VOLUME 1: CHAPTER 4: SCOPE AND CONSULTATION

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Appendix V1-4.1: Public Consultation Report

Appendix V1-4.2: Scoping Report – March 2024

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4. SCOPE AND CONSULTATION

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 ("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.

4.1.2 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.

4.2 Route and Alignment Stage Consultation

4.2.1 SSEN Transmission has sought to maintain an open dialogue with local communities within the vicinity of the Proposed Development throughout the evolution of the project. This has included carrying out consultation events during the route and alignment selection stages, engaging with local elected members such as Ward Councillors and Community Councils and engaging with landowners, residents, community groups and businesses that may be affected by the Proposed Development. SSEN Transmission has held parallel communication with other stakeholders, including statutory consultees, to understand their views on the proposals at the route and alignment selection stages, which has led to key areas of design evolution and development.

4.2.2 In March 2022, a virtual public consultation was carried out[1] to provide information on several separate wind farm grid connections which constitute the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections, including the Proposed Development, all located in the same area, that were being progressed at the time by the Applicant.

4.2.3 Upon consideration of a rationalised approach for the Connagill Cluster Grid Connection projects, including the Proposed Development (as discussed in **Volume 1: Chapter 2: The Routeing Process and Alternatives**), a further in-person public consultation event took place in November 2023 to present the appraisal of the rationalised route options proposed for each grid connection. This was followed by the issue of the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections Consultation Document (Route Stage)[2], published in December 2023. Comments received from all stakeholders (including members of the public) in response to the Consultation Document, or following the consultation event, were documented in a Report on Consultation (Route Stage), published in April 2024[3]. The Report on Consultation also confirmed the proposed route to be taken forward to the alignment selection stage and outlined the Applicant's responses provided at route stage consultation, along with confirmation of the action to be taken, where relevant.

[1] Virtual consultation was carried out in accordance with Scottish Government's Guidance on pre-application consultation for major planning applications during the Covid-19 emergency period.

[2] Connagill Cluster Grid Connections: Consultation Document (Route Stage) (December 2023), produced by SSEN Transmission. Available at: https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/connagill-cluster-documents/connagill-cluster-grid-connections---routeing-consultation-document.pdf. [Accessed November 2024]

[3] Connagill Cluster Grid Connections: Report on Consultation (Route Stage) (April 2024), produced by SSEN Transmission. Available at: https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/connagill-cluster-documents/2024-consultation-documents/report-on-consultation-routeing-stage---connagill-cluster---april-2024.pdf [Accessed November 2024]

4.2.4 Following confirmation of the proposed route, the appraisal of alignment options for the various grid connections associated with the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections (including the Proposed Development) was set out in the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections Consultation Document (Alignment Stage)[4] and presented at a public consultation event, in May 2024. Comments received from all stakeholders in response were documented in a Report on Consultation (Alignment Stage), published in September 2024[5]. The Report on Consultation confirmed the proposed alignment to be taken forward to the EIA stage, and also outlined the Applicant's responses provided at alignment stage consultation, along with confirmation of the action to be taken, where relevant.

4.2.5 Both the route and alignment stage consultation processes, the consultation responses and SSEN Transmission's response to these and the subsequent action that was taken where relevant are discussed in further detail in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.1: Public Consultation Report**.

4.3 Scoping

4.3.1 A Scoping Report was submitted to Scottish Ministers by the Applicant in March 2024[6] to support a formal request under Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations for a Scoping Opinion to determine the information to be provided within the EIA Report (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.2: Scoping Report – March 2024**). A Scoping Opinion was provided by the Scottish Ministers in June 2024 (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.3: Scoping Opinion - June 2024**).

4.3.2 The responses, contained within the Scoping Opinion, were considered in detail during the EIA process. **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.4: Scoping Matrix** 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.

4.4 Key Scoping Issues

4.4.1 The Scoping Opinion makes reference to site specific issues of interest to the Scottish Ministers, to be considered and addressed in addition to those laid out in responses from consultees. The issues raised were as follows.

<u>EIA Consultation and Scope</u>

"Scottish Ministers expect the EIA report which will accompany the application for the proposed development to consider in full all consultation responses attached in [to the Scoping Opinion]. Scottish Ministers are satisfied with the scope of the EIA set out in the Scoping Report."

4.4.2 A Scoping Matrix is appended to the EIA Report summarising all consultation comments received as part of the Scoping Opinion and where these are addressed within the EIA Report, where relevant (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.4: Scoping Matrix**).

<u>Drinking Water Protected Areas</u>

"Scottish Water provided information on whether there are any drinking water protected areas or Scottish Water assets on which the development could have any significant effect. Scottish Ministers request that the company contacts Scottish Water … and makes further enquires to confirm whether there any Scottish Water assets

[4] Connagill Cluster Grid Connections: Consultation Document (Alignment Stage) (May 2024), produced by SSEN Transmission. Available at: https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/connagill-cluster-documents/2024-consultation-documents/conngaill-cluster-grid-connections---alignment.pdf [Accessed November 2024]

[5] Connagill Cluster Grid Connections: Report on Consultation (Alignment Stage) (September 2024), produced by SSEN Transmission. Available at: https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/connagill-cluster-documents/2024-consultation-documents/report-on-consultation-alignment-stage-september-2024.pdf [Accessed November 2024]

[6] Strathy South Wind Farm Grid Connection: Scoping Report (March 2024), produced by SSEN Transmission

which may be affected by the development, and includes details in the EIA report of any relevant mitigation measures to be provided.

Scottish Ministers request that the Company investigates the presence of any private water supplies which may be impacted by the development. The EIA report should include details of any supplies identified by this investigation, and if any supplies are identified, the Company should provide an assessment of the potential impacts, risks, and any mitigation which would be provided."

4.4.3 The presences of Drinking Water Protected Areas (DWPA), Scottish Water assets and private water supplies have been investigated as part of the assessment of impacts on the water environment (see **Volume 1: Chapter 9 - Soils, Geology and Water** and **Volume 5: Chapter 7 - Soils, Geology and Water - Alternative Alignment**). Scottish Water's live infrastructure in proximity of the Proposed Development was identified and considered in the design and impact assessment processes as outlined in **Volume 1: Chapter 9** and **Volume 5: Chapter 7**. This along with published data sets was sufficient for the assessment as discussed in the noted chapter.

Aquatic Ecology

""[Marine Directorate – Science Evidence Data and Digital (MD-SEDD)] provide generic scoping guidelines for overhead line development…which outline how fish populations can be impacted during the construction, operation and decommissioning of a wind farm development or overhead line development and informs developers as to what should be considered, in relation to freshwater and diadromous fish and fisheries, during the EIA process.

In addition to identifying the main watercourses and waterbodies within and downstream of the proposed development area, developers should identify and consider, at this early stage, any areas of Special Areas of Conservation where fish are a qualifying feature and proposed felling operations particularly in acid sensitive areas."

MD-SEDD also provide standing advice for overhead line development … which outlines what information, relating to freshwater and diadromous fish and fisheries, is expected in the EIA report. Use of the checklist, provided in … of the standing advice, should ensure that the EIA report contains the required information; the absence of such information may necessitate requesting additional. information which may delay the process. Developers are required to submit the completed checklist in advance of their application submission."

4.4.4 Potential effects on fish and aquatic ecology are discussed within **Volume 1: Chapter 7 – Ecology** and **Volume 5: Chapter 5: Ecology - Alternative Alignment**. The likely effects of the Proposed Development on watercourses and waterbodies are discussed and assessed in **Volume 1: Chapter 9** and **Volume 5: Chapter 7**. The requested checklist, containing all required information, has been provided to MD-SEDD along with submission of the application.

Peat Landslide Risk

"Scottish Ministers consider that where there is a demonstrable requirement for peat landslide hazard and risk assessment (PLHRA), the assessment should be undertaken as part of the EIA process to provide Ministers with a clear understanding of whether the risks are acceptable and capable of being controlled by mitigation measures. The Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessments: Best Practice Guide for Proposed Electricity Generation Developments (Second Edition), … should be followed in the preparation of the EIA report, which should contain such an assessment and details of mitigation measures. Where a PLHRA is not required clear justification for not carrying out such a risk assessment is required."

4.4.5 A PLHRA has been carried out as part of the EIA Report and included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-9.1: Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment** and **Volume 4: Appendix V5-7.1**: **Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment - Alternative Alignment** and referenced in **Volume 1: Chapter 9** and **Volume 5: Chapter 7** of the EIA Report.

Visualisation Viewpoints

"The Scoping Report identified viewpoints at … to be assessed within the landscape and visual impact assessment. Visualisations are proposed to inform and support the LVIA from the following four locations…"

4.4.6 Photomontage visualisations have been prepared to support the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), included within **Volume 3a** and **Volume 3b**. The viewpoint location is described in **Volume 1: Chapter 6 – Landscape and Visual** and **Volume 5: Chapter 4: Landscape and Visual - Alternative Alignment**. The Scoping Report identified the viewpoint locations for the preparation of the visualisations. The Highland Council (THC) confirmed in their scoping response that they are satisfied with the viewpoint locations selected for the Proposed Alignment and Alternative Alignment, however suggested the consideration of an additional viewpoint from the Strathy Point area (see **Table V1-4.1**).

Bird Surveys

"It is recommended by the Scottish Ministers that decisions on bird surveys – species, methodology, vantage points, viewsheds and durations – site specific and cumulative – should be made following discussion between the Company, RSPB and NatureScot".

4.4.7 As a statutory consultee, NatureScot were consulted on the scope of bird surveys (see **Table V1-4.1**). Data has been obtained from RPSB as part of the desk study and is referred to in the ornithological impact assessment included in **Volume 1: Chapter 8: Ornithology** and **Volume 5: Chapter 6: Ornithology - Alternative Alignment**.

Appropriate Assessment

"The Proposed and Alternative OHL routes pass through the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Ramsar site and the West Halladale Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The routes are also adjacent to the East Halladale SSSI and within connectivity distance to qualifying features of the Caithness Lochs SPA. Therefore, the EIA Report must include sufficient information to inform an Appropriate Assessment, as required by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017".

4.4.8 Shadow Habitat Regulations Appraisals (HRAs) for all relevant European sites, including the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC / Ramsar site and SPA, Caithness Lochs SPA and Ramsar site, and the North Caithness Cliffs SPA has been carried out and included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-7.6: Shadow HRA for the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC and Ramsar** (the Alternative Alignment is considered in **Annex B** of this appendix), and referenced in **Volume 1: Chapter 7** and **Volume 5: Chapter 5** of the EIA Report. As well as in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-8.3: Shadow HRA for European Sites of Ornithological Importance** (the Alternative Alignment is considered in **Annex A** of this appendix) and referenced in **Volume 1: Chapter 8** and **Volume 5: Chapter 6**.

Borrow Pits

"The EIA Report should include detailed information [with regard to] location, size and nature [of on-site borrow pits], and also include details of the proposed depth of the excavation compared to the actual topography and water table, proposed drainage and settlement traps, turf and overburden removal and storage for reinstatement, and details of the proposed restoration profile. The impact of such facilities (including dust, blasting and impact on water) should be appraised as part oof the overall impact of the working.

The Construction Traffic Management Plan should evaluate and include potential cumulative impacts associate with the Proposed Development and other consented developments in the areas to ensure cumulative impacts and borrow pit use to source local materials are considered, and also that sharing of borrow pit locations are properly considered in order to reduce traffic".

4.4.9 A separate planning application for the requirement of any borrow pits will be sought by the Principal Contractor as required. They do not form part of the Proposed Development and are not included in the application for statutory consents.

Further Consultation and Design Alternatives

"Ministers are aware that further engagement is required between parties regarding the refinement of the design of the proposed development regarding, among other things, surveys, management plans, peat, finalisation of viewpoints, cultural heritage, cumulative assessments and request that they are kept informed of relevant discussions."

4.4.10 As noted earlier in this Chapter, pre-application consultation was carried out throughout the project, including a formal Scoping exercise, public consultation via public exhibitions at routeing and alignment selection stages, and consultation with community councils. This is further detailed in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.1**. Alternatives to the Proposed Development are discussed in **Volume 1: Chapter 2** and **Volume 5: Chapter 2 – The Routeing Process and Alternatives - Alternative Alignment**.

4.4.11 Further consultation has been undertaken with relevant consultees on the noted topics, where required. Scottish Ministers have been kept informed of any further discussions with consultees during the Gate Check process (see Section 4.6).

Mitigation Measures

"The Scottish Ministers are required to make a reasoned conclusion on the significant effects of the proposed development on the environment as identified in the environmental impact assessment. The mitigation measures suggested for any significant environmental impacts identified should be presented as a conclusion to each chapter. Applicants are also asked to provide a consolidated schedule of all mitigation measures proposed in the environmental assessment, provided in tabular form, where that mitigation is relied upon in relation to reported conclusions of likelihood or significance of impacts."

4.4.12 Proposed mitigation measures are described towards the end of each technical chapter in **Volume 1** (Chapter 6 – 12) and **Volume 5** (Chapter 4 – 10) of this EIA Report, following assessment of likely significant effects. **Volume 1: Chapter 3 – The Proposed Development** also includes some general mitigation measures which apply across the Proposed Development. All proposed mitigation measures set out throughout the EIA Report are collated within a tabulated Schedule of Mitigation, included in **Volume 1: Chapter 13** and **Volume 5: Chapter 11**.

4.5 Further Consultee Engagement

4.5.1 Stakeholder consultation has been ongoing since the early stages of the project and has continued throughout the Scoping and EIA process. As described in Section 4.2 of this Chapter and in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.1**, during the route and alignment selection stages of the project, stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the route, alignment and design solution options identified, and all responses received were summarised in the relevant Report on Consultation documents[3,5].

4.5.2 **Table V1-4.1** provides a summary of some of the key meetings and engagement that was undertaken by the Applicant with statutory consultees during the routeing, alignment and EIA stages of the project. Where more specific consultation has been carried out with consultees, this is detailed within the relevant topic chapters.

Table V1-4.1: Summary of Further Consultee Engagement

Consultee	Date	Summary of Engagement
NatureScot	December 2021	The Applicant consulted with NatureScot to seek views on the acceptability to scope out the need for further bird surveys,

		instead relying on pre-existing baseline data from other developments in the wider area. NatureScot confirmed in January 2022 that there is sufficient existing survey work related to the wind farms and their associated grid connections in the Strathy area that form part of the Connagill Cluster to give a reliable baseline for completing the ornithological impact assessment and that no extra field work would be required. *Note further consultation on bird surveys with NatureScot in April 2022.*
Statutory Consultee Meeting	March 2022	Attended by SSEN Transmission and representatives from The Highland Council (THC), NatureScot and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) to allow SSEN the opportunity to provide an update on their obligation to provide several wind farm grid connections (all at various stages of development), all converging into Connagill 275/132 kV substation. SSEN Transmission discussed with the statutory consultees the potential for a rationalised approach to development. Feedback received from the statutory consultees was supportive of a rationalised approach. THC queried whether the existing Strathy North 132 kV OHL could be incorporated into the rationalisation which SSEN Transmission confirmed they were happy to take away and consider.
NatureScot	April 2022	Consultation with NatureScot to confirm that given the Applicant is considering the rationalisation of grid connections on larger steel lattice structures, a further breeding bird survey will take place during 2022. NatureScot were grateful for the update.
NatureScot	March 2023	Consultation with NatureScot on the requirement for further bat surveys given the suite of ecological surveys available for the area that would provide sufficient information to inform a robust impact assessment on the effects of the development to bats without completing additional field surveys. In their response received on 17th April 2023, NatureScot agreed that further field surveys would be unnecessary and that the survey information collected from recently submitted wind farms to the national database could be relied upon to inform an impact assessment. However, where survey data was beginning to 'get old', and there is a likelihood of bat activity, further work was advised to be undertaken. Further bat activity surveys were completed in 2022 across the Proposed Development and more widely across the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections.
NatureScot	May 2023	Consultation with NatureScot on the requirement for further terrestrial protected species surveys (for badger, pine marten and wildcat) given the suite of ecological surveys available for the area that would provide sufficient information to inform a robust impact assessment of the effects of the development with regards to these species. The Applicant proposed to update surveys for otter and water vole given these species are likely more sensitive to the scope of the development across the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections. In their response

		received on the 8th June 2023, NatureScot agreed that existing data on terrestrial protected species was sufficient to inform an assessment and further surveys for terrestrial protected species were not required.
Statutory Consultee Meeting	August 2023	A formal pre-application meeting was facilitated by THC and attended by SSEN Transmission and specialist officers from within THC. No external statutory consultees were able to attend the virtual meeting. At this meeting, SSEN Transmission delivered a presentation to provide an update on the Connagill Cluster Grid Connection projects (including the Proposed Development) and to seek preliminary feedback on route options and design solutions for each connection. This was followed with a round table discussion of comments and suggested actions in relation to the proposals. Following the meeting a Pre-Application Advice Report was issued by THC on 20th September 2023 (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.5**)[7]. The Advice Report provided a note of the meeting and feedback on the information to be included in the EIA by key stakeholders.
British Telecom (BT)	April 2024	Consultation with British Telecom (BT) providing indicative tower locations proposed at the time. While it was noted that one tower (of the alternative alignment) would be 60 m from a BT fixed link, the link would pass above the ground altitude plus height of the proposed structure, and BT noted no concerns, however asked to be updated once the design is fixed. *Note further consultation with BT in December 2024.*
The Highland Council (THC)	June 2024	Consultation took place with THC regarding a suggestion in their scoping response that an additional Viewpoint Location (VL) from the Strathy Point area be considered for inclusion. Wirelines illustrating the visibility of the Proposed Alignment and Alternative Alignment were prepared using the viewpoint at Totegan near Strathy Point (VL used for the proposed Kirkton Energy Hub EIA Report) and shared with THC. The wireline showed that both alignments appear very distant and the appearance of the OHL in the landscape would be very similar to the VL already proposed from Strathy Cemetery, but much more distant from either alignment. The Applicant suggested that the photomontage from Strathy Cemetery would show a better representation of a similar view, and while the THC landscape officer agreed, suggested that a wireline from Strathy Point would be useful to aid in correctly locating the development during any site visit. The Applicant agreed to include wirelines from Totegan (near Strathy Point) for both the Proposed Alignment and Alternative Alignment, as included in **Volume 3a: NS Visualisations** and **Volume 3b: THC Visualisations**.

[7] The Advice Report considered other grid connections that form part of the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections, in addition to the Proposed Development

Historic Environment Scotland (HES)	June 2024	The Applicant consulted with HES following a request in their scoping response that a photomontage be included within the EIA Report from Bighouse, garden pavilion and walled garden listed building (LB7160) to assist the understanding of potential impacts on the setting of the buildings. The Applicant confirmed that they would be happy to produce the visualisation to fulfil this request (applicable to the Alternative Alignment only), which was welcomed by HES. An appropriate location for the photomontage was also agreed. The visualisation from Bighouse garden pavilion and walled garden listed building is included in **Volume 3a: Figure V1-VL7a-c: Visualisation Location 7 – Bighouse Garden Pavilion** and **Volume 3b: Figure V1-VL7a-e: Visualisation Location 7 – Bighouse Garden Pavilion.**
NatureScot	June 2024	Pre-application discussions with NatureScot specifically in relation to the likely effect of the Proposed Development on the qualifying features of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC and Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS).
NatureScot	October 2024	Consultation took place with NatureScot regarding the coverage and suitability of habitat surveys. While the Applicant has sought to, wherever possible, utilise existing access tracks, a degree of upgrade and widening would be required. A review of data coverage showed that habitat survey information is not available in a limited number of these locations. However, field survey information and a review of aerial photography indicates that the areas surrounding these limited number of locations are akin to those captured in field surveys and are likely to be of poor condition. The Applicant sought NatureScot's view on whether due to the poor nature of these habitats, a detailed and conservative review of aerial photography be used to map these habitats to inform the impact assessment for the Proposed Development. NS advised that due to the development being within the Flow Country WHS, it was recommended that further field surveys be completed to ensure robust data. The Applicant agreed to complete further field surveys to capture these data gaps, as set out in **Volume 1: Chapter 7**.
BT	December 2024	SSEN shared the fixed tower locations with BT (through ECU) and they confirmed that the Proposed Development should not cause interference to BT's current and presently planned radio network.
NatureScot	January 2025	Further engagement to seek clarification that NS agree that an assessment of marsh saxifrage be scoped out of the EIA, as set out by the Applicant in the March 2024 Scoping Report, but which was not specifically commented upon in the NS scoping response.
ECU	January 2025	Pre-Application Gate Check Meeting to discuss application timescales and requirements.

4.6 Gate Check

4.6.1 In accordance with the guidance for gate checking procedures *Good Practice Guidance for Applications under Section 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989*[8], a Gate Check Report was issued to the ECU and key stakeholders in December 2024. The purpose of the Gate Check Report is to outline consultations with statutory and non-statutory consultees, engagement with the local community and how matters raised during the scoping process have been dealt with in the EIA Report. Key stakeholders are invited to comment on the Gate Check Report to ensure they are satisfied with the approach taken within the EIA Report prior to submission of the section 37 application. A copy of the Gate Check Report is provided in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.6**.

4.6.2 Responses received from consultees to the Gate Check Report are summarised in **Table V1-4.2** along with the actions taken to address the comments.

Table V1-4.2: Summary of Gate Check Responses and Actions Taken

Consultee	Summary of Response	Action Taken
SEPA 23rd December 2024	SEPA noted that Table 1 of the Gate Check Report reported how SEPA's scoping comments would be taken into consideration in the forthcoming EIA. The only aspect that SEPA was unclear on was whether the Applicant intended to carry out a Peatland Condition Assessment following the format requested in SEPA's scoping advice, and if not SEPA encourage that this be undertaken.	The Applicant confirmed to SEPA via ECU that a Peat Condition Assessment will be completed, as included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-9.4: Peatland Condition Assessment Report** (for the Proposed Alignment) and **Volume 4: Appendix V5-7.4: Peatland Condition Assessment Report – Alternative Alignment** (for the Alternative Alignment).
	SEPA encouraged the Applicant to consult with SEPA with a series of detailed plans showing the NVC, peat depth, peatland quality and watercourse buffer information overlain with all proposed permanent and temporary infrastructure.	The detailed plans noted in SEPA's response are included within this EIA Report.
	In relation to buffers to watercourses, SEPA had requested consideration for a 50 m buffer [in their scoping response], but it was noted that in the Gate Check Report, that only a 10 m buffer was proposed to be applied. SEPA requested that both buffers be shown on the plans and SEPA will consider whether works may be acceptable within 50 m on an area-by-area basis.	The Applicant intends to provide the requested information directly to SEPA.
	Peat depth plans should be at a scale which allows it to be clearly understood how impacts on	Detailed peat depth plans are provided in **Figure V1-9.2.4** of **Volume 4: Appendix V1-9.2 –**

[8] Good Practice Guidance for Applications under Section 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 (Energy Consents Unit, February 2022). [online] Available at: https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2022/02/good-practice-guidance-applications-under-sections-36-37-electricity-act-1989/documents/energy-consents-unit-good-practice-guidance-applications-under-section-36-37-electricity-act-1989-february-2022/energy-consents-unit-good-practice-guidance-applications-under-section-36-37-electricity-act-1989-february-2022/govscot%3Adocument/energy-consents-unit-good-practice-guidance-applications-under-section-36-37-electricity-act-1989-february-2022.pdf [Accessed November 2024].

	environmental issues have been avoided or minimised.	**Outline Peat Management Pan** (for the Proposed Alignment) and in **Figure V1-7.2.4** of **Volume 4: Appendix V5-7.2 – Outline Peat Management Plan – Alternative Alignment** (for the Alternative Alignment).
Historic Environment Scotland (HES) 27th December 2024	In their response, HES confirmed that they are content that the details in the Gate Check Report reflect HES's involvement with, and advice regarding, the EIA process for the development. They consider that the Applicant is proposing to provide the relevant information for HES' historic environment interests, in particular the requested visualisation from category A listed Bighouse, garden pavilion and walled garden (LB7160).	The comments received by HES are noted.
ScotWays 7th January 2025	ScotWays note that the Applicant will consider the Scottish Hill Track [344] route within the EIA Report and will also include a draft Outdoor Access Management Plan. ScotWays confirmed they have no further comment to make at this stage.	The comments received from ScotWays are noted.
Transport Scotland 9th January 2025	Transport Scotland confirmed that having reviewed the Gate Check Report, which presents the comments raised in Transport Scotland's scoping response and indicates that these comments will be addressed appropriately within a Traffic and Transport Assessment to be included within the EIA Report. This includes Transport Scotland's request for a threshold assessment of the A9(T). Transport Scotland confirmed that they have no further comment to make at this stage.	The comments received from Transport Scotland are noted.
NatureScot (NS) 15th January 2025	NS confirmed that the contents of the Gate Check Report reflect the situation as far as NS have engaged with the scoping and pre-application process to date.	The comments received from NS are noted.

4.7 Issues Scoped into the EIA Report

4.7.1 The following topics have been 'scoped in' to the EIA Report, as set out within the Scoping Report (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.2**):

- Landscape and Visual;
- Ecology;
- Ornithology;
- Soils, Geology and Water;
- Cultural Heritage; and
- Traffic and Transport.

4.7.2 The Applicant had initially scoped out conducting a forestry impact assessment within the Scoping Report (**Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.2**) as it was considered that, while small areas of conifer plantation and a number of recently planted or replanted woodland would require clearance, these were anticipated not to have any significant effects on the overall woodlands in the area. However, on receipt of the Scoping Opinion (**Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.3**) and noting concerns raised by Scottish Forestry, the Applicant chose to conduct a forestry impact assessment, along with consideration of compensatory planting, to be included within the EIA Report (see **Volume 1: Chapter 12: Forestry** and **Volume 5: Chapter 10: Forestry - Alternative Alignment)**.

4.7.3 The Applicant also proposed to scope out a socio-economic assessment within the Scoping Report, and whilst THC accepted that this could be scoped out of the EIA, they requested that a technical note in support of the application be conducted to include relevant economic information connected with the project. A Socio-economic and Tourism Technical Note has been prepared in support of the application for consent.

4.8 Issues Scoped out of the EIA Report

4.8.1 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 V1-4.2**) as topics to be scoped out from further consideration within the EIA Report.

Recreation and Tourism

4.8.2 The A836 to the north of the Proposed Development forms part of the North Coast 500 (NC 500) tourist route and part of Sustrans National Cycle Route (NCR) 1. The existing access track to be used by the Proposed Development in the western extent, which passes alongside Strathy Forest, is featured within the guidebook 'Scottish Hill Tracks'. This is a joint publication between the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society and The Scottish Mountaineering Trust. The track forms part of Scottish Hill Track 344: Strath Halladale, which travels between Trantlebeg and Strathy. In the western extent, the Proposed Development would cross and run alongside core path SU19.03, which is routed to the west of the Halladale River between Upper Bighouse and Cemy, south of the Kirkton property, near Havaig.

4.8.3 The Estates within the vicinity of the Proposed Development are managed for sporting activities (mainly deer stalking). The Halladale River and the River Strathy are both popular with anglers as they are spate Salmon rivers that enter the Pentland Firth. The River Strathy is fished as part of Bowside Fisheries based at Bowside Lodge.

4.8.4 Potential effects on recreation and tourism assets of infrastructure projects such as this can relate to the temporary or permanent disruption to recreational activities and sites, associated visual effects, and the consequential impact of the proposed works on tourism related businesses.

4.8.5 The effects on visual amenity of the recreational and tourist receptors, including the NC500, Scottish Hill Track 344 and core path SU19.03, as a result of the Proposed Development, has been fully considered in the visual assessment included in **Volume 1: Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual** and **Volume 5: Chapter 4: Landscape and Visual - Alternative Alignment**. Likewise, the impact on increased traffic flows to local road users and local residents, and a review of the effects on pedestrian delay, amenity, fear and intimidation, and accidents / road safety and recreational routes, has been assessment in **Volume 1: Chapter 11: Traffic and Transport** and **Volume 5: Chapter 9: Traffic and Transport - Alternative Alignment**. The supporting Socio-Economic and Tourism Technical Note also considers the impacts on the tourism economy in Highland and the local area. As such, no detailed tourism and recreation assessment has been undertaken, as supported by THC in their scoping response.

4.8.6 An Outdoor Access Plan will be prepared, a draft of which is included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-11.2**, to demonstrate how continued access for recreational users along routes in the area, particularly Scottish Hill

Track 344 and core path SU19.03, would be managed during construction. The Outdoor Access Management Plan would be prepared as part of the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and signage would be erected at suitable locations to warn recreational users of construction traffic. The Applicant and Principal Contractor would consider the potential effects on tourism related businesses during the phasing of construction works.

Land Use and Agriculture

4.8.7 The majority of the land within the vicinity of the Proposed Development is Class 5.3: land capable of supporting improved grassland and Class 6.3: land capable of only rough grazing, according to the Macaulay System (now Hutton Institute) of Land Capability for Agriculture[9]. Other common land uses within the vicinity of the Proposed Development include shooting on estate land, and electrical or energy infrastructure, including the operational Strathy North Wind Farm, Strathy North 132 kV trident 'H' wood pole OHL, Connagill 275/132 kV substation and the Beauly to Dounreay 275 kV steel lattice tower OHL.

4.8.8 As set out in in **Volume 1: Chapter 3: The Proposed Development**, land use impacts associated with the Proposed Development are anticipated to be minimal. The construction work may result in some temporary loss of land or access restriction; however, it is considered that this can be adequately managed through wayleave agreements with the relevant landowners. The permanent loss of land to tower locations, CSE compound and permanent access tracks would be negligible and it would remain possible for grazing to continue around and under towers during their operational lifetime.

4.8.9 As construction effects would be minimal, and as it would remain possible for grazing to continue around and under towers during their operational lifetime, this topic has been scoped out of the EIA in its entirety. Dialogue would be maintained by the Applicant and the Principal Contractor with landowners throughout the construction period to ensure any potential disruption as a result of the proposed works is kept to a minimum.

4.8.10 No contaminated land has been identified within the vicinity of the Proposed Development; therefore, no contaminated land assessment has been undertaken.

Population and Human Health

4.8.11 The Proposed Development is located within a predominately rural area. Small settlements that are within the closest vicinity of the Proposed Development include Melvich to the north-east and Strathy to the north-west. Small clusters of properties and individual dwellings are also distributed alongside the A836 and the A897 within Strath Halladale.

4.8.12 Possible effects associated with construction and operation of the Proposed Development in relation to population and human health could include the following, and a summary is included for each point in relation to it being scoped out of this EIA:

- Noise and vibration during the construction phase:
    - Construction noise and vibration would be short term and intermittent and could be controlled through the implementation of a Noise Management Plan (NMP), which would be developed as part of the CEMP prepared by the Principal Contractor. The NMP would be agreed with THC as Local Authority, and all construction activities would be undertaken in accordance with good practice guidelines set out in BS 5228-1 and BS 5228-2. As such, and given the remoteness of construction activity for much of the Proposed Development, no detailed assessment of construction noise and vibration associated with plant noise or traffic was proposed as part of the EIA.

[9] The James Hutton Institute). *Land Capability for Agriculture in Scotland*. [online] Available at: https://www.hutton.ac.uk/land-capability-for-agriculture-lca/ [Accessed November 2024].

- Operational effects of noise from the OHL:
    - The Applicant has given consideration to the National Grid Technical Guidance Note TGN(E)322 (2021) and given the nature of the Proposed Development, its remoteness and distance from residential dwellings, no operational noise effects are expected, so no inclusion was proposed as part of the EIA.
- Noise from dismantling of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL
    - Noise from dismantling activities of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL would be short and intermittent. Any operational maintenance works required along the line would be short and intermittent and could be controlled through the implementation of a NMP, which would be developed as part of the CEMP prepared by the Principal Contractor. As such, no detailed assessment of noise associated with dismantling of the existing OHL was proposed as part of the EIA.
- Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMF):
    - EMFs arise from electric charges and current flow. The UK Health Protection Agency (HPA) is the government body responsible for policy and guidance on EMFs. Exposure guidelines for transmission lines have been developed by the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) to ensure protection of human health in different situations, occupational exposure and public exposure which have been adopted by the HPA for application in the UK. The Proposed Development would be constructed to operate at a voltage of 275 kV in the future, if required. This would adhere to the relevant regulations and guidance relating to EMF defined by the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) policy 'Power Lines: Demonstrating compliance with EMF public exposure guidelines - A voluntary code of practice' (2012)[10]. This policy states that the exposure limits are 9 kV/m for Electric Fields and 360 µT for Magnetic Fields underneath a 275kV OHL. The Proposed Development would not exceed these voluntary requirements, and it has therefore been concluded that no likely significant effect on human health associated with EMFs is predicted and has been scoped out of the assessment in its entirety from this EIA.
- Operational effects of additional electromagnetic interference (EMI) to medium and long wave (AM) radio signals and TV signals:
    - Electromagnetic interference to medium and long wave (AM) radio signals at properties within close proximity to OHLs can be known to occur. Corona discharge is unlikely to cause significant interference to VHF reception (i.e. FM radio or digital radio and television which operate in the UHF range). Micro-gap discharge can affect digital television and radio reception but is not considered to be a source of long-term annoyance as equipment is built and maintained to high standards and any such discharge would be the subject of remedial action. Impacts to digital television, digital radio and FM radio reception was therefore scoped out of the assessment in its entirety.
    - Potential effects from OHLs on TV signals can occur due to physical obstruction of the signal. The Proposed Development would not represent a significant obstruction, and it is not anticipated that any adverse effects on TV reception would be experienced. The operation of high voltage OHLs can generate electromagnetic fields over a wide range of frequencies, from power (50 Hz) to radio frequencies. It is anticipated that the Proposed Development would emit low-level radio frequency interference (RFI) but that in practice little radio and television interference would arise, except when directly beneath the OHL. Therefore, this topic has been scoped out of the EIA in its entirety.

[10] DECC (2012): Power Lines: Demonstrating compliance with EMF public exposure guidelines - A voluntary code of practice. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/demonstrating-compliance-with-emf-public-exposure-guidelines-voluntary-code-of-practice

Air Quality and Climate Change

4.8.13 There is a potential for the Proposed Development to give rise to some localised and temporary construction related releases associated with dust and construction traffic exhaust emissions. However, the nature of construction activities means these would be localised, short term and intermittent. Emissions associated with the Proposed Development would be limited to temporary and short-term emissions of exhaust gases from vehicles and construction plant, and the potential for the release of carbon dioxide as a result of dewatering and exposing peat and peat soils during construction. Neither source is considered likely to be significant in terms of global warming potential (GWP) [11]. Any potential effects would be further minimised through the implementation of mitigation measures, in particular the project CEMP, which would be produced prior to construction starting by the Applicant and Principal Contractor. An Outline CEMP can be seen in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-3.8: Outline CEMP** and relevant General Environmental Management Plans (GEMPs), which would be included within the CEMP, are listed in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-3.5: GEMP**. Longer term, emissions would be limited to traffic exhaust emissions from intermittent maintenance vehicles, which is not considered likely to be significant in terms of GWP.

4.8.14 With regard to climate adaptation, consideration has been and would continue to be given to the potential implications of climate change on the OHL design and the design of tower support structures (e.g. design for increased flood risk and adverse weather); however, no potential for impacts have been identified.

4.8.15 The Proposed Development would contribute to connecting renewable electricity generation capacity to the transmission network, in turn displacing emissions associated with fossil fuel-based electricity generation elsewhere. As such, this issue is scoped out of the EIA and no detailed assessment of air quality and climate change is included as part of this EIA Report.

Accidents and Disasters

4.8.16 Potentially significant effects which can arise in relation to accidents and disasters from developments of this type include severe weather events and structural damage to towers or poles, as well as the potential for risks during the construction phase.

4.8.17 Given the nature of the Proposed Development, the potential for effects related to the vulnerability to 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.

4.8.18 Furthermore, the Principal Designer would need to fully assess risks and mitigate as appropriate during the construction stage as part of the requirements of the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations (2015).

4.8.19 Potential significant effects relating to the vulnerability of the Proposed Development to accidents and disasters has therefore been scoped out of this EIA Report in its entirety.

[11] GWP is an index to measure how much infrared thermal radiation a greenhouse gas would absorb over a given time frame after it has been added to the atmosphere (or emitted to the atmosphere)

4.9 Other Issues

Aviation

4.9.1 It is not anticipated that the Proposed Development would infringe the safeguarding criteria and operation of Wick Airport (the closest airport to the Proposed Development), and so no assessment on aviation has been included in the EIA Report.

4.9.2 It is acknowledged that the Proposed Development falls within part of the UK Military Low Flying System designated Tactical Training Area, an area within which military aircraft may conduct low level flight training. As requested by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in their scoping response, data will be submitted to ensure structures are accurately chartered to allow deconfliction, and this will be secured through a condition of consent.

Other Factors Identified in the EIA Regulations

4.9.3 The 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 V1-4.3** describes how this EIA Report has addressed these factors.

Table V1-4.3: Assessment of Factors Identified in Regulations 4(3), 4(4) and Schedule 4

Topic	Potential for Significant Effects
Population and Human Health	This Chapter considers potential effects relating to population and human health from EMF, EMI, air quality, noise and / or vibration effects in Section 4.8: Scoped-out Issues. Potential effects on water supplies are considered in: • **Volume 1: Chapter 9: Soils, Geology and Water** • **Volume 5: Chapter 7: Soils, Geology and Water - Alternative Alignment**
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 and Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the conservation of wild birds)	The requirement to consider effects on biodiversity is addressed in • **Volume 1: Chapter 7: Ecology and Chapter 8: Ornithology** • **Volume 5: Chapter 5: Ecology – Alternative Alignment and Chapter 6: Ornithology – Alternative Alignment**
Land and Soil (and natural resources availability)	The potential effects on geological receptors, peat and groundwater resources are considered in: • **Volume 1: Chapter 9: Soils, Geology and Water** • **Volume 5: Chapter 7 Soils, Geology and Water – Alternative Alignment**
Water (and natural resource availability)	The potential effects on the water environment are considered in: • **Volume 1: Chapter 9: Soils, Geology and Water** • **Volume 5: Chapter 7: Soils, Geology and Water – Alternative Alignment**
Air and Climate	This Chapter considers potential effects on air and climate in Section 4.8: Scoped-out Issues.

Material Assets, Cultural Heritage	The potential effects on the designated heritage sites and cultural heritage assets as a result of the Proposed Development are considered in: • **Volume 1: Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage** • **Volume 5: Chapter 8: Cultural Heritage – Alternative Alignment**
Landscape	The potential effects of the Proposed Development on landscape are considered in: • **Volume 1: Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual** • **Volume 5: Chapter 4: Landscape and Visual – Alternative Alignment**
Major Accidents and Disasters	This Chapter considers potential effects relating to major accidents and disasters under Section 4.8: Scoped-out Issues.
Interaction Between Factors (cumulative effects)	The approach to cumulative effects is outlined within **Chapter 5 - EIA Process and Methodology** and is considered within each of the technical chapters in **Volume 1 (Chapter 6 – 12)** and **Volume 5 (Chapter 4 -10)**, where appropriate.