).

6.11.6 This scenario includes the Proposed Alignment of the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection which would be the alignment progressed unless the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub were approved and constructed. An Alternative Alignment would be required for the grid connection if the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub were to be approved and constructed, and this Alternative Alignment is assessed in Cumulative Scenario 2.

6.11.7 Strathy South Wind Farm on-site substation would be located within commercial forestry and is unlikely to be visible from the study area. Strathy South Wind Farm 'Southern Section' Grid Connection would be via underground cable and would not be visible. Kirkton Energy Park on-site substation and associated grid connection are more than 2.5 km from the eastern boundary of the study area and are unlikely to result in any significant effects within the study area. These developments have therefore been scoped out of the cumulative assessment.

Landscape Assessment (Cumulative Scenario 1)

6.11.8 The Strathy South Wind Farm LVIA[16] states that for LCT134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows *'much of this area, particularly within 5 km is already affected by the existing turbines at Strathy North…'* and concludes that the effect on this LCT would be Moderate (significant) during both construction and operation. While the addition of the Proposed Development would extend the influence of vertical man-made elements in the part of this LCT which lies within the study area, it is considered that the cumulative level of effect would not increase above the level of effect arising from the Proposed Development – i.e. Minor – Moderate (direct and indirect) adverse and not significant.

6.11.9 The Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (Proposed Alignment) is at scoping stage and has yet to be subject of a landscape and visual impact assessment. The majority of the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (Proposed Alignment) would be located within LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows and would have both direct and indirect effects on this LCT. The OHL would be supported on steel lattice towers with heights up to 46 m. Examination of the ZTV included in the Strathy South Grid Connection Scoping Report[17] indicated that there would be relatively widespread theoretical visibility of this development from this LCT within the Proposed Development's study area but that medium to low numbers of towers would be visible from areas of lower ground to the east of the River Strathy with higher numbers of towers theoretically visible from the higher slopes west of the river which are under forest plantation. This development would replace a section of the existing 132 kV trident H-wood pole mounted OHL between Strathy North substation to within the vicinity of Melvich Wind Energy Hub substation, which would be removed on completion of construction. The vertical elements of this development would be taller than those of the existing OHL, but it is considered that the cumulative effects within the study area would be no greater than those assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation – i.e. Minor – Moderate adverse and not significant.

[16] SSE Generation Ltd (2020). Strathy South Wind Farm EIA Report, SSE Generation Ltd. Available at: Scottish Government - Energy Consents Unit - Application Details

[17] SSEN Transmission (2024) Strathy South Wind Farm Grid Connection – Scoping Report. Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00005081

6.11.10 The optimal location considered for the Strathy Switching Station would be on the extreme northern boundary of the Proposed Development's study area and it would have direct effects on LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows. The Strathy Switching Station development has yet to be the subject of a landscape and visual impact assessment, but indirect effects would be likely to arise for this LCT as the switching station would be visible from areas of elevated ground which would have views of the switching station at a lower level (assumes circa 85 m AOD). The addition of the Proposed Development would extend the influence of grid infrastructure further into the strath, but it is not considered likely that there would be any cumulative effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to the proposed Strathy Switching Station greater than those arising from the Proposed Development in isolation – i.e. Minor – Moderate adverse and not significant.

6.11.11 Examination of the ZTV for Kirkton Energy Park[18] indicates that there would be extremely limited theoretical visibility from the study area (areas of high ground to the west of the river where forest plantation would screen views and areas of high ground to the east of the river where Kirkton Energy Park and the Proposed Development would only be seen in successive views from a small portion of LCT134 Sweeping Moorland and Flow). It is considered that the addition of the Proposed Development to Kirkton Energy Park would be unlikely to give rise to cumulative effects greater than those arising from the Proposed Development in isolation.

6.11.12 Cumulative landscape effects for Scenario 1 for the Proposed Development's study area arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to Strathy South Wind Farm, Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (Proposed Alignment), Strathy Switching Station and Kirkton Energy Park would be no greater than the level of effect arising from the Proposed Development for LCT 134 – i.e. Minor - Moderate adverse and not significant.

6.11.13 Scenario 1 cumulative landscape assessment does not include Strathy South Wind Farm on-site substation, Strathy South Wind Farm 'Southern Section' Grid Connection or Kirkton Energy Park on-site substation and grid connection as these were scoped out of the assessment.

Visual Assessment (Cumulative Scenario 1)

6.11.14 **Building Receptor B3: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage)** - this building receptor is not included as a visual receptor in the Strathy South Wind Farm LVIA. The ZTV for Strathy South Wind Farm indicates that there is theoretical visibility from this built receptor of between 11 to 20 turbines, in addition to those visible in the baseline (approximately 19 towers).

6.11.15 The addition of the Proposed Development to Strathy South Wind Farm would increase the quantity of vertical man-made elements in the view but the effect would be no greater than that likely to arise from the Proposed Development in isolation i.e. Minor adverse and not significant.

6.11.16 The southernmost towers of the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (Proposed Alignment) would be visible but not from the south facing windows from this built receptor. The level of effect would therefore be no greater than that assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation – i.e. Minor – Moderate adverse and not significant.

6.11.17 Kirkton Energy Park and the associated grid connection are unlikely to be visible from this built receptor.

6.11.18 Strathy Switching Station would be located more than 1 km to the north of this building receptor and would likely be screened from locations adjacent to this dwelling by intervening landform. It would not be visible from south facing windows.

[18] Kirkton Energy Park EIA Report (2022) Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00003244

6.11.19 Cumulative effects for Scenario 1 for this built receptor arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to all of the foregoing developments would be no greater than the level of effect arising from the Proposed Development – i.e. Minor adverse and not significant.

6.11.20 **Building Receptor B4: Dallangwell** - the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 1 developments is unlikely to increase the level of effect arising from the Proposed Development (Minor adverse and not significant) for this building receptor due to the screening effects of topography and/or vegetation.

6.11.21 **Route R1: Scottish Hill Track 344** - effects for this route arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 1 developments are unlikely to increase above the level of Moderate adverse and significant as assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation, although it would be seen in the context of increased numbers of wind turbines in distant views, particularly for north bound walkers, and together with Strathy Switching Station in some views for receptors headed in both directions.

6.11.22 **Route R2: Access Tracks (from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation)** - effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 1 developments are unlikely to increase above the level of Minor adverse and not significant as assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation due to the screening effects of topography and/or vegetation.

6.11.23 **Rec 1: River Strathy** - the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 1 developments is unlikely to increase the level of effect arising from the Proposed Development (Minor adverse and not significant) for this recreation receptor as there would be very limited visibility of turbines at Strathy South Wind Farm, of Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection, no visibility of turbines at Kirkton Energy Park and visibility only from the northern beats of Strathy Switching Station.

6.11.24 **Table 6.14** summarises the effects of the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 1 developments. Significant effects are shaded in grey.

Table 6.14: Summary of Scenario 1 Cumulative Effects

Period **Receptor**	**Effect of Proposed Development in isolation: Operation Effects**	**Cumulative effect of the Proposed Development in addition to Cumulative Scenario 1 developments**
LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows	Minor - Moderate (direct and indirect) Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation (Minor - Moderate Adverse direct and indirect and not significant)
B3 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) **Visitors to the accommodation.**	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor adverse and not significant)
B4 Dallangwell	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor Adverse and not significant)
R1 Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy Both directions of travel **Cyclists, Walkers, Forest workers**	Moderate Adverse and significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Moderate Adverse and significant)

Period Receptor	Effect of Proposed Development in isolation: Operation Effects	Cumulative effect of the Proposed Development in addition to Cumulative Scenario 1 developments
R2 Access Tracks from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor Adverse and not significant)
Rec 1 River Strathy	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor Adverse and not significant)

Cumulative Scenario 2

6.11.25 Cumulative Scenario 2 comprises:

- Strathy South Wind Farm and on-site substation (consented);
- Strathy South Wind Farm 'Southern Section' Grid Connection;
- Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (Alternative Alignment) (scoping);
- Strathy Switching Station (pre-scoping);
- Melvich Wind Energy Hub and on-site substation (proposed);
- Melvich Wind Energy Hub Grid Connection (pre-scoping);
- Kirkton Energy Park and on-site substation (proposed); and
- Kirkton Energy Park Grid Connection (pre-scoping).

6.11.26 Strathy South Wind Farm on-site substation would be located within commercial forestry and is unlikely to be visible from the study area. Strathy South Wind Farm 'Southern Section' Grid Connection would be via underground cable and would not be visible. Melvich Wind Energy Hub on-site substation and its associated grid connection and Kirkton Energy Park on-site substation and associated grid connection are more than 2.5 km from the eastern boundary of the study area and are unlikely to result in any significant effects within the study area. These developments have therefore been scoped out of the cumulative assessment.

Landscape Assessment (Cumulative Scenario 2)

6.11.27 As discussed in Cumulative Scenario 1, while the addition of the Proposed Development to Strathy South Wind Farm would extend the influence of vertical man-made elements in LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows, it is considered that the cumulative level of effect would not increase above the level of Minor - Moderate adverse (direct and indirect) and not significant as assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation.

6.11.28 The Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection (Alternative Alignment) would generally be further away from the study area as it deflects to the north, then east and then south to skirt the northern edge of Melvich Wind Energy Hub. Where it lies within the study area, it would follow the same alignment as the Strathy South Wind Farm 'Northern Section' Grid Connection Proposed Alignment and the consequent cumulative effects on LCT 134 can be expected to be broadly similar.

6.11.29 The optimal location considered for the Strathy Switching Station would be on the extreme northern boundary of the Proposed Development's study area. The Strathy Switching Station has yet to be subject to a landscape and visual impact assessment, but it would be likely to have direct effects on LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows. Indirect effects would also be likely to arise for this LCT as it would be visible from areas of elevated ground which would have views of the switching station at a lower level (assumes circa 85 m AOD). The addition of the Proposed Development would extend the influence of grid infrastructure further into the strath, but it is not considered likely that there would be any cumulative effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to Strathy Switching Station greater than those arising from the Proposed Development in isolation.

6.11.30 Melvich Wind Energy Hub - the ZTV for the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub[19] indicates that there would be very limited theoretical visibility of this development from the study area. It would be visible generally only from areas of high ground east of the river with fragmented pockets of visibility west of the river. It is therefore considered that the effects of the addition of the Proposed Development to Melvich Wind Energy Hub would not be any greater than those assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation.

6.11.31 Kirkton Energy Park - examination of the ZTV for Kirkton Energy Park[20] indicates that there would be extremely limited theoretical visibility from the study area (areas of high ground to the west of the river where forest plantation would screen views and areas of high ground to the east of the river where Kirkton Energy Park and the Proposed Development would only be seen in successive views from a small portion of LCT134 Sweeping Moorland and Flow). It is considered that the addition of the Proposed Development to Kirkton Energy Park would be unlikely to give rise to cumulative effects greater than those arising from the Proposed Development in isolation.

6.11.32 In summary, given the distribution of other development and their theoretical visibility from the study area of the Proposed Development, it is considered that the addition of the Proposed Development would not give rise to cumulative effects greater than those arising from the Proposed development in isolation for LCT 134 i.e. Minor - Moderate adverse and not significant.

Visual Assessment (Cumulative Scenario 2)

6.11.33 **Building Receptor B3: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage)** - effects for this building receptor would be similar to Cumulative Scenario 1 i.e. Minor adverse and not significant.

6.11.34 **Building Receptor B4: Dallangwell** - the addition of the Proposed Development to the Cumulative Scenario 2 developments that have been scoped into the cumulative assessment, is unlikely to increase the level of effect arising from the Proposed Development (Minor Adverse and not significant) for this building receptor due to the screening effects of topography and/or vegetation.

6.11.35 **Route R1: Scottish Hill Track 344** - effects for this route receptor arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 2 developments are unlikely to increase above the level of Moderate adverse and significant as assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation, although it would be seen in the context of increased numbers of wind turbines in distant views, particularly for north bound walkers, and together with Strathy Switching Station in some views for receptors headed in both directions.

6.11.36 **Route R2: Access Tracks (from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation)** - effects for this route receptor arising from the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 2 developments are unlikely to increase above the level of Minor adverse and not significant as assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation due to the screening effects of topography and/or vegetation.

[19] Melvich Wind Energy Hub EIA Report (2023). Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00004514

[20] Kirkton Energy Park EIA Report (2022) Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00003244

6.11.37 **Recreation Rec 1: River Strathy** - the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 2 developments is unlikely to increase the level of effect arising from the Proposed Development (Minor adverse and not significant) for this recreation receptor, as there would be very limited visibility of turbines at Strathy South and Melvich wind farms, and no visibility of turbines at Kirkton Energy Park.

6.11.38 **Table 6.15** summarises the effects of the addition of the Proposed Development to Cumulative Scenario 2 developments. Significant effects are shaded grey.

Table 6.15: Summary of Scenario 2 Cumulative Effects

Period Receptor	Effect of Proposed Development in isolation: Operation	Cumulative effect of the Proposed Development in addition to Cumulative Scenario 2 developments
LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows	Minor - Moderate (direct and indirect) Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation (Minor - Moderate (direct and indirect) Adverse and not significant)
B3 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) **Visitors to the accommodation.**	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor Adverse and not significant)
B4 Dallangwell	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor Adverse and not significant)
R1 Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy, Both Directions **Cyclists, Walkers, Forest workers**	Moderate Adverse and significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Moderate Adverse and significant)
R2 Access Tracks from R1 to Dallangwell and Strathy North substation	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor Adverse and not significant)
Rec 1 River Strathy	Minor Adverse and not significant	No greater than that arising from the Proposed Development in isolation. (Minor Adverse and not significant)

6.12 Mitigation

Embedded Mitigation

6.12.1 Much of the mitigation for landscape and visual purposes has been embedded in the design for the Proposed Development, in the form of the route and alignment selection process. This process is discussed in detail within **Chapter 2 - The Routeing Process and Alternatives**. In general, the alignment has been designed to conform with topography and minimise potential prominence on ridgelines or fragmentation of areas of distinctive landscape character. Care has also been given to minimise the potential prominence of the Proposed Development in views from properties, routes and recreation locations.

Implementation Stage Mitigation

6.12.2 Mitigation measures to be considered during the implementation of the Proposed Development would include the use of best practice construction and restoration techniques.

6.12.3 The reinstatement of areas disturbed during construction would be fundamental to ensuring that the Proposed Development would be successfully accommodated into the existing landscape in the longer term. Careful reinstatement of landform would be employed across working areas and temporary tracks, re-using materials excavated during the construction period to reflect the terrain within adjacent areas as far as practicable. Further details on these measures are included in **Appendix 3.4: Outline Site Restoration Plan** within Volume 4 of this EIA Report.

6.12.4 Landform would be remodelled around new steel lattice towers, and new, permanent tracks to ensure that these tie smoothly into their surroundings and to minimise the visual extent of these features where possible – for example, to help conceal foundations or the running surfaces of tracks from visual receptor locations or within the wider landscape.

6.12.5 Reinstatement of landform would include the creation of suitable gradients for cut and fill slopes associated with access tracks to enable the replacement of peat/soils and re-establishment of vegetation. Where the receiving terrain is not suitable to allow these gradients, the use of suitable geoengineering techniques, such as jute matting would be utilised to help establish vegetation and prevent erosion.

6.12.6 The natural regeneration of native species is the preferred method of achieving vegetation restoration, as outlined in the Outline Site Restoration Plan (see **Appendix 3.4**), and Outline Peat Management Plan (PMP) (see **Appendix 9.2**). Where native soils or vegetation may be considered insufficient to support natural re-vegetation, this would be supplemented by seeding with an agreed seed mix.

6.13 Residual Effects

6.13.1 Construction effects are, by their nature, temporary and there would therefore be no residual construction effects. The assessment of operational effects takes into account the likely benefits of the embedded and implementation phase mitigation measures which are proposed and therefore the operational effects identified should be considered representative of residual effects. These are summarised in **Table 6.12** and **Table 6.13** for the Proposed Development in isolation and in **Table 6.14** and **Table 6.15** for the Proposed Development in addition to the two cumulative scenarios.

6.14 Summary and Conclusions

Landscape Effects

6.14.1 The landscape assessment has predicted that the only significant landscape effects resulting from the Proposed Development would be Moderate adverse (direct and indirect) effects on LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows during construction due to the fact that it would be locally prominent and would result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character. Operational effects on this LCT would not be significant because changes, although perceptible, would be seen in the context of Strathy Wood Wind Farm. There would be no predicted significant effects on the other LCT within the study area (LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland) because the Proposed Development would be seen during construction and operation in the context of Strathy North and Strathy Wood wind farms, and Strathy Wood Forest plantation, and the open, uninhabited area to the west would be unaffected. There would be no significant effects on the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA because none of the underpinning characteristics of the Special Qualities of the SLA would be affected.

Visual Effects

6.14.2 The visual assessment has predicted that significant effects on visual receptors would be limited to Moderate adverse and significant effects during both construction and operation for receptors heading north or south on Route R1: Scottish Hill Track 344: Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy, and Moderate adverse and significant effects for Building Receptor B3: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) during construction. This latter receptor would not have any significant adverse effects during operation.

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

6.14.3 The cumulative landscape and visual assessment carried out for the Proposed Development has identified that there would be no cumulative landscape effects greater than the levels of effect arising from the Proposed Development in isolation – i.e. Moderate adverse and significant effects on R1: Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy, both directions during construction and operation. This applies to both Cumulative Scenario 1 and Cumulative Scenario 2.

Conclusions

6.14.4 The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has established that there would be predicted significant adverse construction effects for a small number of receptors: those who may be present in LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows; at Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage); and receptors on Scottish Hill Track 344: Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy. During operation, significant effects would be experienced by transient receptors on Scottish Hill Track 344 Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy.

6.14.5 Significant cumulative effects would be limited to Moderate adverse effects on Route Receptor R1 Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy in both directions. It should be noted that this would be no higher than the effect assessed for the Proposed Development in isolation.

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