CONTENTS

4. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

4.1 Executive Summary

4.1.1 This Chapter describes the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for the Proposed Development. The assessment considers potential effects during construction and during operation.

4.1.2 The assessment finds that there would be no long term significant landscape and visual effects associated with the Proposed Development.

4.2 Introduction

4.2.1 This Chapter presents the findings of the LVIA for the Proposed Development. The purpose of the LVIA is to identify and evaluate potential significant effects on landscape character and visual amenity as a result of the Proposed Development.

4.2.2 The assessment has been undertaken by landscape architects at ASH design + assessment Ltd (ASH), who are Chartered Members of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). The assessment has been prepared with reference to the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (LI and IEMA, 2013),[1] referred to as GLVIA3.

4.3 Scope of Assessment

4.3.1 The LVIA considers the Proposed Development during the construction and operational phases, as described in **Chapter 3: The Proposed Development** of this Environmental Appraisal (EA). It gives consideration to potential effects on the character of the landscape and also the visual amenity of those present within the landscape.

4.3.2 Although closely related to one another, effects on landscape character and visual amenity have been considered separately for reasons of clarity and robustness. The landscape assessment is contained in Sections **Error! Reference s ource not found.** to 4.8 while the visual assessment is contained in Sections 4.9 to 4.11.

4.3.3 This Chapter describes the key components, features and characteristics that contribute to the quality and perception of the landscape character and visual amenity within the study area (see paragraph 4.3.9) and assesses the potential effects that the introduction of the Proposed Development may have on them. In the context of the Proposed Development (see **Figure 3.1a-c**), potential effects relate to:

- Approximately 24.3 km of 132 kV OHL, to be supported by trident H poles, between a location around 450 m to the south-west of the Rothes III Wind Farm on-site substation (approximate grid reference 322434,847882) and a location around 900 m to the north-west of Blackhhillock substation (approximate grid reference 343098,848409).
- Sealing end structures to transfer the OHL connection to UGC; and
- Ancillary development 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 temporary and permanent access routes, permanent stone hardstanding areas related to the cable sealing end structure, and associated working areas around infrastructure to facilitate construction.

4.3.4 Potential effects resulting from the proposed UGC (see **Figure 3.1a-c**) are assessed separately in **Appendix 1.1** and relate to:

- The construction of underground cables and reinstatement of disturbed areas, comprising:
- UGC between the consented Rothes III Wind Farm on-site substation and the CSE structure where the UGC transitions to OHL; and

[1] Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013) *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition.* Routledge

- UGC between the CSE structure where the OHL transitions to UGC and Blackhillock Substation.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

4.3.5 A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) has been generated to illustrate theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development. ZTVs are useful tools to aid the identification of potential effects but are not indicative of an effect itself since they are generated over bare ground terrain models and do not take into account the potential screening effects of localised features, buildings or vegetation. Nor do they indicate ways in which a development may relate to its broader landscape context.

4.3.6 ZTVs are computer generated diagrams which use a terrain model to indicate areas from which the Proposed Development would theoretically be visible. The ZTV for the Proposed Development has been prepared using Ordnance Survey (OS) Terrain 5 Digital Terrain Model (T5 DTM) and Esri's ArcGIS software. T5 DTM is a grid of heightened points with regular 5 m point spacing. The software uses this information to create a virtual, 3-dimensional, bare ground model which is representative of the earth / sea surface.

4.3.7 The ZTV shows theoretical visibility for a person with a viewing height of 2 m as per NatureScot's (formerly known as Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)) visualisations guidance for a person standing at ground level (SNH, 2017[2]). Therefore, while the ZTV shows theoretical visibility from ground level, it does not show visibility from other heights (e.g. 2nd storey, 3rd storey buildings) and so site appraisal is critical in assessing and evaluating on-site visibility.

4.3.8 A ZTV has been generated (see **Figure 4.1a-c**) to illustrate theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development, based on the worst-case pole height of 16 m.

Study Area

4.3.9 Following an initial site appraisal and review of the ZTV, it was considered that any potentially significant landscape and visual effects would be likely to occur within 1.5 km of the Proposed Development. As such, a 1.5 km radius study area offset from the Proposed Development has been adopted for the assessment, as shown on **Figure 4.1a-c**.

Cumulative

4.3.10 Cumulative effects may arise when more than one development of a similar scale and nature combine to create potential effects different to that which would result from the Proposed Development alone. A cumulative landscape and visual appraisal (CLVA) has been conducted to address the potential for significant cumulative effects resulting from "the additional changes caused by a proposed development in conjunction with other similar developments or as the combined effect of a set of developments, taken together" (NatureScot: p4, in GLVIA3).[3] In the context of the Proposed Development, it is recognised that other existing transmission and distribution infrastructure is located within the study area, including 132 kV and local 11 kV and 33 kV OHLs, and Blackhillock Substation. These components have been considered as part of the baseline for the LVIA rather than the cumulative baseline.

4.3.11 The CLVA focuses on appraising the potential for cumulative visual effects *during operation* only. An appraisal of construction effects has been scoped out of the CLVA since any potential adverse cumulative landscape and visual construction effects would be short term and not likely to be significant. It is also difficult to analyse cumulative effects during construction due to the uncertainty of construction activity timing for other developments in the cumulative baseline scenario.

Illustrative Visualisation and Wireline

4.3.12 An illustrative visualisation and wireline contained in **Chapter 3: The Proposed Development** has been produced to illustrate the Proposed Development during operation from one location, agreed with statutory consultees during

[2] NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) (2017). *Visual Representation of Wind Farms. Guidance. Version 2.2*. February 2017.

[3] NatureScot (2012) *Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments.* March 2012.

consultation. The illustrative visualisation has been produced in accordance with NatureScot's Visual Representation of Wind Farms[2] (2017) guidance, wherein the information found in the guidance has been adopted to the visualisation of overhead lines, where applicable.

4.3.13 Whilst a viewpoint-based assessment has not been undertaken for the LVIA, the illustrative visualisation and wireline provides a visual reference to be viewed alongside the LVIA. The visualisation location (VL) as detailed in **Table 4.1** and shown on **Figure 3.2** is included to provide a representative impression of the views which could be obtained whilst also demonstrating how the Proposed Development would sit in the landscape setting.

Table 4.1: Visualisation Location and Wirelines

Location	Type	Grid Coordinate	Description
VL 1 **Kirkhill** (see **Figure 3.2**)	Illustrative Visualisation	NJ 30578 51668 (approx. 0.4km from the Proposed Development)	Representative of views from the Kirkhill Viewpoint in a general south-east direction across the B9015, and valley, towards the River Spey.

4.4 Consultation

4.4.1 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**.

4.4.2 In their Screening Opinion, ECU confirmed that a full LVIA would be required as supporting information for the section 37 application. **Table 4.2** sets out the comments received from consultees in relation to landscape and visual amenity and the actions taken to address them within this assessment.

Table 4.2: Consultee responses

Consultee	Consultee Response	Applicant Action
NatureScot	NatureScot commented on the work that SSEN Transmission progressed to reach alignment selection stage, and suggested it places SSEN Transmission in a well-informed position to progress to the section 37 application and EIA / EA stages. NatureScot did not have any further comments to input at alignment consultation stage.	This was noted. Any further updates were to be communicated with NatureScot.

4.5 Methodology

Assessment Guidance

4.5.1 The assessment has been prepared with reference to GLVIA3, and Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (SNH and The Countryside Agency, 2002)[4].

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

Professional Judgement

4.5.2 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 and landscape and visual sensitivity, magnitude and significance of effect. The assessment has been undertaken and verified by chartered members of the Landscape Institute to provide a robust and consistent approach.

4.5.3 New development inevitably attracts a spectrum of opinion from the public, ranging from very adverse to very beneficial reactions. However, using the precautionary principle, the LVIA has been carried out based on the assumption that all landscape and visual effects reported are adverse, unless otherwise stated.

Key Stages of the Assessment

4.5.4 GLVIA3 suggests that landscape and visual effects are assessed from a clear understanding of the Proposed Development and any mitigation measures which are being adopted.

4.5.5 The GLVIA3 methodology for landscape assessment involves an appreciation of the existing landscape and visual 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.

4.5.6 Familiarity with the site and the extent, nature and expectation of existing views is a key factor in establishing the visual sensitivity in terms of the Proposed Development. 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 subsequent evaluation of effect significance.

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

4.5.8 There are five key stages to the assessment:

- establishment of the baseline;
- appreciation of the Proposed Development;
- identification of key landscape and visual receptors;
- identification of potential landscape and visual effects; and
- assessment of landscape and visual effect significance.

4.5.9 Detailed methodology for these five key stages are described separately under the relevant methodology sections for landscape assessment (see Section **Error! Reference source not found.**) and visual assessment (see Section 4.9).

4.5.10 Landscape and visual effects have been assessed at two points in time:

- during construction;
- during operation (after 10 years of operation)

Site Survey

4.5.11 A site visit was undertaken in June 2022 to verify the landscape and visual receptors identified through desk study, identify any further potential receptors which may be of relevance, and collate information on baseline landscape and visual amenity. Site recording involved the completion of standardised recording forms and annotation of OS plans, supported by a photographic record of views from key receptor locations. True View Visuals augmented reality software was also used to verify visibility on site. Photography from the visualisation location was also undertaken in June 2022.

Limitations of the Assessment and Assumptions

4.5.12 The prominence of the Proposed Development in the landscape would vary according to the prevailing weather conditions. The assessment has been carried out, as is best practice, by assuming the 'worst case' scenario i.e. on a clear, bright day in winter, when neither foreground deciduous foliage nor haze can interfere with the clarity of the view obtained.

4.5.13 The assessment of visual effects has been undertaken from the nearest publicly accessible locations, for example the nearest public road, footpath or open space to each receptor or receptor group, as appropriate. Assumptions have been made about the types and importance of views obtained from these locations. Where access has not been possible, conclusions have been estimated with regards to the level of effect, using professional judgement with the aid of desk-based resources and assessment from the nearest accessible location. Receptors in derelict, demolished or unused buildings or those considered to be unoccupied / unused at the time of the survey have not been assessed. Therefore, not all buildings included on the OS base maps are necessarily assessed as building-based receptor locations in the visual assessment. The assessment also generalises the effect rating across receptors in each grouping.

4.5.14 Limitations relating to ZTVs are discussed in Sections 4.3.5 to 4.3.8.

4.5.15 The assessment acknowledges that there will be tree felling associated with the Proposed Development to establish an operational corridor and avoid wind blow, and some areas of compensatory replanting (see **Chapter 9: Forestry**). However, the assessment assumes that all other trees and shrubs will remain in place, at the same height, in the same condition throughout the assessment since it is not within the scope of this assessment to establish the future status of all planting in the study area. Likewise, the assessment does not factor any other new planting or development into the assessment, since the details of future proposals are not known at this stage. This includes potential new planting outside the operational corridor, which is likely to be the responsibility of landowners, Forestry and Land Scotland or other parties.

4.6 Landscape Assessment: Detailed Methodology

4.6.1 Effects to landscape character may arise through the introduction of new components which are out of keeping with established landscape patterns and features. The scale and form of new development can prove to be influential in the context of existing landform, scenic quality, settlement pattern and planting structure. Development may also result in the alteration or fragmentation of important and distinctive landscape components.

4.6.2 The Landscape Assessment assesses the potential impacts on landscape character of the Proposed Development. The character of the landscape relates to the natural processes and human activities that have been at work for a long time to shape the land to its present form. Factors contributing to landscape character include topography, vegetation cover, sense of space or enclosure and past and present land use. Landscape character and resources are considered to have an importance in their own right and are valued for their intrinsic qualities. The aim of the assessment is to determine the effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape character of the area and the elements which contribute to its values and sensitivity.

4.6.3 This detailed methodology section describes the five key stages of the landscape assessment (as listed in paragraph 4.5.8).

Establishment of the Landscape Baseline

4.6.4 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through a combination of desk study and site appraisal. The following specific tasks have been undertaken:

- a review of the 'Moray Local Development Plan (MLDP) 2020' and the 'Moray Local Landscape Designation Review 2018' for local landscape designations and a search for other national and regional level designated and protected landscapes;

- a review of the Landscape Character Types (LCTs) identified by NatureScot (2019);
- site appraisal (June 2022) to verify landscape receptors identified through desk study, identify further potential receptors and collate information on the landscape baseline.

Relative Landscape Value

4.6.5 The relative value of the landscape is an important consideration in informing later judgement of the significance of effects. Value concerns the perceived importance of the landscape, when considered as a whole and within the context of the study area. Landscape value 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.

4.6.6 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. Criteria for the allocation of perceived landscape value are outlined in **Table 4.3**.

Table 4.3: Relative 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 is associated with features of national or regional importance which are relatively common within the wider context; • 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.

Appreciation of the Proposed Development

4.6.7 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline landscape context. It involves an understanding of the proposed activities and changes which would take place during the short-term construction of the Proposed Development and its long-term operation, and of any peripheral or ancillary features proposed. The consideration of any mitigation or other planting in the vicinity is also important in the understanding of potential longer-term effects (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Identification of Key Landscape Receptors

4.6.8 The identification of landscape receptors is the first step in the analysis of the potential for significant landscape effects to take place. 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 effects which might result from a development of the type proposed.

Landscape Sensitivity

4.6.9 Landscape sensitivity considers the nature of the landscape and its ability to accommodate development of the type proposed without compromising its key characteristics and components. There are two aspects which are considered when establishing the landscape sensitivity:

- value: the baseline value of the landscape and the contributory value of individual landscape receptors to the landscape as a whole; and
- susceptibility to change: the ability of landscape receptors to accommodate development of the type proposed without changing the intrinsic qualities of the landscape as a whole.

4.6.10 Landscape sensitivity has been evaluated with reference to these factors and using a three-point scale as listed in **Table 4.4**.

Table 4.4: Landscape Sensitivity Criteria

Landscape Sensitivity	Criteria
High	A highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.
Medium	A reasonably valued landscape with a composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape which is potentially tolerant of a large degree of change of the type proposed.

Identification of Potential Landscape Effects

4.6.11 The second step in the assessment process involves the identification of potential effects which may occur as a result of the interaction of the effects of the Proposed Development with the identified landscape receptors. The assessment takes into account direct effects upon existing landscape elements, features and key characteristics and also indirect effects which may occur secondarily as a result of changes affecting another landscape component or area. The ZTV is used as a tool to gauge the extent of potential indirect change, supported by targeted field surveys.

Magnitude of Change

4.6.12 Magnitude of change concerns the degree to which the Proposed Development would alter the existing characteristics of the landscape. The assessment of magnitude involves consideration of the nature and scale of the change which would occur in relation to each identified potential effect and also the duration and potential reversibility of the effect. These

changes are then combined to evaluate a magnitude rating for the area as a whole. Magnitude of change is categorised on a four-point scale as listed in **Table 4.5**.

Table 4.5: Magnitude of Landscape Change Criteria

Magnitude of Landscape Change	Criteria
High	Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive change over a more limited area.
Medium	Perceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to notable change in a localised area.
Low	Virtually imperceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or perceptible change in a localised area.
Negligible	No discernible change in any landscape characteristics or components.

4.6.13 As recommended in GLVIA3, the criteria used to assess magnitude of change are recognised to be reference points along a continuum. Consideration is given to the potential for magnitude to vary over time, during construction and operation.

Assessment of Landscape Effect Significance

4.6.14 Evaluation of the predicted significance of effect has been carried out through analysis of the anticipated magnitude of change in relation to the identified landscape sensitivity and using a degree of professional judgement. 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.

4.6.15 Effect significance has been evaluated using a four-point scale using the criteria noted in **Table 4.6** to describe effects. Effects are assessed to be adverse, unless otherwise stated as beneficial.

Table 4.6: Landscape Effect Criteria

Landscape Effect	Criteria
Major	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.
Moderate	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.
Minor	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.
Negligible or No Effect	The Proposed Development sits well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and would not result in any discernible reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.

4.6.16 The above criteria and levels of effect represent points on a continuum. Where necessary, interim ratings (such as Minor-Moderate) have been used to indicate the anticipated level of effect. For the purposes of the assessment, effects with a rating of Moderate and above are considered to be significant. In some circumstances, localised effects may be described, where effects would be localised to part of the landscape resource. Consideration is given to the potential for effects to vary over time, during construction and operation.

4.7 Landscape Assessment: Baseline Conditions

Overview

4.7.1 The landscape within the study area is largely characterised by agricultural, well-settled lowland landscape. At its western end, the Proposed Development passes through upland moorland and forestry before descending into the Spey Valley, which is characterised by its broad, open valley floor surrounded by steep, wooded slopes. Towards the eastern end the landscape comprises of gently undulating lowland farmland and patches of forestry and woodland. The study area includes the planned towns of Rothes to the west, as well as Keith at the very eastern end, some smaller settlement clusters and scattered farms. These are usually well-connected by a network of minor roads as well as major routes such as the A95.

Designated Landscapes

4.7.2 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.

4.7.3 As shown on **Figure 4.2a-c,** there are no nationally designated or protected landscapes within the study area.

4.7.4 Within the regional context, Spey Valley Special Landscape Area (SLA) overlaps with the middle section of the study area. This designation is described below and its Special Qualities[5] are listed, with those of particular relevance to the Proposed Development highlighted in **bold**.

Spey Valley SLA

4.7.5 SLA is a non-statutory designation applied by Moray Council through the development planning process to landscapes identified as being of regional or local importance. The Spey Valley SLA comprises the broad Spey Valley and surrounding steep-sided hills which contain it. Within the study area it covers the middle section of the alignment approximately from Rothes to Boat o' Brig, where it runs along the valley floor west of the Spey before it crosses it turning east. The reasons for designation are described in the Moray Local Landscape Designation Review (2018) as *"The diverse and handsome landscape of broad gently weaving river, floodplain farmland, wooded valley sides and distinctive settlements together with the romance associated with the Spey due to its connection with whisky distilling are key reasons for designation of this SLA".*

4.7.6 The special qualities for the Spey Valley SLA are cited as follows:

- The broad and open floodplain of the Spey south of Fochabers which narrows further upstream where the valley is increasingly constrained by steep hillsides.
- The middle section of the valley is strongly contained on both sides by steep wooded slopes including those of the prominent heather-capped hill of Ben Aigan which looms over the valley.
- The Spey is wide and occasionally braided forming banks of cobbles and vegetated islands.
- The Spey Valley has a rich cultural heritage, including monuments such as the Scheduled Pictish symbol stones at Inveravon Parish Church, Knockando Parish Church, and Arndilly House, architectural features including traditional (and not so traditional) distilleries, the 16th century Ballindalloch Castle, numerous estate lodges, Telford's graceful high arched bridge spanning the Spey at Craigellachie, the planned settlements of Aberlour and Archiestown and the Victorian settlement of Craigellachie.
- Smaller farms and houses are sited close to the minor road which forms the route for the Speyside Way on the east side of the valley between Fochabers and Boat o' Brig. Steep slopes and terraces, backed by extensive coniferous forest, accommodate small species-rich pastures and mixed woodlands fringed by ferns and gorse.

[5] The name of the various highlighted qualities of designated and protected landscapes varies. For this assessment, the term Special Qualities has been used as a general term to reference any of the following: Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of NSAs, Wild Land Area Qualities (WLAQs), Special Qualities of SLAs, and highlighted levels of interest for GDLs.

This area has an intimate scale and more tranquil nature than the western side of the river in this area which is more intensively farmed and accommodates busy roads and the railway.

- Narrow shelves of farmland and the retained historic field patterns of small croft houses and farms are perched above the floodplain of the Spey to the north-east of Rothes although increasingly in the middle sections of the valley within this SLA, the forested side slopes of hills dominate.
- The distilleries and their history of whisky production in Speyside has led to the area being called the heart of single malt distilling in Scotland.
- The association of the Spey valley with whisky distilling attracts visitors and conjures a romantic perception of the landscape and cultural heritage of the area.
- The Speyside Way follows minor roads, forest tracks and the banks of the river through this landscape.
- Views are generally open in the north but become more confined upstream where the valley is contained by steep-sided hills.
- Adjacent uplands are highly visible west of Craigellachie and form part of the wider setting.

Landscape Character

4.7.7 NatureScot has undertaken detailed review and classification of the various landscape areas and types within Scotland (SNH, 2019). Seven individual Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are identified within the study area (see **Figure 4.2a-c**):

- LCT 285: Rolling Farmland and Forests - Moray & Nairn
- LCT 287: Broad Farmed Valley
- LCT 288: Upland Farmland
- LCT 289: Upland Farmed Valleys
- LCT 290: Upland Moorland and Forestry
- LCT 292: Open Upland
- LCT 293: Low Forested Hills

4.7.8 Descriptions of these LCTs, including their key characteristics are included in **Appendix 4.1**. A brief description of these LCTs is included below:

LCT 285: Rolling Farmland and Forests - Moray & Nairn

4.7.9 This LCT is found within the foothills between the Rivers Spey and Nairn. Overall, this LCT is characterised by a complex landform made up of undulating slopes, low rolling hills and valleys. There is a high degree of tree cover, with a mixture of commercial forestry and broad-leaved woodland, interspersed with areas of farmland and pasture. This is a relatively well-settled landscape, with scattered farms and small settlements, connected by a network of single-track roads. A number of historic sites including abbeys, castles and large estate buildings are located within this LCT. Within the study area it encompasses a small area west of the B9015 and Orton, which includes a couple of farm houses and fields nestled within woodland and forestry which clothe the western slopes of the Spey valley.

LCT 287: Broad Farmed Valley

4.7.10 This LCT covers the lower reaches of the Spey valley, characterised by the winding course of the River Spey, set within a wide, flat floodplain. Within the study area it covers the area from Rothes in the west to Auchroisk Distillery in the east. Tributary rivers and burns occasionally merge into the river through narrower side valleys and from upland basins. Vegetation cover is varied, with moorland and coniferous forestry dominating the upper valley sides, while mixed policy woodland occurs surrounding estates on some of the lower slopes. Within the valley the landscape pattern becomes smaller and more intimate in scale, consisting mainly of farmland, with shelterbelts and occasional patches of woodland. This is a well-settled landscape, consisting of distinctive settlements, estate houses, historic castles, distillery buildings and farm buildings, which give it a sense of local character. There is a well-developed network of B-roads and minor roads which run along the valley sides and tie in to the A941 which passes through the study area. The Speyside Way, a long-distance walking route, follows the course of the River Spey. The complex mosaic of landforms, vegetation cover and

historic buildings result in a sequence of changing views, contrasting with the simpler landscape pattern on the forested valley sides.

LCT 288: Upland Farmland

4.7.11 This LCT comprises the broad shallow valleys which are part of an area of mid-elevation uplands north-east of the River Spey. Agriculture is the main land use, with a mixture of improved pasture and large-scale rectilinear fields dominating the valley floor. On higher slopes pockets of forestry and heather moorland occur. Patches of native woodland can occasionally be found mainly near settlements. This is a relatively well-settled landscape, with small-scale farms, distilleries, small settlements and the planned town of Keith. It is well-connected by a number of major and minor roads, including the A95 and B9014 within the study area, as well as the railway which runs along the valley floor. There is a large concentration of overhead lines adjacent to Keith and Blackhillock substations, and wind turbines occasionally feature in views into adjacent landscape types. There are extensive open views across the farmland and towards hills in adjoining landscapes.

LCT 289: Upland Farmed Valleys

4.7.12 This LCT comprises a series of long, elevated valleys east of the Spey, along the southern edge of the study area. They are composed of a patchwork of forestry, farmland, and moorland. Settlement is relatively sparse, consisting of individual estates located mainly on the valley sides and scattered farms along the valley floor. These are connected by a network of sinuous roads which largely follow the topography of the landscape. Within this LCT views are often channelled along the valleys towards lowland farmland or distant hills, whereas more narrow valleys provide more intimate, changing views. Steel lattice towers, wind turbines and other structures occasionally feature in views, including three domestic turbines at Auchlunkart Home Farm and Hill of Towie Wind Farm, which is located within this LCT, just outside the study area.

LCT 290: Upland Moorland and Forestry

4.7.13 This LCT is characterised by gently undulating plateaux surrounded by smooth, rounded hills. Landform consists mainly of heather or grass moorland interspersed with forestry plantations forming large scale geometric patterns in the landscape. Occasionally the transition between the two is softened by patches of native pine and birch woodland. Some areas of semi-improved pasture can also be found, particularly to the east and near Glen of Rothes where the landscape begins to transition into farmland. Settlement consists of sparsely scattered farm buildings, found mainly in Glen of Rothes within the study area. Within the study area this LCT is more accessible than some of the core areas outwith the study area and is traversed by a number of roads and forestry tracks, including the A941 and Core Path SP01 and SP12.

LCT 292: Open Upland

4.7.14 This LCT occurs across south-east Moray and beyond, extending to the Cairngorms National Park boundary, and is found along the southern part of the study area, overlooking the Spey Valley. It is characterised by a broad basin of upland moorland surrounded by a series of prominent, well-defined hills. Within the study area it comprises some of the northern slopes of Ben Aigan, including Knock More. Overall landcover consists mainly of upland moorland, with heather moorland dominating lower slopes. While forests are less common in this landscape type generally, there is a high degree of forest cover within the study area, with conifer forestry dominating. Areas of farmland can be found at the edge of this LCT where it transitions into Upland Farmland and Upland Farmed Valleys. Settlement is relatively sparse and mainly found adjacent to main roads, such as the A95, a short section of which passes through the LCT within the study area, where individual farmhouses can be found. This LCT provides a backdrop to the broad farmed valley of the River Spey. While there is a sense of remoteness within the hills this part of the LCT has a more settled feel.

LCT 293: Low Forested Hills

4.7.15 This LCT consists of a ridge of broad, gently undulating hills running east to west. There is a high degree of forest cover, consisting mainly of large-scale conifer plantations found on the upper slopes, which form geometric patterns. Occasional areas of farmland also occur on more gentle slopes. Settlement is generally sparse, although within the study area it is more populated, with a number of farmhouses and cottages, served by a network of minor roads connecting with the B9103 in the adjacent Broad Farmed Valley and Upland Farmland LCTs.

4.8 Assessment of Landscape Effects

4.8.1 The potential effects of the Proposed Development on landscape character are as follows:

- direct and indirect *temporary* effects from construction of the Proposed Development; and
- direct and indirect *permanent* effects associated with operation of Proposed Development.

4.8.2 The following paragraphs summarise the findings of the landscape assessment, based on an appreciation of the Proposed Development. Refer to **Figure 4.2a-c** and **Appendix 4.1** for details of the landscape baseline and assessment.

4.8.3 No significant landscape effects would be experienced to landscape character as a result of the Proposed Development, during construction or operation, largely due to the woodland cover and presence of existing OHLs and electricity infrastructure in the landscape.

4.8.4 The Proposed Development would lead to some perceptible changes in the landscape character of the SLA and Special Qualities during construction, including due to the increased activities which would take place. However, given the proximity to the public road and surrounding existing infrastructure of similar type and scale, this is not predicted to lead to a noticeable change in the presence of any Special Landscape Qualities (SLQ) within the SLA. During operation, the Proposed Development would be seen in the context of surrounding existing OHLs and would be located in a relatively active and managed landscape, within a small part of the overall SLA. The effect on the Spey Valley SLA is therefore predicted to be Minor-Moderate Adverse (not significant) during construction and operation and the integrity of the designation would not be affected by the Proposed Development.

4.8.5 During construction, it is anticipated that Minor-Moderate (not significant) effects would occur for LCT 290 (Upland Moorland and Forestry) and LCT 287 (Broad Farmed Valley), since construction activities within both LCTs would temporarily form focal features and distraction within the local area. This activity would be somewhat contained by forestry and woodland. In more open areas (such as moorland and felled areas near Ardcanny Wood and along the floor of the Spey Valley north of Rothes), construction works, including tree felling, may appear similar to existing forestry and agricultural activities in some areas, but would nonetheless be a perceptible intensification of this activity. Construction activities would cause a temporary distraction where the overhead line crosses the valley resulting in Minor (not significant) effects during construction from LCT 288 (Upland Farmland) and Negligible-Minor (not significant) effects from LCT 289 (Upland Farmed Valleys) where these construction activities would be perceived from the margins of this LCT. These activities would be perceived in the context of traffic and movement along the A95 and railway line which the Proposed Development would run adjacent to. For LCT 292 (Open Upland), construction would occur within a very localised area at the edge of the LCT and construction effects are therefore anticipated to be Negligible-Minor. Effects within other LCTs are expected to be Negligible.

4.8.6 During operation, it is anticipated that Minor-Moderate (not significant) effects would occur for LCT 287 (Broad Farmed Valley), where the Proposed Development would appear along the valley floor and side slopes from more open areas, particularly at points where the line crosses the B9015 and the River Spey near Boat o' Brig. The Proposed Development would introduce new vertical structures into the landscape which would potentially influence the experience of the river and its setting, although these would be experienced in the context of existing overhead lines and road and rail infrastructure within an active and managed landscape. Minor (not significant) effects are expected within LCT 288 and 290, where the Proposed Development may slightly increase the presence of electricity infrastructure. Within LCT 288 the Proposed Development would be seen in the context of existing overhead lines and rail and road infrastructure, while in LCT 290 it may slightly extend the perceived influence of an active and inhabited landscape, although this would be partially contained by forestry. Elsewhere effects are expected to be Negligible-Minor or Negligible, due to the high degree of forestry and woodland cover.

Summary of Landscape Effects

4.8.7 **Table 4.7** provides a summary of these findings.

Table 4.7: Summary of Landscape Assessment

	Potential Effect During Construction							Potential Effect During Operation (after 10 years)						
	Not Significant				Significant			Not Significant			Significant			
	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major
Spey Valley SLA				•							•			
LCT 285 – Rolling Farmland and Forests – Moray & Nairn	•							•						
LCT 287 – Broad Farmed Valley				•							•			
LCT 288 – Upland Farmland			•							•				
LCT 289 – Upland Farmed Valleys		•							•					
LCT 290 – Upland Moorland and Forestry				•						•				
LCT 292 – Open Upland		•						•						
LCT 293 – Low Forested Hills	•							•						

4.8.8 This assessment concludes that landscape effects on the LCTs and Spey Valley SLA would not be significant due to the wooded and undulating character of the landscape and the presence of existing OHLs, and other built features such as main roads, substations and small-scale wind turbines that affect the sensitivity of the landscape to change. Some effects are anticipated to be higher during construction, due to construction activities, tree felling and the increased perception of activity within the landscape, but these would reduce in the long-term during operation.

Cumulative Landscape Character

Introduction

4.8.9 Cumulative impacts are those which occur where the effects of more than one development of a similar type combine to produce a greater level of effect on landscape character.

Cumulative Baseline Scenario

4.8.10 The cumulative baseline scenario comprises the developments listed in **Table 4.8**. It assumes a baseline scenario where these developments would be operational and considers effects resulting from the potential addition of the Proposed Development.

Table 4.8: Cumulative Baseline Scenario

Status	Development
Consented	Construction of a battery energy storage system at Blackhillock. (Application Reference: 22/00067/S36).
	Construction of overhead line 33 kV EVH 1 single pole and two H-Pole structures at Glentauchers Distillery, Mulben. (Application Reference: ECU00002194).
Application Stage	Construction of whisky maturation warehouses to the west of Rothes (Application Reference: 22/01673/EIA).

Potential Cumulative Landscape Effects

4.8.11 Potential cumulative landscape effects have been appraised at the 'operational' stage of the Proposed Development.

4.8.12 The battery energy storage system and EHV overhead line would be located in LCT 228: Upland Farmland, and the whisky maturation warehouses would be located in LCT 290: Upland Moorland and Forestry.

4.8.13 When experienced in combination with the cumulative baseline scenario developments, the Proposed Development may increase the perceived presence of electrical infrastructure within LCT 228 and LCT 290, but it is not anticipated that this would result in a significant landscape effect, given the presence of other large features and the mitigating effects of screening by surrounding landform.

4.8.14 The appraisal therefore concludes that there would be no significant cumulative landscape effects associated with the Proposed Development.

4.9 Visual Assessment: Detailed Methodology

4.9.1 The visual assessment describes and evaluates the potential change in existing views obtained from residential properties, places of work, routes, popular destinations and strategic vantage points during the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development, and the extent to which these would affect residents, visitors and users of the landscape.

4.9.2 Visual amenity relates to the way in which people visually experience the surrounding landscape. Adverse visual effects may occur through the intrusion into established views of new features, out of keeping with the existing structure, scale and composition of the view. However, visual effects may also be beneficial where an attractive focus is created in a previously unremarkable view or the influence of previously detracting features is reduced. The significance of effects will vary, depending on the nature and degree of change experienced and the perceived value and composition of the existing view.

4.9.3 This detailed methodology section describes the five key stages of the visual assessment (as listed in paragraph 4.5.8).

Establishment of the Visual Baseline

4.9.4 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through combination of desk study and site appraisal. The following specific tasks have been undertaken:

- generation and review of ZTV diagram to identify visual receptors and focus the review of the visual baseline;
- a review of OS maps, Google maps, Bing maps, 'Moray Local Development Plan' (Moray Council, 2020)[6], and other online resources to identify visual receptor locations, including key road and recreational routes; and

[6] Moray Council (2020). *Local Development Plan. July 2020.* Available at: www.moray.gove.uk//moray_standard/page_133431.html [Accessed on 02.12.22]

- site appraisal (June 2022) to verify sensitive visual receptors identified through desk study, identify further potential receptors, and collate information on the visual baseline, including the nature and context of individual visual receptors and the key elements and qualities of the existing view.

Appreciation of the Proposed Development

4.9.5 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline visual context. It involves an understanding of the proposed activities and changes which would take place during the construction of the Proposed Development and its longer-term operation, and of any peripheral or ancillary features proposed.

Identification of Key Visual Receptors

4.9.6 For there to be a visual effect there is the need for a viewer. Individuals experiencing views from locations such as buildings and recognised routeways used by the public have been included in the assessment. Those experiencing views are referred to as visual receptors.

4.9.7 Potential visual receptors have been identified through analysis of the ZTV in combination with targeted field survey.

Identification of Potential Visual Effects

4.9.8 Preparation of the visual baseline is followed by the systematic identification of likely effects on the potential visual receptors. This is a two-fold process, giving consideration to how effects may arise from aspects of the Proposed Development, and how these changes may be accommodated in the existing baseline view.

4.9.9 Locations of visual receptors identified for inclusion in the assessment were visited and key information on the nature, composition and characteristics of the existing visual experienced recorded. Consideration is given to the likely perceived value of a particular view to the viewer, taking into account the nature of the receptor and the potential activity they may be involved in, and factors such as elevation, extent and key features or attractions which may feature in the view.

Visual Sensitivity

4.9.10 The evaluation of visual sensitivity considers both the perceived *value* of the existing view to the receptor and the *susceptibility* of the visual receptor to change. Consideration is therefore given to the following:

- the susceptibility of the receptor to change, which is a combination of the nature of the receptor and the potential activity they may be involved in;
- the perceived value of a particular view to the viewer, which takes into account visual context, including key features and attractors/ detractors which may feature in the existing view and affect the value of that view to the receptor; and
- the aspect and direction of change in respect of the most valued views from the receptor location including the relative elevation compared to the changed element of the view.

4.9.11 Visual sensitivity has been evaluated with reference to these factors above and using a three-point scale as listed in **Table 4.9.**

Table 4.9: Visual Sensitivity Criteria

Visual Sensitivity	Criteria
High	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.

Visual Sensitivity	Criteria
Medium	Views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view 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	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.

4.9.12 The next stage in the assessment process, having identified potential visual receptors and their sensitivity to the Proposed Development, is to ascertain the magnitude of change which would result from the Proposed Development.

Magnitude of Change

4.9.13 Magnitude of change concerns the extent to which the Proposed Development would alter the existing views. Consideration is given to the scale or extent of the changes; the extent to which the composition or focus of the view may be altered; and duration and reversibility of these changes. Magnitude of change is categorised on a four-point scale as listed in **Table 4.10**.

Table 4.10: Magnitude of Visual Change Criteria

Magnitude of Visual Change	Criteria
High	The Proposed Development would result in a very noticeable change in the existing view.
Medium	The Proposed Development would cause a noticeable change in the existing view.
Low	The Proposed Development would cause a perceptible change in the existing view.
Negligible	The Proposed Development would cause a largely imperceptible change in the existing view.

4.9.14 As recommended in GLVIA3, the criteria used to assess magnitude of change are recognised to be reference points along a continuum. Consideration is also given to the potential for effects to vary over time, during construction and operation.

Assessment of Visual Effect Significance

4.9.15 The level of visual effect identified concerns the importance of changes resulting from the Proposed Development. Evaluation of the visual effect is established using professional judgement based on consideration of the magnitude of change in relation to visual sensitivity, taking into account proposed mitigation measures. 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.

4.9.16 Effect significance has been evaluated using a four-point scale and using the criteria noted in **Table 4.11** to describe effects. Effects are assessed to be adverse, unless otherwise stated as beneficial.

Table 4.11: Visual Effect Criteria

Visual Effect	Criteria
Major	The Proposed Development would form a prominent and very detracting feature, resulting in a very noticeable deterioration to an existing highly valued and well composed view.
Moderate	The Proposed Development would introduce some detracting features to an existing highly valued and well composed view or would be prominent within a pleasing or less well composed view, resulting in a noticeable deterioration of the existing view.
Minor	The Proposed Development would form a perceptible but not detracting feature within a pleasing or valued view or would be a more prominent feature within a poorly composed view of limited value, resulting in a small deterioration to the existing view.
Negligible	The Proposed Development would form a barely perceptible feature within the existing view and would not result in any discernible deterioration or improvement to the view.

4.9.17 Consideration is given to the potential for effects to vary over time, during construction and operation.

4.9.18 The above criteria and levels of effect represent points on a continuum. Where necessary, interim ratings (such as Minor-Moderate) have been used to indicate the anticipated level of effect. For the purposes of this assessment, effects of Moderate and above are considered to be significant.

4.9.19 In some circumstances, localised effects may be described, where effects would be localised to part of the visual receptor grouping / route (often a small part).

4.10 Visual Assessment: Baseline Conditions

Interpretation of the ZTV

4.10.1 The Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is illustrated on **Figure 4.1a-c**. The ZTV shows that within 1.5 km, the Proposed Development would theoretically be visible from large parts of the study area, focused along the Spey Valley, and more open, undulating areas such as Rothes Estate. In these areas, landform and forestry would likely limit the extent of visibility shown. The ZTV shows the Proposed Development would not be visible from more elevated areas which are located behind undulations in the landform, on the northern and southern edges of the study area.

Visual Receptors

4.10.2 Visual receptors within the study area comprise residents or others present in and around buildings and settlement areas, those using routes (including transport and recreational routes) through the study area, and those obtaining views from outdoor locations where enjoyment of the view is one of principal reasons for being at the location.

<u>Building-based Receptors</u>

4.10.3 Building-based receptor locations are described in detail in **Appendix 4.2** and their locations are shown on **Figure 4.3a-c**. These receptor locations within the study area can be broadly subdivided into four areas as detailed below:

- Properties near Rothes, Glen of Rothes and Burn of Rothes (Receptor Location B1- B7):
    - Residents and visitors to residential properties, distillery and cottages generally concentrated near Rothes, with residential properties to the south-west within Rothes Estate, and north in Glen of Rothes. Views from these receptor locations are varied, generally channelled along the Glen of Rothes, partially enclosed by trees lining the road, with more open views from receptor locations within Rothes Estate.
- Properties along the B9103 and B9105 (Receptor Locations B8-B16):

- Residents and visitors to group of residential properties, outbuildings, distillery, farm, and agricultural buildings along the B9103 and B9105. Views from these receptor locations are generally channelled along the B roads and the Spey Valley, either towards the north or south, or towards the River Spey in the east. Views are partially enclosed by tree groups near some of the receptor locations.

- Properties near Mulben and along the A95 (B17-B23):
  - Residents and visitors to group of residential properties, outbuildings, and distillery along the A95 and B9103 near Mulben. Views from the majority of receptor locations are generally channelled along the road and valley. Some receptor locations in an elevated position have views of the railway and pole overhead lines crossing the landscape.
- Properties west of Keith and along the A95 (B24-B32):
  - Residents and visitors to group of residential properties, outbuildings, B&Bs, and farm buildings to the west of Keith. Views from these receptor locations are varied but are mostly in the direction of the A95 or B9014 and across the valley floor towards partially forested undulating hills.

Receptors at Outdoor Locations

4.10.4 The following Outdoor Viewing Locations have been included where the view is considered to be a principal reason for being at the location:

- Receptor Location O1 (Kirkhill Viewpoint and Car-Park see **Figure 3.2**): Visitors to a small car park and viewpoint with elevated views of fields and opposite forested slope across the valley;
- O2 (Drumbain Picnic Area and Lay-by): Visitors to a lay-by and picnic are to the direct west of the A941 with views generally enclosed by undulating landform and tree group lining the road; and
- O3 (Rothes Golf Course): Visitors to golf course and carpark in an elevated position to the west of Rothes, with elevated views across undulating landscape and nearby forested areas.
- O4 (Boat O'Brig Speyside Car-Park): Visitors to a small car park with filtered views towards the River Spey to the west, and views to the south more enclosed by vegetation and steeper landform adjacent to the B9013.

Route-based Receptors

4.10.5 Routes within the study area are described in detail in **Appendix 4.2** and shown on **Figure 4.3a-c**. These can be classified into two different categories:

- Public transport routes (including public roads); and
- Recreational routes.

4.10.6 Public transport routes within the study area which have been included in the visual assessment include the following:

- A Roads:
  - Route R1 (A941) comprises a main single carriageway trunk road connecting Elgin with Craigellachie, used by local residents, recreational travellers and visitors. Views from the study area are largely contained within urban areas or across partially elevated areas such as at the Glen of Rothes.
  - Route R2 (A95) comprises a main single carriageway trunk road connecting Keith with Craigellachie, used by local residents, recreational travellers and visitors. Views from the study area are generally channelled along the valley floor.
- B Roads:
  - Route R3 (B9015): comprises a double track road connecting Rothes with Orton, used by local residents, recreational travellers and visitors. Views are generally contained along the valley floor, with more open views of fields across the River Spey floodplain to the south.

- Route R4 (B9014): comprises a double track road connecting Keith with Dufftown. Views are generally open towards undulating fields channelled along the road, occasionally more enclosed by tree groups lining the road.
- Route R5 (B9103): comprises a double track road connecting Mulben with Orton, used by local residents, recreational travellers and visitors. Views from the road are largely enclosed by trees lining the road, surrounding buildings, and undulating landform. Near Orton, there are some views of the River Spey towards the north and south.

- Minor Roads:
  - Route R12 (minor road between Speyburn Distillery and the A941 near Pitcraigie): comprises a singletrack road used by local residents and visitors within the Glen of Rothes, to the east of the A941. Views are largely channelled by the glen and surrounding forested hillslopes. Near the A941 junction, views are more open across the glen.
  - Route R13 (minor road between Arndilly Farm and Aikenway Castle remains): comprises a single-track road used by locals, recreational travellers and visitors running between the prominent northern meander of the River Spey. Views from the minor road are generally enclosed by surrounding trees, with glimpsed views of open fields to the east, and the River Spey to the west.
  - Route R14 (minor road between through Woodside of Cairnty to the B9103 near Craighead): comprises a single-track road used by local residents and recreational travellers, with views generally enclosed by surrounding forests. Near the B9103, views become more open across the valley and along the B9103.
  - Route R15 (minor roads within Mulben and Upper Mulben): comprise various single-track roads used by local residents, workers of the distillery, and visitors. Near Mulben, the minor roads are in a lower position along the valley floor, where views are largely of surrounding fields and tree groups. At Upper Mulben, the minor roads are in an elevated position, and views are more open, towards the south across the valley.
  - Route R16 (minor road between Glentauchers Distillery and Gateside): comprises a single-track road used by local residents and visitors. Views are enclosed by trees surrounding the road, with occasional open views towards the A95, and undulating fields.
  - Route R17 (minor road south-east to the Wood of Muldearie): comprises a single-track road in an elevated position north of the A95, used by local residents, farm workers and visitors. Views from the road are generally towards the south across the A95 and valley, towards opposite forested slopes and undulating fields.
  - Route R18 (minor road between Blackhill Wood and Wester Chalder): comprises a single-track road used by local residents, recreational travellers and visitors to the west of the B9014. Generally, views are more enclosed due to landform and vegetation adjacent to the route, where open they are of undulating fields to the east and west.
  - Route R19 (minor road between Braehead and Mains of Auchindachy): comprises a single-track road to the south-west of Keith, used by local residents and visitors. Views from this route are orientated in various directions, across open undulating fields and scattered buildings. Blackhillock substation is visible from most of the route and various overhead lines running to the substation can be seen crossing the surrounding landscape.

- Railway Routes:
  - Route R6 (Railway between Keith and Orton): comprises a section of the Aberdeen-Inverness railway line running along a west-east axis generally following the B9103, with open views across fields contained in the valley.
  - Route R7 (Heritage Railway from Dufftown to Keith): comprises a railway line running in a north-east to south-west axis between Keith and Dufftown with views over fields, forestry and residential properties.

4.10.7 Recreational routes considered within the visual assessment include Core Paths (Moray Council, 2011)[7], and other commonly used recorded walking or cycling routes. These include the following:

- Core Paths:
  - Route R8 (Core Path SP01 within Rothes Estate): comprises a route used by recreational users, visitors, and estate workers with some open views across undulating fields and felled forestry generally to the north. Along the western and easter end of the routes, (near the proposed substation in the west, and passing the Wood of Conerock in the east), views are more enclosed by surrounding forest.
  - Route R9 (Core Path SP12 between Rothes and the Wood of Conerock): comprises a route used by recreational users, visitors and estate workers with views generally channelled along the edge of the forest, with occasional views southward to Rothes Golf Course.
  - Route R11 (Core Paths SP13, SP14, SP15, SP16, SP17, and SP18 within and near Rothes): comprises a series of routes including core paths and minor roads in Rothes, used by local residents, recreational travellers and visitors. Views are generally contained within the urban area of Rothes by surrounding buildings and tree groups. Views along core paths to the east of Rothes along the River Spey are generally more open across the river, and fields.
  - Route R20 (minor road and routes within Keith, including Core Paths KT06, KT07, KT08, KT09, KT10, KT11, KT12, KT13, KT14, KT15, KT16, KT17, KT18, KT19, KT20 and KT21): comprises single-track routes used by local residents, recreational travellers, and visitors. Generally, views are contained within the urban area of Keith, with open views from some of the core paths in the direction of open fields in the west and south. Blackhillock substation and surrounding overhead lines can be seen from most of the routes.
- Long Distance Route:
  - Route R10 (Speyside Way, Core Paths SRA 03 and SW03, and minor road): comprises marked long-distance walking route and single-track routes used by local residents, walkers and other recreational travellers. Views are varied, generally open in the direction of the River Spey to the west from elevated sections, with other sections of the route contained by surrounding forests and trees, particularly to the north of Boat O'Brig.

4.11 Assessment of Visual Effects

4.11.1 Effects to visual amenity may arise through the introduction of new components within the existing views of a visual receptor, the scale and form of which may be perceived to be prominent or intrusive.

4.11.2 The following sections summarise the findings of the visual assessment, based on an appreciation of the Proposed Development. Please refer **Figure 4.3a-c** and **Appendix 4.2** for details of the visual baseline and assessment and **Figure 3.2** for the illustrative visualisation**.**

Building-based Receptors

4.11.3 Thirty-two building-based receptor locations were included in the visual assessment (see **Figure 4.3a-c**), comprising individual buildings or groups of buildings and associated outdoor spaces where a view of the Proposed Development would potentially be obtained. The assessment has identified that while there would be short-term significant effects during the construction stage of the project to four of the building-based receptors, there would be no significant effects in the long term.

4.11.4 For receptors at B2 (Brauchhill and Ardcanny), a **Moderate Adverse** (significant) effect is predicted during construction due to the proximity of the proposed construction activities in rear and oblique views. This would reduce to **Minor-Moderate Adverse** (not significant) during operation as construction works would cease. While the Proposed Development would remain in close proximity, particularly to Brauchhill, it would be seen in rear views adjacent to forestry edge.

[7] Moray Council (2011). *Moray Council Core Paths Plan*. Available at: *www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file61775.pdf*. [Accessed on 02.12.22]

4.11.5 For receptors at B10 (Collie Farm and nearby property) a **Moderate Adverse** (significant) effect is predicted during construction due to the close proximity to the Proposed Development, which would be noticeable in open views to the north and north-west from one of these properties, in the context of existing woodpole lines. This would reduce to **Minor-Moderate Adverse** (not significant) during operation as construction works would cease.

4.11.6 Effects would be **Moderate Adverse** (significant) for receptors in B17 (Stoneyton) during construction as the Proposed Development and construction activity would be noticeable in the main, open view to the north-west and north, across open fields. This would reduce to **Minor-Moderate Adverse** (not significant) during operation as construction works would cease.

4.11.7 For receptors at B19 (Properties along B9103 west of Mulben), a **Moderate Adverse** (significant) effect is predicted during construction due to the proximity of construction activities in rear and oblique views. This would reduce to **Minor-Moderate Adverse** (significant) during operation as construction works would cease. While the Proposed Development would remain in close proximity, it would only be seen in rear views in the context of an existing woodpole line.

4.11.8 For the remaining visual receptors included in the assessment, visual effects for receptors in buildings would range between Negligible (not-significant) and **Minor-Moderate Adverse** (not significant) during construction, upon completion and during operation. Further details of the visual baseline and assessment for these receptors can be found in **Appendix 4.2**.

Outdoor Receptors

4.11.9 The assessment identified that no significant visual effects would be experienced by receptors in outdoor locations as a result of the Proposed Development, with effects ranging from **Negligible** (not significant) to **Minor-Moderate Adverse** (not significant). This is largely due to screening from landform, trees, distance and sensitivity of receptors.

Route-based Receptors

4.11.10 The assessment identified that no significant visual effects would be experienced by route-based receptors as a result of the Proposed Development, during construction or operation, due to screening from landform and trees, sensitivity of receptors, visual context, and its limited perceptibility introduced adjacent to existing OHLs and other electricity infrastructure. Predicted effects would range from **Negligible** (not significant) to **Minor-Moderate** Adverse (not significant) during construction and operation.

Summary of Visual Effects

4.11.11 **Table 4.12** provides a summary of these findings. An 'L' indicates a localised effect. An 'X' illustrates where the potential effect has changed from the previous stage.

Table 4.12: Summary of Visual Assessment

	Potential Effect During Construction							Potential Effect During Operation (after 10 years)						
	Not Significant				Significant			Not Significant				Significant		
	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major
Building-Based Receptors														
B1 – Dounie Cottage and Burn of Rothes				•							•			
B2 – Brauchhill and Ardcanny					•						X			
B3 – Drumbain			•							•				
B4 – Properties by A941			•							•				
B5 – Speyburn Distillery and nearby properties			•							•				
B6 – Morar, Delfur Farm, Croft Farm and residential properties along the B9105				•						X				
B7 – Rothes	•							•						
B8 – Dundurcas Farm and Kirkhill				•						X				
B9 – Newlands and properties south to the Wood of Dundurcas				•						X				
B10 – Collie Farm and nearby property					•						•			
B11 – Garbity House			•							•				
B12 – Property near Boat o' Brig and Speyside Carpark	•							•						
B13 – Bridgeton Mains			•							•				
B14 – Bridgeton East				•						X				
B15 – Auchroisk and Auchroisk Distillery			•							•				
B16 – Burghnamary and Cairnty Croft		•							•					
B17 – Stoneyton					•						X			
B18 – Holl and Balnabreich		•							•					
B19 – Properties along B9103 west of Mulben					•						X			
B20 – Mulben North and Mains of Mulben				•						X				
B21 – Mulben South			•							•				

	Potential Effect During Construction							Potential Effect During Operation (after 10 years)						
	Not Significant				Significant			Not Significant				Significant		
	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major
B22 – Garland, the Tam and Shandston			•							•				
B23 – Calternach, Maryhill and Glentauchers Distillery			•							•				
B24 – Rosarie and properties north of A95		•							•					
B25 – Bush Farm and Muldearie Mains		•							•					
B26 – Jocksleys, Hillockhead, Maisley and Douglasbrae				•						X				
B27 – Broadfield and Blackhill Wood		•							•					
B28 – Mains of Auchindachy and Quarryhead	•							•						
B29 – Coldhome			•							•				
B30 – Braehead			•							•				
B31 – Allanbuie			•						X					
B32 – Keith	•							•						
Outdoor Receptors														
O1 - Kirkhill Viewpoint and Car Park				•							•			
O2 - Drumbain Picnic area and lay-by				•							•			
O3 – Rothes Golf Course			•							•				
O4 – Boat O'Brig Speyside Carpark		•						•						
Route-Based Receptors														
R1 – A941	•		L					•		L				
R2 – A95				•						X				
R3 – B9015				•							•			
R4 – B9014 and Minor Road between Keith and Wester Chalder	•		L					•		L				
R5 – B9013				•							•			
R6 – Railway (section between Keith and Orton)				•							•			

	Potential Effect During Construction							Potential Effect During Operation (after 10 years)						
	Not Significant				Significant			Not Significant				Significant		
	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major	Negligible	Negligible – Minor	Minor	Minor – Moderate	Moderate	Moderate – Major	Major
R7 – Heritage Railway (from Dufftown to Keith)	•		L					•		L				
R8 – Core Path SP01 (Rothes Estate)			•	L						•	L			
R9 – Core Path SP12 (Rothes to Wood of Conerock)		•							•					
R10 – Speyside Way, Core Paths SRA 03 (Boat o'Brig) and SW03 (Speyside Way), and Minor Road			•	L						•	L			
R11 – Routes within Rothes	•							•						
R12 – Minor road between Speyburn Distillery and the A941 near Pitcraigie				•						X				
R13 – Minor Road between Arndilly Farm and Aikenway Castle remains	•							•						
R14 – Minor Road from Speyside Way through Woodside of Cairnty to the B9013 near Craighead	•		L					•		L				
R15 – Minor Roads within Mulben and Upper Mulben	•		L					•		L				
R16 – Minor Road between Glentauchers Distillery and Gateside	•							•						
R17 – Minor Road south-east to the Wood of Muldearie			•							•				
R18 – Minor Road to the west of the B9014 from south of Blackhill Wood to near Wester Chalder	•							•						
R19 – Minor Road between Braehead and Mains of Auchindachy			•	L						•				
R20 – Routes within Keith	•		L					•		L				

4.11.12 This assessment concludes that five visual receptors would experience both short and long-term significant effects resulting from the Proposed Development during construction and operation. These would largely occur due from receptors immediately adjacent to the Proposed Development which would also have open direct views of it.

Cumulative Visual Amenity

Introduction

4.11.13 Cumulative impacts are those which occur where the effects of more than one development of a similar type combine to produce a greater level of effect on visual amenity. Cumulative visual effects may be experienced 'in combination' (where different developments would be observable at the same time), or in 'in succession' (where an observer would be required to turn to experience multiple developments). Cumulative visual effects may also be 'sequential' where different developments are seen when travelling through the landscape; for example, from a road.

Cumulative Baseline Scenario

4.11.14 The cumulative baseline scenario is defined in the Cumulative Landscape Appraisal under Section 4.8.

Potential Cumulative Visual Effects

4.11.15 When experienced in combination with the cumulative baseline scenario developments, the Proposed Development could potentially result in some limited cumulative visual effects for some receptors with views of the battery energy storage system near Blackhillock substation, EHV overhead line near Glentauchers Distillery, or whisky maturation warehouses west of Rothes. This includes nearby building-based receptors (B2 – Brauchhill and Ardcanny, B23 - Calternach, Maryhill and Glentauchers Distillery, B29 - Coldhome, B30 - Braehead), nearby outdoor locations (O3 – Rothes Golf Course) and nearby roads (R6 – Railway (section between Keith and Orton), R19 - Minor Road between Braehead and Mains of Auchindachy). However, given the scale of and type of the cumulative developments and visual baseline around Blackhillock, it is unlikely that the addition of the Proposed Development would result in significant visual cumulative effects.

4.11.16 This appraisal concludes that while there may be potential for limited cumulative visual effects associated with the Proposed Development, there would be no significant cumulative visual effects.

4.12 Mitigation

4.12.1 Principle mitigation measures have been embedded in the design process and relate to the identification of a preferred route, alignment and technology to reduce, as far as possible, adverse landscape and visual effects.

4.12.2 Landscape and visual mitigation measures relating to the construction and successful reinstatement of disturbed ground associated with the Proposed Development will be managed through good practice as set out in the CEMP. This relates to the successful landscape reinstatement of areas disturbed during the construction of the Proposed Development including compounds, working areas, and temporary access routes, which is important in minimising the degree of landscape and visual effect. For example, the formation of smooth gradients to tie into adjacent undisturbed areas and the use of best practice techniques for the handling and reinstatement of soil will assist in the successful reinstatement of disturbed areas and minimise landscape and visual effects resulting from the features of the Proposed Development.

4.12.3 Furthermore, minimisation of tree felling near receptor locations as far as practicable is proposed to mitigate potential for adverse effects.

4.13 Summary

Landscape Assessment

4.13.1 The landscape assessment has assessed effects of the Proposed Development on landscape character and designated and protected landscapes within the study area and concluded that there would be no significant landscape effects associated with the Proposed Development. This is due to the wooded and undulating character of the landscape and the presence of existing OHLs, other built features in the area, and overall landscape character context. Given the lack of longer-term significant effects, the integrity of all designated areas would remain intact.

Visual Assessment

4.13.2 The visual assessment has considered visual effects for receptors in buildings, in outdoor locations and on routes within the study area and has found that while there would be some significant short-term visual effects from four of the thirty-two building-based receptors located in close proximity to the Proposed Development during construction, there would be no long term significant effects from these receptors. For the remainder of visual receptors, visual effects would not be significant.