VOLUME 2: CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Figures and Visualisations (Volume 3a and 3b of this EIA Report)

There are no figures or visualisations associated with this chapter.

Appendices (Volume 4 of this EIA Report)

Appendix 1.1: Scoping Report

Appendix 1.2: Scoping Opinion.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Overview

This Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report has been prepared by Environmental Resources Management Ltd (ERM) on behalf of Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc ("the Applicant") who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission), own, operate and develop the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and remote islands. In this EIA Report the Applicant and SSEN Transmission are used interchangeably unless the context requires otherwise. The EIA Report has been prepared to accompany an application for consent under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

Renewable energy generation volumes connecting to the SSEN Transmission licensed area, particularly offshore wind, are expected to increase towards the end of the decade and into the 2030s. Most of this is likely to connect to the far north of the SSEN Transmission network, and, as a result of this increase, there is a requirement for additional transmission system capacity to the north of Beauly to meet this demand.

The Network Options Assessment (NOA)[1] undertaken by the National Grid Electricity System Operator (NGESO) is one of the documents that sit under the Pathway to 2030: A Holistic Network Design (HND)[2] to support offshore wind deployment for net zero. The NOA 2021/22 Refresh is an update to the NOA 2021/22[3] that was published in January 2022[4] in accordance with standard condition C27 of the NGESO transmission licence. It now fully integrates the HND's offshore network and confirms the wider onshore network requirements.

Together, the HND and the NOA 2021/22 Refresh have identified 94 schemes that are required to meet the Government's ambition for 50 Gigawatt (GW) of offshore wind by 2030[5]. This comprises 56 schemes that have been identified as HND essential options (options needed for 2030 for delivery of 50 GW offshore wind), and 38 optimal schemes from this NOA 2021 / 22 Refresh analysis.

NOA Option Beauly to Loch Buidhe 400 kilovolt (kV) reinforcement (BLN4) identifies the requirement to reinforce the electricity transmission network between Beauly Substation and the existing Loch Buidhe Substation and the need to create new electricity transmission between Loch Buidhe Substation and Spittal. This network reinforcement and creation also triggers the requirement to construct new standalone substations at Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beauly capable of operating at 400 kV.

The scope of this EIA Report is the new substation proposed at Loch Buidhe, henceforth referred to as Carnaig 400 kV Substation or the Proposed Development. The new 400 kV overhead line (OHL) connecting Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beauly, and the proposed substations at Beauly and Spittal are being progressed through separate consents and are, therefore, not within the scope of this EIA Report.

1.2 Background

The Proposed Development is located approximately 9.5 km north east of Bonar Bridge. A full description of the project infrastructure is included in **Volume 2**, **Chapter 3, Section 3.2** of this EIA Report but the following is a summary of the key components and physical characteristics:

- Two new bellmouths and access roads to the Proposed Development from the public highway;
- One new bellmouth and access road from the Proposed Development to the private forestry track;
- A temporary construction compound;

[1] The NGESO, 'Network Options Assessment (NOA)' available online at: https://www.nationalgrideso.com/research-and-publications/network-options-assessment-noa

[2] The NGESO 'Pathway to 2030 – A Holistic Network Design (HND)', 2022, available online at: https://www.nationalgrideso.com/document/262681/download

[3] The NGESO, 'NOA 2021/2022', January 2022, available online at: https://www.nationalgrideso.com/document/233081/download

[4] The NGESO, 'NOA 2021/2022 Refresh', July 2022, available online at: https://www.nationalgrideso.com/document/262981/download

[5] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64a54c674dd8b3000f7fa4c9/offshore-wind-investment-roadmap.pdf Accessed 01.10.2024

- Drainage and associated Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) retention basins;
- A new level platform (approximately 530 metre (m) by 324 m) to be delivered through cut and fill earthworks. An outdoor AIS, 400 kV substation complete with 400 kV double busbar arrangement;
- Installation of three new SGTs and other associated equipment;
- A new substation control building (approximately 23 m by 48 m by 5.8 m);
- Erection of a 2.4 m high palisade security fencing with a 1.6 m electrified anti-climbing extension security fence around the perimeter of the platform;
- Post construction mitigation measures including peatland restoration and landscape mitigation planting.
- Biodiversity enhancement works including native species planting and habitat creation; and
- Erection of a deer fence around the perimeter of landscape planting and peatland restoration areas.

1.3 Legislative and Statutory Context

Consent for the Proposed Development is sought from The Highland Council (THC) under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).

The Applicant, as a transmission licence holder under the Electricity Act 1989 has a statutory duty, under Section 9(2) of the 1989 Act to develop and maintain an '*efficient, coordinated and economical system of electricity transmission*' and to *'facilitate competition in the generation and supply of electricity*'. Separately, the Applicant has duties under Schedule 9, para. 3(1) (*Preservation of amenity and fisheries: Scotland*) when formulating proposals that would involve the execution of work in connection with the transmission of electricity (Schedule 9, paras. 1(3) and 3(4)).

Construction of the Proposed Development and ancillary works constitutes development in terms of section 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 ("the Planning Act"). Accordingly, these works require planning permission.

1.4 The Need for EIA and Scope

The Applicant is voluntarily progressing the Proposed Development as EIA development.

A request for a Scoping Opinion was made to THC under Regulation 17 of the EIA Regulations on the 29th February 2024. A Scoping Report (**Volume 4 Appendix 1.1**) was submitted to support the request, which sought input from statutory and non-statutory consultees regarding the information to be provided within this EIA Report.

The Scoping Opinion of THC was issued on the 9th May 2024 (24/00833/SCOP) confirming the scope of the EIA Report (**Volume 4 Appendix 1.2**).

1.5 EIA Report Structure

This EIA Report consists of the following volumes:

- Volume 1: Non-technical Summary
- Volume 2: Main Report
- Volume 3a: Figures (Excluding Visuals)
- Volume 3b: Visuals
- Volume 4: Technical Appendices

Volume 1 a standalone Non-Technical Summary is also provided, which describes the Proposed Development, and the likely significant effects predicted in a concise, non-technical manner.

Volume 2 of the EIA Report provides an introduction to the Proposed Development and sets out the need and the strategic system planning considerations for delivering the Proposed Development. This volume also provides a description of the key components of the Proposed Development, including construction, operational

and access requirements, and the main alternatives considered during the development of the Proposed Development. The volume also contains detail on the approach to the EIA Report, the consultations that have been undertaken to define the scope of the EIA and an overview of relevant planning and energy policy. The volume concludes with a summary of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development. The technical chapters each include an assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development on the particular receptors of relevance to each of the technical assessments, a description of the proposed mitigation measures relevant to those assessments, and confirmation of the predicted residual effects. The consideration of cumulative (inter-project and intra-project) effects is also discussed where relevant in each technical chapter within Volume 2.

Volume 3a and **3b** contains supporting figures and visualisations referred to in Volume 2 of the EIA Report. Figures offer a visual summary of key themes or data referred to in the chapters, to aid understanding. Visualisations are pictorial representations of the Proposed Development.

Volume 4 contains supporting appendices referred to in Volume 2 of the EIA Report. Appendices tend to be more technical based reports which provide a greater level of detail on key themes or data underpinning the impact assessment.

A Planning Statement is also included with the application as supporting information. The Planning Statement considers the compatibility of the Proposed Development in the context of existing and emerging development plan and national energy and planning policies. Other planning documents including the Pre-Application Consultation Report (PAC Report), the Design and Access Statement and the Sustainability Statement will be included with the application as supporting information.

1.6 Notifications

Notice will be served for this application to the relevant planning authority, in this case THC, of the application for consent under the 1997 Act.

In accordance with Regulation 21 (3) of the EIA Regulations, the application should be advertised by the planning authority in the following local newspapers that are circulated in the locality of the Proposed Development:

- The Press and Journal (Inverness, Highlands and Islands)
- Inverness Courier

It will also be advertised in the following regional newspaper:

- Edinburgh Gazette

Notice of the Planning Application, including this EIA Report, associated documents and figures, will be available for viewing at Kyle of Sutherland Hub, South Bonar Industrial Estate, Ardgay IV24 3AQ from:

- Monday – Thursday: 09:00 – 19:00.
- Friday – Saturday: 09:00 – 16:00.
- Sunday: 10:00 – 15:00.

An electronic version is available online at: https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/loch-buidhe-area-400kv-substation/

This EIA Report is available in other formats if required. For details, including costs, contact:

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