APPENDIX 11.2 - DRAFT OUTDOOR ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

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Figures

1. DRAFT OUTDOOR ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan has been prepared to detail how existing public access would be managed during the construction and operation of the Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection, referred to in this EIA Report as 'the Proposed Development'.

1.1.2 The Proposed Development comprises a new 132 kV overhead line (OHL) to connect the consented Strathy Wood Wind Farm[1] to the electricity transmission network at Connagill 275/132 kV substation via the existing Strathy North Wind Farm 132 kV trident wood pole OHL. The Proposed Development also includes ancillary development, consisting of the installation of cable sealing end (CSE) compound, temporary and permanent access tracks, forestry and vegetation clearance, and temporary working measures/area. SSEN Transmission and "the Applicant" are used interchangeably in this plan.

1.2 Methodology

1.2.1 This Plan has been prepared in line with the requirements set out in the NatureScot (NS) guidance document 'A Brief Guide to Preparing an Outdoor Access plan (2010)[2]'.

1.3 Outdoor Access Baseline

1.3.1 The Proposed Development comprises the construction and operation of approximately 4.5 km of new 132 kV OHL as well as the other ancillary development mentioned in paragraph 1.1.2 above. The Proposed Development is within a remote area where existing outdoor access routes are established.

1.3.2 It is assumed that delivery of all construction materials and components for use at the Proposed Development, would be delivered from the east, via the A9 and A836 public road network and would make use of an existing junction (located approximately 1 km east of Strathy) onto an existing track leading to Strathy South Wind Farm. This track was upgraded for use during the construction of the operational Strathy North Wind Farm (as far the Strathy North Substation). The upgrade is currently being extended, for use during the construction of the consented Strathy Wood and Strathy South wind farms, as far as Strathy South Wind Farm.

1.3.3 A review of recreational routes and paths in the area has been undertaken to help establish where potential interactions may occur in relation to the Proposed Development.

1.3.4 The main existing access track to be utilised by the Proposed Development, passing alongside and through Strathy Forest, is featured within the guidebook 'Scottish Hill Tracks'. This is a joint publication between the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society and The Scottish Mountaineering Trust. The track forms part of Scottish Hill Track 344: Strath Halladale, which travels between Trantlebeg and Strathy. Durning construction, there would be interaction with users of this route.

1.3.5 There are several Core Paths in the surrounding area, mainly leading from the A836 north towards the coast. However, none would be directly affected by the Proposed Development.

1.3.6 The A836 forms part of Sustran's National Cycle Network (NCN) 1 between Lairg and Thurso, approximately 4.5 km north of the Proposed Development.

1.3.7 The recreational routes are illustrated on **Figure 11.1.1**.

[1] Received consent from the Scottish Government in December 2021 (Reference ECU00005239).

2 A Brief Guide to Preparing an Outdoor Access Plan, Scottish Natural heritage (2010). Available at: https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2017-06/B639282%20-%20A%20Brief%20Guide%20to%20Preparing%20Outdoor%20Access%20Plans%20-%20Feb%202010.pdf [access 24th January 2024]

1.3.8 The Estates within the vicinity of the Proposed Development are managed for sporting activities (mainly deer stalking) and the River Strathy is a spate Salmon River, popular with anglers and fished as part of Bowside Fisheries based at Bowside Lodge.

1.4 Potential Access Impacts

Construction Phase

1.4.1 The primary access impact associated with the Proposed Development would arise during the construction phase of the project. The core construction period for the Proposed Development is anticipated to be approximately 12 months.

1.4.2 The existing access track for the Proposed Development identified in Section 1.3 would be used by construction traffic for access during the construction of the Proposed Development. There would be no requirement to divert or upgrade this route to accommodate the Proposed Development, as this track was upgraded for use during the construction of the operational Strathy North Wind Farm (as far the Strathy North Substation) and the upgrade is currently being extended, for use during the construction of the consented Strathy Wood and Strathy South wind farms, as far as Strathy South Wind Farm.

1.4.3 While recreational access could be disrupted by construction activity, any restrictions would be short-term and temporary, taking account of the mitigation measures discussed in Section 1.5 of this Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan.

Operational Phase

1.4.4 Potential access impacts during the operational phase would be limited to occasional access for maintenance purposes. It is unlikely that there would be any restrictions to outdoor access during this phase. Should any major maintenance activities be scheduled, consideration and planning for outdoor access management would be reviewed prior to works commencing.

1.5 General Access Arrangements

1.5.1 The Applicant is committed to enabling day to day access where the safety of the general public or construction staff is not compromised. During the construction phase, every effort would be made to ensure access to existing routes would be maintained. Furthermore, any construction effects are expected to be short-term and temporary. However, to ensure the safety of the public, some additional measures may be required.

1.5.2 Prior to commencement of the construction works, access arrangements and appropriate warnings would be communicated to the local community via the community liaison group, project website and local mailing list.

1.5.3 From time to time, short term restrictions to access may be required where there is no safe alternative. These restrictions would be communicated via the same method.

1.5.4 The Applicant would liaise with the landowners as required to minimise any disruption to forestry or estate run activities where possible.

Access Arrangements – Existing Routes

1.5.5 Where there is potential for interaction along existing recreational routes with construction activities, it is proposed that these interactions will be managed through:

- Warning signage indicating the likelihood of construction traffic will be placed at regular intervals along the walking route;
- A site information leaflet will be posted at regular intervals along the track, informing members of the public ‘what to do’ if site traffic is encountered;

- Speed limit of construction traffic on tracks to be set to 15 mph with appropriate signage highlighted;
- Site rules will dictate flashing / hazard lights are to be switched on by all construction traffic vehicles while using site tracks;
- Warning signage for construction staff highlighting that members of the public may be utilising routes (see **Plate 1**);
- Pedestrian refuges will be provided at regular intervals to provide a safe passing place for construction traffic and path users. This will take the form of a mills barrier (or similar) placed at regular locations in the verge or edge of track where pedestrians can wait for traffic to pass and vice versa; and
- Training / briefing of all drivers to be aware of path users.

1.5.6 The above arrangements will be implemented to ensure both that those wishing to make access are informed of construction hazards, and that construction workers are trained to anticipate and take measures to avoid other access users.

Plate 1: Example Construction Staff Warning Sign

New Permanent and Temporary Access Tracks

1.5.7 As part of the Proposed Development, new permanent and new temporary access tracks would be constructed.

1.5.8 During construction of these tracks, access would be restricted to the general public on safety grounds. Access gates may be installed to limit unauthorised vehicles from entering the site and pass gates would be installed where the site entrance meets the existing road to accommodate walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

1.5.9 Signage would be put in place where the site entrance meets the existing track and where the existing rights of way intersect the new access tracks with a purpose to highlight to the public the risk of entering the site.

1.5.10 Once the Proposed Development becomes operational, the public would be able to fully access the permanent tracks, in line with current access legislation and the temporary access tracks would be removed and the areas restored.

Equestrians

1.5.11 The British Horse Society has made recommendations on the interactions between Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) traffic and horses. Horses are normally nervous of large vehicles, particularly when they do not often meet them. Horses are flighty animals and will run away in panic if really frightened. Riders will do all they can to prevent this but, should it happen, it could cause a serious accident for other road users, as well as for the horse and rider.

1.5.12 The main factors causing fear in horses in this situation are:

- Something approaching them, which is unfamiliar and intimidating;
- A large moving object, especially if it is noisy;
- Lack of space between the horse and the vehicle;
- The sound of air brakes; and
- Anxiety on the part of the rider.

1.5.13 The British Horse Society recommends the following actions that will be included in the Site training for all HGV staff:

- On seeing riders approaching, drivers must slow down and stop, minimising the sound of air brakes, if possible;
- If the horse still shows signs of nervousness while approaching the vehicle, the engine should be shut down (if it is safe to do so);
- The vehicle should not move off until the riders are well clear of the back of the HGV;
- If drivers are wishing to overtake riders, please approach slowly or even stop in order to give riders time to find a gateway or lay by where they can take refuge and create sufficient space between the horse and the vehicle. Because of the position of their eyes, horses are very aware of things coming up behind them; and
- All drivers delivering to the Site must be patient. Riders will be doing their best to reassure their horses while often feeling a high degree of anxiety themselves.

1.6 Conclusions

1.6.1 The Applicant aims to maintain access during construction of the Proposed Development and by implementing the management strategies set out in this Plan, it is believed that this can be achieved while ensuring the safety of the public and construction staff.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks
TRANSMISSION

Legend

Overhead Line (OHL) Works

- Proposed Steel Lattice Tower
- Proposed Wood Pole (H pole)
- Proposed OHL Alignment

Ancillary Development

- Proposed Sealing End Compound
- New Permanent Access
- New Temporary Access

Existing Infrastructure

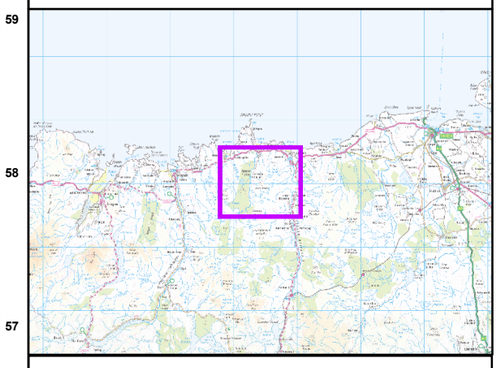
- Existing Wood Pole (H pole)
- Existing 132 kV OHL (Wood Pole)
- Existing Access Track
- Strathy North Wind Turbines (Operational)
- Strathy North Substation

Consented Infrastructure

- Strathy Wood Wind Turbines
- Strathy Wood Substation

Recreation

- Scottish Hill Track 334
- A836
- A897
- North Coast 500 / National Cycle Network 1



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