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6. SCOPE AND CONSULTATION

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 The EIA Regulations require that an EIA should describe the likely significant effects of a proposed development on the environment. Scoping of potential likely significant effects having regard to the physical impacts of a proposed development provides a basis for ensuring that the assessment of environmental effects is appropriately limited to issues of genuine potential significance. This ensures a proportionate approach to EIA that is focused on likely significant effects to be considered and assessed. Consultation and engagement with stakeholders early in the process, with advice and input from key consultees being sought at the early stages of a project, helps greatly to inform decisions about the design and EIA work for a proposed development.
- 6.1.2 This Chapter describes the pre-application consultation, the scoping process and further consultation that was undertaken to determine the scope of the EIA Report, and the consultations that were undertaken to inform the local community of the Proposed Development. This Chapter also includes a brief description of the environmental receptors of potential significance associated with the Proposed Development which are addressed in detail in the EIA Report, and those that are scoped out.

6.2 Consultation with the Local Community

- 6.2.1 SSEN Transmission has sought to maintain an open dialogue with local communities throughout the evolution of the Proposed Development. This has included carrying out consultation events during the site selection stages, engaging with local elected members such as Ward Councillors and Community Councils and engaging with landowners, residents and businesses that may be affected by the Proposed Development.

Reporting of Site Selection Stage and Consultation

- 6.2.2 A summary of the consultation undertaken to date is provided below:
- two consultation events took place in March and April 2023, to provide face-to-face public engagement (including a mail drop advertising the events);
 - postcards were sent to 4,439 homes and businesses within communities potentially impacted by the Proposed Development;
 - an email was sent out to the Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400 kV project mailing list with details of the Greens (New Deer 2) event in March 2023;
 - Community Councillors and Local Elected Members were emailed in advance with information they could share within their local area;
 - the consultation events were also advertised in the Press & Journal and Strathspey Herald newspapers, on SSEN Transmission social media channels and the dedicated project webpage;
 - a statutory consultee meeting (April 2023) to discuss the substation site selection process; and
 - the publication of a Consultation Booklet (April 2023) which described the site selection process followed, site options identified, the appraisal undertaken, the alternatives considered during the selection options and the suggestion for a Preferred Site. This was available online and at the in-person events and was presented to statutory consultees.
- 6.2.3 A consultation register is maintained as a live document to record consultation comments when they are received. Comments were passed on to the relevant technical teams where appropriate in order to inform this EIA Report.

Proposal of Application Notice

- 6.2.4 A Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) was submitted on 30 January 2024 (Ref. ENQ/2024/0139) to notify the Council of the Applicant's intention to submit a National application and provide details of the proposed pre-application consultation process to be undertaken.

6.2.5 In addition to being sent to the Council, the PAN was also sent to the following other key stakeholders these via e-mail on 30 January 2024:

- Fyvie, Rothienorman & Monquhitter Community Council;
- Deer Community Council;
- Turriff & District Community Council;
- Cllr A. Stirling;
- Cllr I. Taylor;
- Cllr G. Lang;
- Cllr A. Forsyth;
- Gillian Martin MSP;
- David Duguid MSP;
- Maggie Chapman MSP;
- Maurice Golden MSP;
- Liam Kerr MSP;
- Douglas Lumsden MSP;
- Michael Marra MSP;
- Mercedes Villalba MSP; and
- Tess White MSP.

Pre-Application Consultation

6.2.6 A pre-application consultation meeting was held with the Council in April 2024, which provided the Applicant an opportunity to present the proposals to the Council and seek advice on the acceptability of the Proposed Development, and likely requirements and expectations for a future application. Following this meeting, Aberdeenshire Council provided a formal pre-application response in July 2024 (see **Volume 4, Appendix 6.1: Pre-Application Advice from Aberdeenshire Council**), detailing their understanding of the Proposed Development, and setting out relevant planning policy and environmental considerations that would need to be addressed as part of the application supporting documents.

6.2.7 **Volume 4, Appendix 6.2: Pre-Application Consultation Report** provides detail of the consultation events and engagement that has been undertaken. Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) events were held as follows, with events in February 2024 following publication of a PAC 1 Consultation Booklet¹ and events in May 2024 following publication of the PAC 2 Consultation Booklet²:

- 27 February 2024: Cuminestown Community Hall;
- 29 February 2024: New Deer Public Hall;
- 21 May 2024: Cuminestown Community Hall; and
- 23 May 2024: New Deer Public Hall.

6.2.8 These events presented the Proposed Development, as well as further information on the environmental, planning and technical considerations. Virtual 3D modelling of the Proposed Development was presented at each event. The events were open to members of the local community and any interested parties, with the aim of providing information regarding the Proposed Development and to gather views and feedback from those in attendance.

¹ Greens 400kV Substation Pre-Application Consultation Event 1 Booklet (*February 2024*), produced by SSEN Transmission. Available at: <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/greens-400kv-substation/>. [Accessed: July 2024].

² Greens 400kV Substation Pre-Application Consultation Event 2 Booklet (*May 2024*), produced by SSEN Transmission. Available at: <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/greens-400kv-substation/>. [Accessed: July 2024].

6.2.9 SSEN Transmission has maintained dialogue with all relevant community and ward councils throughout the site selection process and has sought to keep members up to date on project progress and upcoming consultation events. In addition to regular update meetings with MPs and MSPs, SSEN Transmission has also hosted a number of meetings with local elected members and community forums, including:

- 12 April 2023, Councillors Information Event with Local Ward Councillors (Microsoft Teams Meeting);
- 12 April 2023, Virtual meeting with statutory consultees including the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECU), Aberdeenshire Council, Historic Environment Scotland and NatureScot (Microsoft Teams Meeting);
- 4 September 2023, Aberdeenshire Council Virtual Statutory Consultee Meeting (Microsoft Teams Meeting); and
- 8 November 2023, SEPA Virtual Statutory Consultee Meeting (Microsoft Teams Meeting).

6.3 EIA Scoping

6.3.1 An EIA Scoping Report was issued to Aberdeenshire Council in June 2024 (see **Volume 4, Appendix 6.3: Greens Substation Environmental Impact Assessment: Scoping Report**). A Scoping Opinion was provided by Aberdeenshire Council on 30 September 2024 and is included in **Volume 4, Appendix 6.4: Scoping Opinion**.

6.3.2 The responses, contained within the Scoping Opinion, were considered in detail during the EIA process. **Volume 4: Appendix 6.5: Scoping Matrix** of this EIA Report includes a matrix detailing the key issues that were raised in the Scoping Opinion and how and where they are addressed in the EIA Report.

6.4 Issues Scoped out of Assessment

6.4.1 It is considered that the following topics do not require to be the subject of detailed EIA work as it is considered that they are not likely to give rise to significant effects. They were referred to in the Scoping Report (see **Volume 4: Appendix 6.3: Greens Substation Environmental Impact Assessment: Scoping Report**) as topics to be scoped out from further consideration within the EIA Report. There was general agreement amongst consultees, as detailed within the Scoping Opinion (see **Volume 4: Appendix 6.4: Scoping Opinion**), as to the proposed scope of the EIA Report.

Landscape and Visual Impact

6.4.2 **Landscape Character: Landscape Character: National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Wild Land Areas** - There are no nationally designated landscapes within 10 km of the Proposed Development.

6.4.3 **Landscape Character: Special Landscape Area (SLA)** - The closest SLA lies 9 km to the west of the Proposed Development. Significant effects on local character and visual amenity would be unlikely to occur due to the distance, intervening topography, built form and vegetation.

6.4.4 **Landscape Character: National Character Areas** - With the exception of landscape character type 20 (which covers the Site extent and almost the entirety of the Study Area), all National LCAs will be scoped out of the assessment due to their large geographical area and distance from the Site making it highly unlikely for significant effects due to the Proposed Development to occur.

6.4.5 **Visual Receptors: Derelict Farmsteads** - At the time of writing, some properties may be derelict and their future use and function unknown. These properties are therefore excluded from the scope of this assessment. The status of these properties will be reviewed, in case plans for their future use change.

6.4.6 **Visual Receptors: Recreational receptors at East Balthangie Caravan & Camping Park** - East Balthangie Caravan & Camping Park is approximately 4.5 km northeast of the Proposed Development and unlikely to incur significant effects due to the distance from the Proposed Development and the undulating topography.

6.4.7 **Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA)** - Effects on residential receptors are anticipated to be captured sufficiently and holistically within the LVIA to identify significant adverse effects (taking in to account

perceptual qualities as well as visual changes on receptors) and therefore a separate RVAA is scoped out of this assessment.

- 6.4.8 **Night Time Assessment** - The substation is not expected to be illuminated at night during normal operation and night-time working is not anticipated on a regular basis and should only be required for maintenance or in response to a network event or emergency situation. There would be emergency floodlights installed for health and safety purposes, but these would not be permanently lit. The access roads would also not be lit under normal operation. As such, there are no anticipated impacts from light pollution as a result of the Proposed Development and a night-time visual assessment has therefore been scoped out of this assessment. Ecology, Nature Conservation and Ornithology
- 6.4.9 **Designated Sites** - There are no perceived effect pathways for impacts to designated sites with ecological or ornithological qualifying interests. Although the Site and surrounding area provides suitable foraging habitat for geese, no designated sites with geese as qualifying interests were identified within the Proposed Development's potential Ecological Zone of Influence (ZoI) based on predicted foraging ranges.
- 6.4.10 **Habitats** - It is proposed that impacts to improved / modified and non-native habitats at the Site, when considered solely as habitat interests (i.e., not as supporting species), are scoped out of further assessment. This is based on their relatively low ecological value, the fact they are comprised of commonly occurring or widespread species, current modified / land use condition, non-native conifers, and being well represented in the wider landscape. For clarity, the ditch within the Site has been considered to be modified for drainage purposes and would not meet the priority definition of a watercourse.
- 6.4.11 **Pollution** - All issues arising from pollution during the construction and operational phases are scoped out. If any, these would be short-term and likely to be localised events. Effective, industry-standard mitigation measures would be embedded within the Proposed Development (detailed within the Principal Contractor's CEMP and the SSEN Transmission GEMPs).
- 6.4.12 **Protected Species (Non-Avian)** - Based on the baseline information available, the following species are scoped out of further assessment through EIA: red squirrel, pine marten, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates. No evidence of their presence has been observed, the Site and surrounding area offers low suitability habitat or is unlikely to represent a key area for these species / groups. The same habitat types are well represented in the wider landscape.
- 6.4.13 **Ornithology (excluding Barn Owl)** - Aside from barn owl, all other ornithological interests are scoped out of further assessment. Breeding bird surveys to date have found that the arable and grazing-dominated habitat within the Site and the wider area is of low value for ornithological interests. Species recorded have included a range of typical farmland passerines (songbirds) in addition to grey partridge. Grey partridge is a declining Red List species within BoCC5 and has a UK population estimate of 37,000 pairs³. However, taking account of the relatively localised nature of the Proposed Development in comparison to the extensive suitable habitat (arable farmland) present in the wider area, no significant effects to the species are anticipated. In addition, these species are expected to be habituated to a degree of disturbance from farming operations. Effective, industry-standard mitigation measures and sensitive timings of works would be embedded within the Proposed Development for the protection of all active bird nests, to ensure compliance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended.

Cultural Heritage

- 6.4.14 **Impacts on designated heritage assets** - The direct impacts during construction and operation of the Proposed Development on World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Gardens and Designed Landscapes

³ Woodward, I., Aebischer, N., Burnell, D., Eaton, M., Frost, T., Hall, C., Stroud, S. & Noble, D. (2020). APEP 4 - Population estimates of birds in Great Britain and the United Kingdom. British Birds Volume: 113.

(GDL), Historic Battlefields and Conservation Areas will be scoped out of the cultural heritage assessment as there are none present within the Proposed Development area or within the 1 km study area.

6.4.15 **Operational impacts on non-designated heritage assets** - The direct impacts during operation of the Proposed Development on non-designated heritage assets will be scoped out as any impacts through changes within the setting of these negligible to low valued, post-medieval heritage assets would not result in significant effects.

6.4.16 **Indirect impacts** - It is not anticipated that there will be any indirect impacts from the construction or operation of the Proposed Development, therefore the assessment of indirect impacts on heritage assets has been scoped out.

Traffic and Transport

6.4.17 **Impact on road network outwith Study Area** - As vehicles travel away from the Proposed Development during the construction phase, they would disperse across the wider road network, thus diluting any potential effects. It is therefore expected that the effects relating to Traffic and Transport are unlikely to be significant beyond the identified Study Area, and as such no further routes are proposed to be included.

6.4.18 **Operational Phase** - The traffic impacts associated with the operational phase are anticipated to be of low volume, limited to movements associated with maintenance activities and low numbers of staff commuting to the Site. Therefore, further assessment of the traffic impacts of the Proposed Development during the operational phase is not considered necessary.

Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils

6.4.19 **Impacts related to disturbance, compaction and loss of peat** – British Geological Survey (BGS) Superficial Deposits geology mapping, James Hutton Institute National Soil Map of Scotland, and NatureScot Carbon and Peatland mapping indicate peat soils to be limited within the Site and considering the current arable land use; therefore, significant effects are not anticipated.

6.4.20 **Impacts to statutory designated sites** - There are none present within 1 km of the Proposed Development.

6.4.21 **Impacts to bedrock and superficial geology** - Significant effects are not anticipated on bedrock and superficial geology assuming the use of an appropriate drainage strategy, completion of a Flood Risk Assessment and implementation of construction good practice such as pollution prevention mitigation.

6.4.22 **Impacts to groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTE)** – has been scoped out based on a review of the geology, hydrogeology and hydrology of the Site.

6.4.23 **Impacts related to changes in groundwater flows and levels, and surface water drainage patterns** - It is considered that good design and construction good practice, including pollution prevention mitigation detailed within the SSEN Transmission GEMPs will reduce the impacts related to changes in groundwater flows and levels, and surface water drainage patterns.

6.4.24 **Impact of pollution on fisheries, including from suspended sediment in surface water bodies** - It is considered that good design and construction good practice, including pollution prevention mitigation detailed within the SSEN Transmission GEMPs will reduce the potential for pollutants or sediment to be released into water bodies as a result of the Proposed Development.

Noise and Vibration

6.4.25 **Vibration** - there are no known vibrational noise issues associated with the operation of the Proposed Development at nearby Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSR).

Land Use and Agriculture

- 6.4.26 **Whole Topic** - As the majority of the Proposed Development is not located on high quality agricultural land, significant effects on land use would be unlikely and therefore Land Use and Agriculture has been scoped out from further assessment.

Forestry

- 6.4.27 **Secondary effects** - Secondary effects resulting from forestry activities, including effects on habitats and species, ornithology, hydrology and landscape and visual effects, would be considered within their respective chapters of this EIA Report and would not be included within the Forestry Chapter.

Electromagnetic Fields

- 6.4.28 **Whole Topic** - The Applicant ensures at all times that they comply with relevant legislation and as EMF limits will be adhered to there is no potential for significant effects. No significant effects are predicted as a result of the Proposed Development and therefore an assessment on EMF has been scoped out of the EIA Report in its entirety.

6.4.29 Population and Human Health

- 6.4.30 **Whole Topic** - The impacts on human health for a development of this nature and scale are limited to increased exposure to noise and changes in amenity value of residential or recreational resources. These will be considered in the Landscape and Visual Impact and Noise and Vibration chapters of the EIA Report and therefore a specific Human Health assessment has been scoped out of the EIA. Short-term disruption to nearby residents and businesses during the construction period will be managed through the implementation of a CEMP and CTMP by the Principal Contractor, which will be agreed in advance with Aberdeenshire Council.

6.4.31 Major Accidents and Disasters

- 6.4.32 **Whole Topic** - Given the nature of the Proposed Development, the potential for effects related to the vulnerability to major accidents and disasters are likely to be limited to those associated with unplanned power outages, due to extreme weather or structural damage. Crisis management and continuity plans are in place across the SSE Group. These are tested regularly and are designed for the management of, and recovery from, significant energy infrastructure failure events. Where there are material changes in infrastructure (or the management of it) additional plans are developed. Potential significant effects on the vulnerability of the Proposed Development to Major Accidents and Disasters has therefore been scoped out of the EIA Report.

Air Quality and Climate

- 6.4.33 **Whole Topic** - The Proposed Development has the potential to give rise to some localised and temporary construction related releases associated with dust (foundation construction, passage of vehicles along access tracks) and construction plant and traffic exhaust emissions. However, the nature of the construction activities is that these would be localised, short term for individual activities and intermittent. Any potential for nuisance effects on residential or recreational amenity during construction would be strictly controlled in accordance with a CEMP. The amount of material required and potential emissions generated during construction and operation is not considered disproportionate for a development of this scale. Therefore, the GHGs emitted from the Proposed Development are unlikely to increase or decrease the concentration of GHGs, as annually, there will be projects of this scale that are required to ensure that infrastructure needs are met in Scotland. In relation to climate adaptation, the design and location of the Proposed Development has considered the potential risk posed by increased flood risk and ground instability. The intention is to reduce potential risks to the electricity assets so that repairs and upgrades are less frequent. Based on the above, Air Quality and Climate has therefore been scoped out of the EIA Report.

Material Assets and Waste

6.4.34 **Whole Topic-** The materials and waste associated with construction activities will be captured and addressed within a Materials Management Plan and Site Waste Management Plan which will form part of the Principal Contractor's CEMP. Considering the nature and scale of the Proposed Development, significant effects on material assets and waste are not anticipated. Materials and Waste has therefore been scoped out of the EIA Report.

6.5 Other Issues

6.5.1 The 2017 EIA Regulations introduced a number of factors to be considered within an EIA Report; specifically, those factors listed under Regulations 4(3) and 4(4), and Schedule 4. **Table 6-1** describes how this EIA Report has addressed these factors.

Table 6-1 Assessment of Factors Identified in Regulations 4(3), 4(4) and Schedule 4

Topic	Potential for Significant Effects
Population and Human Health	This Chapter (Volume 2, Chapter 6 - Scope and Consultation) considers potential effects relating to population and human health under Section 6.6: Issues Scoped out of Assessment.
Biodiversity (in particular species and habitats protected under Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora)	The potential effects on Biodiversity, are considered in Volume 2, Chapter 9: Ecology, Nature Conservation and Ornithology .
Land and Soil (and natural resources availability)	This Chapter (Volume 2, Chapter 6 - Scope and Consultation) considers potential effects relating to land use and soil under Section 6.6: Issues Scoped out of Assessment.
Water (and natural resource availability)	The potential effects on the water environment are considered in Volume 2, Chapter 12 – Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils .
Cultural Heritage	Volume 2, Chapter 10 - Cultural Heritage includes an assessment of the potential for significant effects on material assets and cultural heritage including archaeological assets and historic landscapes
Material Assets	This Chapter (Volume 2, Chapter 6 - Scope and Consultation) considers potential effects relating to material assets under Section 6.6: Issues Scoped out of Assessment.
Landscape	Volume 2, Chapter 8 - Landscape and Visual Impact considers the potential effects of the Proposed Development on landscape.
Major Accidents and Disasters	This Chapter (Volume 2, Chapter 6 - Scope and Consultation) considers potential effects relating to major accidents and disasters under Section 6.6: Issues Scoped out of Assessment.
Interaction Between Factors (cumulative effects)	The approach to cumulative effects is outlined within Volume 2, Chapter 5 – EIA Process and Methodology and is considered within Volume 2, Chapter 14 – Cumulative Effects (Effects Interaction) and each of the other technical chapters (Chapters 7 to 13), where appropriate.