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9. FORESTRY

9.1 Executive Summary

9.1.1 Desk-based assessment and walkover field surveys have been carried out to assess the effects on forestry associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. The assessment has been informed by National Datasets, UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) and supplemented by data retrieved from landowners or woodland managers.

9.1.2 An Operational Corridor (OC) of 72 m has been identified within woodland areas to enable the construction of the Proposed Development. Direct impacts of the Proposed Development on forestry arise as a result of the removal of 54.67 ha of woodland, of which 18.99 ha would be classified as of Long Established Plantation Origin (LEPO) (category 2b) in the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).

9.1.3 Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the creation of the OC would result in wider potential indirect effects on the surrounding woodland areas. These areas would be subject to potential increased risk of damage (windthrow) and it is estimated that an additional 22.8 ha, of which 3.26ha is LEPO (category 2b), AWI would be removed as a result of management felling to avoid the risk of windthrow. Any felling which requires to be undertaken outwith the OC would be the responsibility of the relevant landowner and not the Applicant.

9.1.4 Mitigation measures, such as further micrositing within sensitive areas (e.g. broadleaf and native pinewood), could potentially increase tree retention, depending on the structure profile, terrain and tree species. Operations could also be reduced from entire tree removal to arboriculture crown reductions only, where safe construction practices and operation of the OHL can be maintained. Mitigation measures have been outlined in the chapter to reduce or mitigate any predicted effects.

9.1.5 The assessment has concluded that the removal of native woodland in terms of the forestry assessment would result in a moderate adverse, long term and significant effect. Given that the Proposed Development would result in the permanent loss of woodland, the Applicant is committed to making arrangements to plant off-site the equivalent area of woodland as Compensatory Planting, meeting the Scottish Government's CoWRP objective of no net loss of woodland[1].

9.1.6 The magnitude of the effect to the regional forest resources was identified as a minor adverse, long term effect and not significant.

9.1.7 The potential impact on individual landowners in terms of their Long Term Forest Plans (LTFPs) is assessed as high magnitude and thus the effect is moderate adverse and significant. The Applicant is committed to assist individual landowners in amending their LTFPs. This is deemed sufficient to reduce the residual effect on forest management to not significant.

9.2 Introduction

9.2.1 This Chapter describes the assessment of the significance of predicted residual effects on forest and woodland areas arising from the construction and operation of the proposed new 132 kV single circuit overhead line (OHL) between Rothes III Wind Farm on-site substation, and Blackhillock substation at Keith, referred to hereafter as 'the Proposed Development'.

9.2.2 The connection into Rothes III Wind Farm on-site substation and Blackhillock substation would be formed by UGC and would be undertaken under the Applicant's Permitted Development rights. The potential effects of the UGC sections are considered within **Appendix 1.1.**

9.2.3 **Appendix 9.1** contains Woodland Reports, describing woodland baseline conditions in the area of the Proposed Development, the potential windthrow risk, the short and long term potential impacts on commercial woodland,

[1] The Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal, Forestry Commission (2009)

mitigation measures proposed and an assessment of the required area for compensatory planting. They also appraise the impacts on forestry management and forestry operations that are relevant to each landowner. **Appendix 9.1** is made up of five Woodland Reports covering the following forestry properties:

- Ben Aigan;
- Multiple landownerships with small scale impact;
- Rosarie Wood;
- Rothes Estate; and
- Sourden wood.

9.2.4 This Chapter is also supported by **Appendix 9.2** which consists of a Compensatory Planting Management Strategy. The Forestry Landscape Assessment (FLA) that is appended to this Chapter has been carried out by Galbraith (See **Appendix 9.3**). This Chapter is supported by two Figures.

9.2.5 Baseline surveys informing this Chapter have been carried out by the SSEN Forestry team in line with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS)[2] guidance. The assessment has been prepared with reference to:

- Woodland Reports;
- UKFS Guidelines;
- Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)[3];
- Moray Woodland and Forest Strategy[4];
- Site walkover surveys conducted in Spring and Summer 2022; and
- Native woodland Inventory[5]

9.3 Scope of Appraisal

Overview

9.3.1 This Chapter considers the significance of likely predicted effects of the Proposed Development on forestry, including the assessment of cumulative effects based on the felling requirements identified for the Proposed Development. It defines the potential impacts on the forest structure and management of the resource, and the likely level of impact based on an assessment of the sensitivity of the affected forestry areas which may arise as a result of the Proposed Development. However, it does not address the Long-Term Forest Plans (LTFPs) of the wider resource (outside the area identified for the Proposed Development). Any felling undertaken outside the Proposed Development area would be at the discretion of the landowner, and the Applicant would not have any control over this. Consequently, this assessment is limited to consideration of the effects of the Proposed Development on the present forest composition and yield only.

Extent of the Study Area

9.3.2 The study area for this assessment is based around the requirement to form and maintain an Operational Corridor (OC) for the Proposed Development as described in Section 9.3.3 below and the requirement to fell trees to allow for construction of the Proposed Development. These areas have been identified by the Applicant based on requirements for construction, maintenance and operation of the Proposed Development, and any site constraints. As provided in terms of the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations (ESQCR) 2002 and Schedule 4 to the Electricity Act

[2] Forestry Commission (2017) . *The UK Forestry Standard*. Online Source available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/687147/The_UK_Forestry_Standard.pdf [accessed 10/10/2022].

[3] Scottish Government (2023) *Ancient Woodland Inventory (Scotland)*. Online resource available at: https://spatialdata.gov.scot/geonetwork/srv/eng/catalog.search#/metadata/A091F945-F744-4C8F-95B3-A09E6EF6AE33, [accessed 18/01/2023].

[4] Moray Council(2017). *Moray Woodland Strategy*. Online source available at: Url: http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file117645.pdf#:~:text=Moray%20Woodland%20%26%20Forestry%20Strategy%20PURPOSE%20OF%20THE,within%20woodlands%20in%20Moray.%20l%20Promote%20biodiversity%20and [accessed 20/10/2022].

5 Forestry Commission Scotland (2014), *Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS)*. Online resource available at*: https://forestry.gov.scot/forests-environment/biodiversity/native-woodlands/native-woodland-survey-of-scotland-nwss*, [accessed at 22/11/2022]

1989, the Applicant has the necessary statutory powers to remove woodland for the purposes of ongoing maintenance of OHLs and to ensure clearance and protection of electrical infrastructure and equipment.

9.3.3 The OC for the elements of the Proposed Development which comprise of OHL is defined with reference to the distance at which a tree could fall and cause damage to the OHL, resulting in a supply outage. As a result, the final OC width would be based on the safety distance required to allow for a mature tree falling towards the OHL at the midpoint of an OHL span between two poles taking into consideration key factors such as gradient, topography, and crop height. The OC for the Proposed Development is a width of 72 m. However, where routed through valuable habitat such as ancient and/or native woodland, it can, depending on the tree species present and terrain permitting, be reduced to ensure the retention of as many trees as is reasonably practicable.

9.4 Consultation

9.4.1 The consultation process for the Proposed Development is described in **Chapter 1**, Section 1.6. A summary of consultation responses received that are relevant to this Chapter are presented in **Table 9.1**.

Table 9.1 Consultation responses

Consultee	Consultee Response	How response has been considered
Energy Consents Unit (ECU) (July 2022)	It is not likely that there would be any significant effects on forestry. The Proposed Development would result in the loss of some areas of woodland. However, subject to sufficient mitigation measures, including compensatory planting in line with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal, these are unlikely to be significant.	Noted. The mitigation measures, including compensatory planting in line with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal are set out in **Section 9.8** of this Chapter.
	Felling of commercial and non-commercial forestry is required to accommodate the construction of the Proposed Development. This will be minimised as far as possible through the use of existing wayleaves and areas of open ground. The remaining loss is unlikely to be significant in the context of the wider area subject to mitigation measures, including compensatory planting in line with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal.	Noted. Felling of commercial and non-commercial forestry will be minimised as far as possible through the use of existing wayleaves and areas of open ground. The mitigation measures, including compensatory planting in line with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal are set out in **Section 9.8** of this Chapter.
	Forestry within wayleave corridors may not be replanted beneath or close to the overhead line.	Noted. Forestry within wayleave corridors will not be replanted beneath or close to the OHL.
	It is noted from the screening submission that where areas of woodland will be removed or lost, compensatory planting in line with national policy on woodland removal and compensatory planting will be followed. It is likely that wayleaves or maintenance corridors preventing woodland planting would see the displacement of substantive areas of woodland. It is noted that the route will pass through ancient and native woodland.	Noted. Compensatory planting in line with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal is set out in **Section 9.8** of this Chapter. It should be noted that only LEPO (category 2b) AWI forestry would be affected by the Proposed Development. No higher valued Ancient Woodland (category 1a and 2a) or LEPO (category 1b) would require any felling
Scottish Forestry (October 2021)	Scottish Forestry outlined their expectation that the compensatory planting and restocking elements will be conditioned by the appropriate planning authority to ensure no net loss of woodland results from the Proposed Development.	Noted. **Appendix 9.2: Compensatory Planting Management Strategy** and Section 9.8 of this Chapter set out compensatory planting and restocking.

9.5 Methodology

Sensitivity, Magnitude and Significance of Effect

9.5.1 There are currently no published criteria, guidance or methodologies for the assessment of effects on forestry. As a result, this assessment is made based on professional judgement, with reference to:

- The sensitivity of the different types of woodland present in the study area, taking into consideration the degree and rate of change in the woodland, both in the recent past and that anticipated in the near future, and therefore the susceptibility/vulnerability of the woodland change;
- The quality of the woodland and the extent to which it is rare or distinctive, and the value attributed to the woodland through designations;
- The magnitude of change and extent of woodland removal;
- Duration and reversibility, i.e., the timescale of the effect of the Proposed Development (days/weeks/months/years) until recovery. Permanent effects are described as such, and likelihood of recovery is detailed where appropriate; and

- Adverse/beneficial impacts, i.e., an assessment of whether the effects of the Proposed Development would be beneficial or detrimental to the feature in question. The effect of tree felling on woodland is normally considered to be of an adverse nature, however, in some areas beneficial effects may arise where the introduction of the Proposed Development allows for the removal of ecologically habitat-poor conifer plantation.

9.5.2 The criteria for assessing sensitivity is outlined in **Table 9.1** and the criteria for assessing magnitude is outlined in **Table 9.2** below. **Table 9.3** outlines the methodology for assessing the significance of the effect. Effects of Moderate and Major are considered significant.

Table 9.2 Criteria for Assessing Sensitivity

Category	Description
High	• Highly valued, subject of national designation, • Particularly rare or distinctive in a national context; or • Considered susceptible to small changes.
Medium	• Valued more locally, subject to local designation; • Rare or distinctive in a regional context; and/or • Tolerant of moderate levels of change.
Low	• Generally, more commonplace and not designated; • Considered potentially tolerant of noticeable change; or • Undergoing substantial development such as that their character is one of change.
Negligible	• Already fundamentally changed (e.g. second rotation commercial conifer); Considered tolerant of noticeable change; or • Having undergone substantial development such that their character is one of change.

Table 9.3 Criteria for assessing magnitude of change

Category	Description
High	A noticeable change to the woodland over a wide area or an intensive change over a limited area.
Medium	Small changes to the woodland over a wide area or noticeable change over a limited area.
Low	Very small changes to the woodland over a wide area or small changes over a limited area.
Negligible	No discernible change to the woodland.

Table 9.3 Criteria for calculating the significance of effects.

Magnitude of Change	Sensitivity of Woodland →			
	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	Major	Major	Moderate	Minor
Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	None
Low	Moderate	Minor	None	None
Imperceptible	Minor	None	None	None

Desk Study - Baseline Data Collection

9.5.3 The Proposed Development, it's surrounding forestry and landscape, as well as existing and proposed new access tracks (see **Figure 9.1a-h**) were analysed for existing woodland cover through desk-based studies using maps and aerial photography.

9.5.4 Web-based data on local, regional and national designations and public access issues were also consulted.

Field Survey - Forest Walkover

9.5.5 Forest walkover and mapping surveys were undertaken in Spring 2022 to confirm the extent of the woodland areas affected by the Proposed Development, as well as further assess the current woodland characteristics and the wider impacts the Proposed Development would have on the woodland resource. Photographic records were captured to provide visual samples of the woodland types and evidence of woodland characteristics throughout the OC, as well as estimated standing woodland volume of the commercial conifer resource (refer to the accompanying Woodland Reports in **Appendix 9.1**).

9.5.6 The forest walkover survey included a visual assessment of tree health, vigour, ground conditions and existing woodland stability. Observations were also made of potential woodland windfirm boundaries, forest rides and other potential green edges as identified during the desk study.

9.5.7 The site visits confirmed that woodland restructuring management is active within the commercial conifer woodland properties.

Limitations and Assumptions

9.5.8 Forest information has been provided by the forest and land managers of each landholding and cross checking has only been carried out where observations suggested that the immediate conditions varied from the records.

9.6 Baseline Conditions

9.6.1 In total, approximately 7.5 km of the Proposed Development OHL was assessed as being within woodland and associated open ground, where tree clearance would be required to form an OC, see **Figure 9.1 a-h**.

9.6.2 The baseline characterisation work carried out identified 19 landowners (refer to **Figure 9.2 a-h**) with forest or woodland potentially affected by the Proposed Development. The Applicant has produced OHL Woodland Reports for the affected forest properties, and a combined report for the smaller wooded parcels in **Appendix 9.1 a-h**. Each of these sites were

visited and existing data sourced from the forest owners and their agents was reviewed and confirmed against the woodland site surveys.

9.6.3 A detailed breakdown of woodland characteristics and woodland removal requirements can be found in the respective Woodland Reports (**Appendix 9.1**).

9.6.4 Under the future "do nothing scenario" it has been assumed that coniferous plantation areas would continue to be managed principally in-line with commercial objectives and woodland restructuring, including their felling and replanting with similar species. It is not considered likely that there would be a net reduction in the area of forest as a result of this scenario overall, although there would be local changes. The native woodland would be anticipated to remain in a similar condition in the absence of the Proposed Development. On this basis, the current baseline has been used for the purposes of this assessment and no further consideration will be given to future baseline scenarios.

9.7 Potential Impacts

Overview

9.7.1 The assessment of effects from the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development considers the following:

- Direct construction effects: loss of areas of forest through woodland removal to facilitate the Proposed Development, in the context of the regional forest resource for both commercial conifer forest, ancient woodland and semi-natural woodlands;
- Indirect construction effects: increased windthrow and secondary felling agreed with landowners;
- Indirect operational effects: effects on forest management systems and restrictions on forest access; and
- Cumulative effects: combined loss of woodland from direct and indirect (secondary) felling.

Construction Effects

Woodland Removal

9.7.2 Direct impacts of the Proposed Development on forestry relate to the loss of woodland to allow for the OHL's OC, excluding management felling areas. Indirect impacts of the Proposed Development on forestry relate to the management felling areas (refer to add para. references). The loss of woodland resulting from the Proposed Development has been calculated using the Proposed Development's Geographic Information System (GIS).

9.7.3 The loss of woodland as a result of the OHL's OC (excluding management felling areas), would equate to an area of 54.09 ha. This would be compensated for via off-site tree planting as part of the compensatory planting management strategy (see **Appendix 9.1**). This would offset the total net loss of woodland as there would be a 1:1 ratio of replacement

9.7.4 In relation to these woodland losses, the removal of young conifer restock has been assessed as having a high magnitude of change but a negligible sensitivity, and the effect is therefore minor and not significant. The removal of semi-mature conifer plantation has been assessed as having a medium magnitude of change and a low sensitivity (taking into consideration that the management felling area would be replanted), and the effect is therefore, again, minor and not significant. See conifer felling requirements summarised in **Table 9.4**.

Table 9.4: Felling Requirements (Proposed Development)

Felling requirements	Area (ha)
Felling requirements excluding management felling	
Existing coniferous plantation below the age of 5 years to be felled	12.42
Existing coniferous plantation above the age of 5 years to be felled	13.34
Existing coniferous plantation above the age of 35 years to be felled	4.02
Existing broadleaved woodland (includes mixed broadleaved woodland) to be felled	18.13
Existing scrub to be cleared	6.76
Total loss of wooded area (excluding management felling)	**54.09***

* *This would be compensated for via off-site tree planting as part of the compensatory planting management strategy. This would offset the total net loss of woodland as there would be a 1:1 ratio of replacement.*

Ancient Woodland Inventory

9.7.5 The AWI consists of 3 main categories, these are:

- Ancient Woodland (category 1a and 2a):
  - Interpreted as semi-natural woodland from maps of 1750 (category 1a) or 1860 (category 2a) and continuously wooded to the present day. If planted with non-native species during the 20th century they are referred to as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).
- Long-established woodlands of plantation origin (LEPO) (category 1b and 2b):
  - Interpreted as plantation from maps of 1750 (category 1b) or 1860 (category 2b) and continuously wooded since. Many of these sites have developed semi-natural characteristics, especially the oldest ones, which may be as rich as Ancient Woodland.
- Other woodlands on 'Roy' woodland sites (category 3):
  - Shown as unwooded on the 1st edition maps but as woodland on the Roy maps. Such sites have, at most, had only a short break in continuity of woodland cover and may still retain features of Ancient Woodland.

9.7.6 According to the AWI, of the forestry that would require felling to accommodate the OC for the Proposed Development, a total of 17.92 ha is under LEPO (category 2b) classification. This is the only AWI classification that applies to woodland which would require felling as a result of the Proposed Development. Site visits supported by the information provided by the landowners have confirmed that areas of ancient woodland impacted by the Proposed Development are indeed LEPO (category 2b).

9.7.7 Of the 18.99 ha LEPO (category 2b) forestry that would require felling for the OHL OC; 13.06 ha is in reality, productive conifer plantation and the remaining broadleaved sections have been found to have been planted between 1901 and somewhere between 1930-1937.

9.7.8 It should be noted that only LEPO (category 2b) AWI forestry would be affected by the Proposed Development. No higher valued Ancient Woodland (category 1a and 2a) or LEPO (category 1b) would require to be felled.

Native Woodland Inventory

9.7.9 The direct impact on native woodland removal is 9.9 ha, this includes both coniferous and broadleaved woodlands.

9.7.10 Native woodland has 4 types :

- Native woodland-woods where the canopy cover is composed mainly of native species (ie over 50%).
- Nearly native woodland-where native species make up between 40% and 50% of the canopy. These are woods that could have potential to be converted into native woodlands by altering their species mix.
- Open land Habitat – polygons with <20% canopy cover of trees and shrubs adjoining a native woodland.
- PAWS - Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites. These are surveyed in the NWSS where they are recorded in the Scottish ancient woodland inventory (SAWI). These woodlands appear to have originated through natural regeneration sometime before the mid-19th century but were later converted to planted woods.

9.7.11 The 9.9 ha identified above falls under the native woodland type, no PAWS survey is recorded in the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland. The impact to the area of broadleaved woodlands, could potentially be further avoided or reduced through detailed design where a combination of factors (e.g., topography, pole height, tree species and height) may reduce the area defined as being within the OC. For example, the extent of tree clearance may be reduced where it can be demonstrated through further detailed survey that the trees can be accommodated within closer proximity to the Proposed Development with either no work being required, or a degree of crown reduction only. In terms of the forestry assessment of this, the sensitivity is medium, the magnitude of the change is medium and as such the effect is assessed as moderate adverse, long term and significant. The assessment of the impact of the clearance of native woodland in biodiversity terms is addressed within **Chapter 5: Ecology**.

Sites of special scientific interest (SSSI)

9.7.12 An area of 0.98 ha that would require felling falls within the River Spey SSSI. Further mcirositing will be carried out and additional tree retention opportunities identified as set out above.

Windthrow

9.7.13 Where felling of the OC creates an increased windthrow risk to the adjacent, retained conifer woodland blocks, a wider management felling area has been identified outside of the OHL's OC. This would include felling of the block to a viable windfirm edge to mitigate the windthrow risk and the significance of the effect would therefore be minor and not significant.

9.7.14 This assessment identifies an additional area of 22.8 ha of commercial woodland which would be at increased risk of windthrow. The sensitivity of commercial woodland within the study area is low. The magnitude of impact would be low, and therefore this additional area is assessed as Minor Adverse and Not Significant. Notwithstanding this assessment, the Applicant has produced Woodland Reports included in Appendix 9.1, which recommend proposals to landowners to remove this risk by identifying additional areas of felling out to the nearest 'windfirm' edge (known as a 'green edge'), where the trees have developed next to open ground.

9.7.15 Of the 22.8 ha of management felling identified, 3.26 ha of this is classified as LEPO (category 2b) on the AWI. This area comprises a compartment containing a commercial 39 year old Sitka Spruce (SS) monoculture, which has therefore been planted at some point in the recent record.

Any felling undertaken outside the OC would be at the discretion of the landowner, and the Applicant would not have any control over this. Management felling areas (i.e. the indirect impacts), would be replanted as part of the landowner felling license/LTFP conditions. Consequently, this assessment is limited to consideration of the effects of the Proposed Development on the present forest composition and yield only.

Operational Effects

Woodland Removal

9.7.16 The operational effects on forests and woodland resulting from the Proposed Development would involve periodic vegetation clearance and management to maintain the OC. Within the OC, following construction of the OHL, there

would be an ongoing requirement to manage the growth of vegetation to facilitate access for maintenance of the OHL and to maintain the required tree clearance zones for the safe and resilient operation of the line. The OC, after woodland removal, is deemed to be of negligible sensitivity and the impact of vegetation management is considered to represent a low magnitude of change. Overall, the adverse effect during operation is assessed as none and not significant.

Effects on Forest Management Systems

9.7.17 The introduction of a new OHL through areas of managed forest would require the landowner to review their existing management system. Most large commercial forest areas have a Long-Term Forest Management Plan (LTFP), which identifies the operations intended for the ongoing management of the forest over a 20-year period. This LTFP also provides the forest owner with consents from Scottish Forestry, as the forest authority, to undertake felling and replanting of the forest over a 10-year period. The impact of the Proposed Development is therefore only in terms of individual LTFPs having to be revised to address the construction of the Proposed Development and the associated tree clearance works on the future management of the site. In the absence of mitigation, the requirement for forest owners to revisit their LTFP to incorporate the existence of the Proposed Development could be considered to be onerous. The sensitivity of the management system to revision is considered to be low; however, the magnitude of change required in terms of restructuring the LTFP to incorporate felling for the operational corridor and potentially additional felling to avoid wind throw could be, locally or for the individual landowner, of high magnitude and thus the effect is moderate adverse and significant.

Restrictions on Forest Access

9.7.18 At the time of tree harvesting, the forestry industry has a range of operations, some of which can be restricted by the presence of an OHL. Live electrical OHLs provide a number of risks in terms of tree felling and extraction of the timber to the roadside near the OHL. Loading and haulage of the timber off-site can also be restricted within proximity of live electrical equipment. The adjacent forestry, once restocked, would be approximately 36 m away from the proposed new OHL alignment, and again, it is assumed that standard health and safety measures and the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) guidelines standard health and safety management measures and best practice, e.g. FISA guidelines would be followed during planning. The risk of the Proposed Development to future forestry activities is therefore assessed as none and not significant.

Cumulative Assessment

Woodland Removal

9.7.19 The cumulative effect of direct woodland removal associated with creating an OC and access, combined with the potential indirect (secondary) effect of woodland removal outside of the OC (under separate felling license) would potentially comprise 77.47 ha or 0.12% in the context of the Moray Council regional forestry resource of 62,441 ha[6] and is assessed as a medium magnitude of change This effect is assessed as a minor adverse, long term effect and not significant.

Windthrow

9.7.20 Due to the scale of woodland removal and/or restructuring required to accommodate windfarm development, there has been a general commitment by windfarm developers to fell to windfirm boundaries thereby removing, or at least minimising, the risk of further windthrow. This is in contrast to the narrower and more linear nature of the OC felling required for the Proposed Development. On this basis, it is assessed that there is no potential for additional or in combination cumulative windthrow effects from the Proposed Development.

[6] Moray Council (2018), *Moray Woodland & Forestry Strategy*. Online resource available at: http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file117645.pdf#:~:text=Moray%20Woodland%20%26%20Forestry%20Strategy%20PURPOSE%20OF%20THE,within%20woodlands%20in%20Moray.%20l%20Promote%20biodiversity%20and, [accessed 11/10/2022]

Forest Management

9.7.21 No direct overlap of woodland removal for the Proposed Development, with other proposed programmes of woodland removal for cumulative developments has been identified. On this basis, no potential for significant cumulative effects on forest management have been identified.

Operational Effects

9.7.22 In reviewing the potential for effect interactions, additional and in combination cumulative effects, no significant residual cumulative effects have been identified.

9.8 Mitigation

Overview

9.8.1 Good practice measures have been incorporated into the environmental management controls set out in this Chapter, in **Section 9.2**, including:

- Adherence to Forestry Commission (Scottish Forestry) Guidelines e.g., to ensure protection and enhancement of the water environment; and
- Implementation of tree harvesting and extraction methods to ensure minimisation of soil disturbance and compaction.

9.8.2 All woodland removal operations contracted by the Applicant would adhere to the UKFS.

Mitigation During Construction

9.8.3 No significant effects are predicted based on the area of woodland removal proposed in conifer plantation or considering the potential for increased windthrow. On this basis no mitigation is proposed. However, the Applicant proposes to implement a suite of standard good practice working methods to ensure that all construction activity (including woodland removal) reduces potential effects on ecological and hydrological receptors.

9.8.4 The Applicant will also seek to reduce the OC width wherever possible in order to further retain scrub/understorey layers in areas where existing tree cover does not breach safety clearances and allows for safe construction activity.

9.8.5 In order to address the potential significant effect on forest land-use management, the Applicant has committed to the development of OHL Woodland Reports for each forest ownership and a combined report of all the smaller wooded areas (**Appendix 9.1**). The OHL Woodland Reports identify all areas of felling required to form the OC and access corridors. In addition, the OHL Woodland Reports will aim to reduce the risk of future wind throw by identifying felling to stable forest edges (outside of the OC). This proposed felling will be further reviewed with the landowners to link this with their existing LTFP, which would, once amended, be required to adhere to the UKFS as part of the approval process with Scottish Forestry. This approval is required prior to any felling being undertaken out with the Proposed Development OC or proposed access tracks.

9.8.6 The Applicant is committed to meeting the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy (CoWRP) objective of no net loss of woodland for the Proposed Development. On this basis the Applicant would replant the area quantity (hectares) of woodland removed, which is a total of 54.67 ha for the Proposed Development. This would be achieved in the term of Compensatory Planting Scheme agreements with landowners within the regional land boundary of the Local Authority, where the Proposed Development is geographically located. The **Appendix 9.2** Compensatory Planting Management Strategy provides further details to this mitigation method.

Mitigation During Operation

9.8.7 No significant effects are predicted based on the area of woodland removal proposed during operations or from restrictions on forest access. The potential for significant effects on forest management systems for individual landowners have been identified as a result of the need to accommodate the felling required to create the OC and access tracks. In order to address this effect, the Applicant is committed to working with landowners in-line with the OHL Woodland Reports for the woodland property. **Appendix 9.1** is made up of five Woodland Reports covering the relevant forestry properties. Each Woodland Report includes an appraisal of the impacts on forestry management and forestry operations relevant to each landowner.

9.9 Summary

9.9.1 This chapter has considered the potential for significant effects on the forest resource, forest management and access during construction and operation of the Proposed Development. According to Moray Woodland and Forestry Strategy the loss of woodland associated with the Proposed Development would equate to 0.12% of the forest resource.

9.9.2 The loss of woodland required to facilitate the Proposed Development has been assessed as having a low to moderate magnitude of change. 18.99 ha of the total 54.67 ha required to be removed for the Proposed Development is categorised as LEPO on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (category 2b), and is mostly comprised of commercial timber plantation. No higher valued Ancient Woodland (category 1a and 2a) or LEPO (category 1b) would require any felling.

9.9.3 The creation of the OC would result in wider potential indirect effects on the surrounding woodland areas. These areas would be subject to potential increased risk of damage (windthrow) and it is estimated that an additional 22.8 ha, of which 3.26 ha is LEPO (category 2b), would be removed as a result of management felling. Any felling undertaken outwith the OC would be solely under the control of the relevant landowner (and not the Applicant).

9.9.4 Based on the assessment, in terms of mitigation for woodland loss, woodland loss could be entirely recovered through a compensatory planting scheme. The magnitude of the effect to the regional forest resources was identified as a minor adverse, long term effect and not significant. The potential impact on individual landowners in terms of their Long Term Forest Plans (LTFPs) is assessed as high magnitude and thus the effect is moderate adverse and significant. The Applicant is committed to assist individual landowners in amending their LTFPs. This is deemed sufficient to reduce the residual effect on forest management to not significant.