Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks
TRANSMISSION

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This Environmental Appraisal (EA) has been prepared by ASH design+assessment Limited ("ASH") on behalf of Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc ("the Applicant") who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission ("SSEN Transmission"), own, operate and develop the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and remote islands. In this EA "the Applicant" and "SSEN Transmission" are used interchangeably unless the context requires otherwise. The EA has been prepared to accompany an application for consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 ("the 1989 Act").

1.1.2 The application seeks consent under section 37 of the 1989 Act to construct and operate a new single circuit 132 kV overhead line (OHL) between Rothes III Wind Farm and Blackhillock substation, the locations of which are shown on **Figure 1.1**. Deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 for the new OHL and ancillary infrastructure is also sought.

1.1.3 This new single circuit 132 kV OHL connection is known as the "Elchies (Rothes III) Wind Farm Connection". This is to distinguish it from a separate connection that will also be made from the Rothes III Wind Farm into the distribution network, and this will be known as the "Rothes III Wind Farm Connection". The Applicant is not responsible for this connection to the distribution network and therefore it is not considered in this EA.

1.1.4 The project, hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development', is being driven by the requirement to provide a grid connection for the consented Rothes III Wind Farm.

1.1.5 The Proposed Development would include the following works, for which section 37 consent under the 1989 Act and deemed planning permission is sought:

- The installation and operation of approximately 24.3 km of new trident pole OHL between a new Cable Sealing End ("CSE") structure approximately 450 m southeast of Rothes III Wind Farm (Ordnance Survey (OS) grid reference 322434,847882) and a new CSE structure approximately 900 m north-west of Blackhillock substation (OS grid reference 342233,848695); and
- Ancillary works required to facilitate the construction and operation of the Proposed Development, including tree felling and vegetation clearance, temporary measures to protect road and water crossings, upgrades to existing access tracks and existing access points, new permanent and temporary access routes, permanent stone hardstanding areas related to the CSE structure, and associated working areas around infrastructure to facilitate construction.

1.1.6 The Proposed Development would also include the following works, which would fall under the Applicant's permitted development rights[1]:

- Approximately 450 m of Underground Cable (UGC) between the Rothes III Wind Farm on-site substation (OS grid reference 322049, 848063) and a new CSE structure to the southeast; and
- Approximately 1.1 km of UGC between the new CSE structure which would be situated approximately 900 m north-west of Blackhillock substation and Blackhillock substation itself (OS grid reference 343098,848409).

1.2 Background to the Proposed Development

1.2.1 SSEN Transmission has a statutory duty under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 1989 to develop and maintain an efficient, co-ordinated and economical transmission system in its licenced areas. SSEN Transmission has obligations to offer non-discriminatory terms for connection to the transmission system.

[1] Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992

1.2.2 The consented Rothes III Wind Farm (comprising 28 turbines, with approximate capacity of 99 MW) located approximately 4 km west of Rothes in Moray, requires connection to the electricity transmission network at Blackhillock substation by 30 June 2027 in accordance with agreements between SSEN Transmission, National Grid Electricity System Operator (as operator of the National Grid), and Fred Olsen Renewables, as developer of the wind farm. It is proposed that this would be achieved via the construction and operation of a new 132 kV single circuit connection, between the wind farm's on-site substation and Blackhillock substation, being the Proposed Development (see **Figure 1.1**).

Routeing Process

1.2.3 As described in **Chapter 2** of this EA, the Proposed Development has been subject to a routeing process in which alternative routes for connection between the Rothes III Wind Farm and Blackhillock substation were compared to find the best option based on the most appropriate balance between environmental, engineering and cost factors.

1.2.4 Following this, a study of alignment options within the chosen route was carried out, prior to selecting a proposed alignment and design solution to take forward for section 37 consent (that chosen route being the Proposed Development).

1.2.5 Section 1.6 of this Chapter provides an overview of the consultation carried out with statutory consultees and members of the public, and **Chapter 2** outlines how the routeing and alignment processes responded to the consultations undertaken.

1.3 Legislative and Statutory Context

1.3.1 Consent for the OHL and CSE components of the Proposed Development is sought from Scottish Ministers under section 37 of the 1989 Act. The 1989 Act is the primary legislation governing the electricity supply industry in Great Britain and places statutory obligations upon a licence holder.

1.3.2 Installation of the UGC falls under the Applicant's permitted development rights.[1] As such these works do not require specific express consent. The assessment of impacts likely to arise from installation of the UGC are however included in **Appendix 1.1**.

1.4 The Need for the Environmental Appraisal

1.4.1 Applications under section 37 of the 1989 Act are subject to the requirements of the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, hereafter referred to as 'the EIA Regulations'.

1.4.2 The Proposed Development is classified as Schedule 2 development under the EIA Regulations by virtue of it being classed as:

"The carrying out of development (other than development which is Schedule 1 development) to provide any of the following -

(2) an electric line installed above ground –

(a) with a voltage of 132 kilovolts or more"

1.4.3 A Screening Opinion was sought from Scottish Ministers, as consenting authority, for consideration under the EIA Regulations to determine whether the section 37 application for the OHL would constitute 'EIA Development'. The Screening Request was submitted in February 2022. A Screening Opinion was received on 21 July 2022, noting that a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report would not be required. The Screening Opinion is included as **Appendix 1.2**.

1.4.4 The Applicant recognises that the Proposed Development may give rise to some environmental effects. As such, whilst a formal EIA is not required, a voluntary Environmental Appraisal (EA) has been undertaken, including a number of environmental studies, the results of which are detailed in this EA. Mitigation measures that have been identified to

prevent, reduce or offset an effect, are identified within the relevant technical chapters and consolidated within **Chapter 10: Schedule of Mitigation**.

1.4.5 The comments and advice received as part of the Screening Opinion informed the assessments carried out and information presented within this EA, details of which are included within the relevant technical chapters of this EA.

1.4.6 The assessment of potential environmental effects and preparation of the EA has been co-ordinated by environmental and landscape consultants ASH on behalf of SSEN Transmission. The core ASH team has been supported by specialists providing inputs on terrestrial ecology (habitats and mammals), ornithology, water environment, soils, cultural heritage and forestry.

1.4.7 Other inputs relating to construction and future maintenance of the Proposed Development have been provided by SSEN Transmission.

1.5 Structure of the Environmental Appraisal

1.5.1 The EA is reported in one volume including text, figures and appendices, as listed on the table of contents.

1.5.2 The EA is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background;
- Chapter 2 – Routeing Process and Alternatives;
- Chapter 3 – The Proposed Development;
- Chapter 4 – Landscape and Visual;
- Chapter 5 – Ecology;
- Chapter 6 – Ornithology;
- Chapter 7 – Geology, Hydrology and Hydrogeology;
- Chapter 8 – Cultural Heritage;
- Chapter 9 – Forestry; and
- Chapter 10 – Schedule of Mitigation.

1.5.3 These Chapters are supported by a series of figures and appendices, as appropriate.

1.5.4 Assessment of impacts likely to arise from installation of the UGC are included in **Appendix 1.1**, rather than within the chapters noted above, given that they fall under the Applicant's permitted development rights.

1.6 Consultation

1.6.1 Consultation with statutory consultees has been undertaken to agree the proposed scope of environmental surveys and / or assessments associated with the Proposed Development. The statutory consultees included as part of preliminary consultations included NatureScot, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Spey District Fishery Board, Scottish Water, Scottish Forestry, and Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS), along with additional communication with Moray Council following receipt of the Screening Opinion. Further details on consultations undertaken are included in the relevant technical chapters of this EA.

Public Consultation

1.6.2 The approach to public consultation has ensured that the local community has been given the opportunity to comment on the proposals and provide feedback throughout its development. This has enabled locally important issues and concerns to be identified and subsequently considered. Consultation feedback has been pivotal in the design evolution of the project.

1.6.3 SSEN Transmission organised virtual consultation events at route selection stage via the project website www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/elchies-rothes-iii-wind-farm-grid-connection/ at the following times:

- 8th July 2020; 13:00 – 15:00 and 17:00 – 19:00; and
- 9th July 2020; 14:00 – 16:00 and 18:00 – 20:00

1.6.4 SSEN Transmission developed an online consultation tool to enable the local community to experience the full exhibition from home on a computer, tablet or mobile device. The online exhibition was designed to look and feel like a real consultation in a community hall, with exhibition boards, maps, interactive videos and the opportunity to share views on the proposals.

1.6.5 SSEN Transmission also organised a public exhibition at alignment selection stage within the local area to allow members of the general public to obtain information and pass comment upon the Proposed Development. Given the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in September 2021, in-person alignment consultation events took place. The in-person consultation events took place at the following times:

- 28th September 2021; 14:00-19:00 – at Boharm Public Hall, Mulben
- 29th September 2021; 14:00-19:00 – at The Grant Hall, Rothes

1.6.6 To ensure wider access and engagement virtual consultation events were also held at alignment selection stage.

1.6.7 The virtual consultation events took place via the project website https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/elchies-rothes-iii-wind-farm-grid-connection/ at the following times:

- 30th September 2021; 13:00-15.00 and 17:00-19:00

1.6.8 Further details of the consultation process can be found in the Routeing Report on Consultation[2] and the Alignment Report on Consultation.[3] Both are available via the project website https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/elchies-rothes-iii-wind-farm-grid-connection/.

1.7 Representations to the Application

1.7.1 Representations with respect to the section 37 application should be made to the ECU. These can be made via the ECU's case search webpage at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationSearch.aspx.

[2] Elchies (Rothes III) Wind Farm Grid Connection Report on Consultation – Route Options (September 2020)
[3] Elchies (Rothes III) Wind Farm Connection Report on Consultation – Alignment Options (November 2022)