VOLUME 1: CHAPTER 6: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

Appendices (Volume 4 of this EIA Report)

Appendix V1-6.1: Technical Methodologies for Visual Representation

Appendix V1-6.2: Citation for Special Landscape Area 03. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra

Appendix V1-6.3: Assessment of Effects on Special Landscape Area 03. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra

Appendix V1-6.4: Landscape Character Assessment Tables

Appendix V1-6.5: Visual Assessment Tables

6. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

6.1 Executive Summary

6.1.1 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been undertaken for the Proposed Development in combination with the Proposed Alignment (hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Alignment') within a study area of 5 km from the proposed overhead line (OHL), which is considered appropriate to identify all potential significant effects. The LVIA has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect and Landscape Assistant at horner + maclennan, a registered practice with the Landscape Institute, in accordance with best practice guidance, the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3)[1].

6.1.2 This Chapter presents the findings of the LVIA. It describes the key sensitivities and potential changes to the physical and visual environment arising from the Proposed Alignment. The receptors within this Chapter are categorised in the following sections:

- Landscape character, landscape designations and protected landscapes; and
- Visual Amenity[2] of those present within the landscape, including established views from residential areas and travel routes.

6.1.3 The Proposed Alignment would be dependent on or associated with a number of other consented and proposed developments. Therefore, for the purposes of the LVIA, the following developments have been assumed to be present within the baseline landscape:

- Strathy South Wind Farm, given the Proposed Alignment would provide the connection for the wind farm to connect to the National Grid.
- Strathy Wood Wind Farm and its grid connection, given the Proposed Alignment would connect into this grid connection and would act as shared infrastructure for Strathy Wood Wind Farm.

6.1.4 The southernmost part of the grid connection for the Strathy South Wind Farm would be provided via an underground cable (UGC) which is anticipated to be constructed under permitted development rights. This UGC is assumed to be present within the baseline assessment of construction effects. The assessment of operational effects covers the above ground sections of the OHL route only and does not include the UGC.

6.1.5 The LVIA also gives consideration to cumulative effects occurring as a result of the addition of the Proposed Alignment to other infrastructure developments which form part of the Connagill Cluster Grid Connection within the study area which are not already considered as part of the baseline. These include:

- Wind Farm
  - Kirkton Energy Park (and on-site substation).
- Grid Infrastructure
  - Kirkton Energy Park Grid Connection; and
  - Strathy Switching Station.

6.1.6 For the purposes of the assessment of the Proposed Alignment it is assumed that the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub and grid connection would not be constructed. However, this is considered within the baseline for the Alternative Alignment (see **Volume 5: Chapter 4: Landscape and Visual - Alternative Alignment**).

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

[2] Defined in GLVIA 3 as *'The overall pleasantness of the views people enjoy of their surroundings, which provided an attractive visual setting or backdrop for the enjoyment of activities of the people living, working, recreating, visiting or travelling through an area'*

6.1.7 Mitigation measures, including landform and vegetation restoration through best practice construction techniques, and reinforcement and extending of existing woodland in proximity to the proposed cable sealing end (CSE) compound are proposed to help minimise effects of the Proposed Alignment and improve its assimilation into the landscape setting. The residual effects of the Proposed Alignment with proposed mitigation measures have been assessed after ten years, allowing for the landscape and vegetation reinstatement to establish.

Summary of Effects

Landscape Effects

6.1.8 The assessment of potential landscape effects has considered the Landscape Character Types (LCTs) identified by NatureScot and designated and protected landscapes, including Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) and Wild Land Areas (WLAs).

6.1.9 There would be Moderate adverse (significant) direct and indirect effects during construction for LCT 134 (Sweeping Moorland and Flows) due to the loss of landcover to temporary working areas and access tracks and the presence of materials, labour and construction activity. Significant effects on this LCT during operation would be limited to Moderate adverse (significant) indirect effects due to the visibility of the Proposed Alignment within this LCT and a further reduction in the sense of remoteness experienced.

6.1.10 Moderate adverse (significant) direct effects are also predicted for LCT 142 (Strath – Caithness and Sutherland) during construction due to the loss of landcover to temporary working areas and access tracks and the presence of workforce, materials and construction activity. Moderate adverse (significant) indirect effects during construction are predicted to arise due to the visibility of activity, most notably at the crossing of the Halladale River. No significant effects are predicted for this LCT during operation and no other LCTs are predicted to accrue significant effects during either the construction or operational phases.

6.1.11 No other LCTs are predicted to accrue significant effects during either the construction or operational phase.

6.1.12 The assessment of effects on the four special qualities of Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA are assessed in detail in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.3**. The assessment concludes that there would be no significant effects on any of the special qualities of the SLA during construction or operation of the Proposed Alignment.

6.1.13 Wild Land Area 39. East Halladale Flows lies within the south-eastern portion of the study area but the Proposed Alignment is unlikely to have significant effects on the wild land qualities although it would introduce further tall elements to views from the interior in which wind turbines are already present.

Visual Effects

6.1.14 The assessment of potential visual effects has considered views from 50 building based visual receptors (comprising groups of properties and individual properties) in and around buildings, six route receptors (roads and access tracks) and 11 outdoor receptors (including the two rivers within the study area).

Built Receptors

6.1.15 Significant Effects are predicted for built receptors as follows:

- B38 (Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale) - Major adverse significant effects during both construction and operation;
- B36 (Properties at Strath Halladale north) - Moderate – Major adverse significant effects during both construction and operation;
- B37 (Properties at Kirkton) – Moderate – Major adverse significant effects during construction reducing to Moderate during operation; and

- B2 (Properties on the Minor Road to Strathy Point (South Section), B10 (Properties at Baligill), B33 (Properties east of Bighouse Lodge) and B49 (Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage)) - Moderate adverse significant effects during construction and operation.

6.1.16 No significant effects are predicted for the remaining 43 built receptors during construction or operation of the Proposed Alignment.

Route Receptors

6.1.17 Significant Effects are predicted for route receptors as follows:

- R6a (Core Path SU19.03 northbound) – Major adverse significant effects during construction reducing to Moderate - Major adverse significant effects during operation;
- R6b (Core Path SU19.03 southbound) - Moderate – Major adverse significant effects during construction reducing to Moderate adverse significant effects during operation; and
- R1a and R1b (A836 / National Cycle Route (NCR) 1 westbound and eastbound respectively), R2a and R2b (A897 northbound and southbound), R3b (Minor road to Kirkton, southbound) and R4a and R4b (Scottish Hill Track 344 southbound and northbound) - Moderate adverse significant effects during both construction and operation

6.1.18 No significant effects are predicted for the remaining route-based receptors during construction or operation of the Proposed Alignment.

Outdoor Receptors

6.1.19 Significant Effects are predicted for the following outdoor receptor:

- Rec8 (Kirkton Cemetery) - Moderate adverse significant effects during both construction and operation.

6.1.20 No significant adverse effects are predicted for any of the remaining ten outdoor based receptors during construction or operation of the Proposed Alignment.

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

6.1.21 The cumulative landscape and visual assessment carried out for the Proposed Alignment has considered the potential landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Alignment when considered in combination with Kirkton Energy Park and associated substation and grid connection, and Strathy Switching Station.

6.1.22 The cumulative landscape and visual effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Alignment would generally be no greater than the levels of effect predicted to arise either from Kirkton Energy Park for some receptors or the Proposed Alignment for others. Section 6.11 clarifies the levels of effect for each receptor and **Table V1-6.17** summarises these findings.

6.1.23 The cumulative visual assessment has identified a very limited number of receptors which would experience an increase in the level of effect identified for either Kirkton Energy Park or the Proposed Alignment in isolation. These are building-based receptor B37: Properties at Kirkton (Major adverse and significant); route-based receptors R1a: A836/NCR1 west-bound in the vicinity of Strath Halladale (Major adverse and significant) and R6a: Core Path SU19.03 north-bound (Major adverse and significant); and outdoor based receptor Rec 8: Kirkton Cemetery (Moderate - Major adverse and significant).

6.2 Introduction

6.2.1 This Chapter presents the findings of the LVIA for the Proposed Development in combination with the Proposed Alignment. The Proposed Development in combination with the Alternative Alignment is assessed in **Volume 5: Chapter 4: Landscape and Visual – Alternative Alignment**.

6.2.2 The purpose of the LVIA is to identify and describe potential significant effects which may occur as a result of the Proposed Alignment to views obtained by those living, working and visiting in the area, and to the wider landscape resource, and the residual predicted significance of effects after mitigation. This Chapter considers potential effects, including cumulative effects, of the Proposed Alignment on visual amenity and landscape character during construction and operation. As described in **Volume 1: Chapter 3: The Proposed Development**, it is anticipated that the effects associated with the construction phase could be considered to be representative of worst-case decommissioning effects on visual amenity and landscape character. As such, a separate assessment of potential decommissioning effects of the Proposed Alignment is not included in this Chapter.

6.2.3 The LVIA has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect and a Landscape Assistant at horner + maclennan (h+m), a registered practice with the Landscape Institute. The assessment has been undertaken in accordance with best practice guidance, the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA)[1]. A table presenting relevant qualifications and experience of key staff involved in the preparation of this Chapter is included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-5.1: EIA Team**.

6.2.4 Landscape and visual impacts are inter-related but are considered separately.

6.2.5 The LVIA considers the potential changes to the character of the landscape which can include both physical changes and changes to perceptual qualities associated with the experience of the landscape and its value.

6.2.6 Visual impact assessment relates solely to the effect of a proposed development on views and visual amenity. All visual receptors are people.

6.2.7 The Proposed Alignment would be dependent on or associated with a number of other consented and proposed developments. Therefore, for the purposes of the LVIA, the following developments have been assumed to be present within the baseline landscape:

- Strathy South Wind Farm, given the Proposed Alignment would provide the connection for the wind farm to connect to the National Grid.
- Strathy Wood Wind Farm and its grid connection, given the Proposed Alignment would connect into this grid connection and would act as shared infrastructure for Strathy Wood Wind Farm.

6.3 Scope of Assessment

Study Area

6.3.1 The study area comprises the area where any potentially significant effects resulting from the Proposed Alignment would be likely to occur and has been established through consideration of the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) (see paragraphs 6.3.2 to 6.3.5 below), and professional judgement. A ZTV run from each tower position has been produced in order to help establish the study area. Following review of this ZTV (see **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.1: Zone of Theoretical Visibility**) alongside site verification, and based on site analysis of the perceptibility of similar existing developments in the landscape, an LVIA study area of 5 km from the Proposed Alignment has been considered appropriate to identify all potential significant effects (see **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.1**).

Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

6.3.2 As an aid to establishing the scope for the LVIA, a ZTV has been produced for the Proposed Alignment and is presented in **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.1**[3]. The ZTV is a computer-generated diagram which uses a terrain model to indicate areas from which the Proposed Alignment would be theoretically visible. The ZTV has been generated using ESRI ArcGIS software based on a terrain model using Ordnance Survey (OS) T5 DTM data.

[3] The ZTV and visualisations (in accordance with NatureScot and THC visualisation standards) has been produced by ASH design+assessment Ltd.

6.3.3 ZTVs have been run using the designed heights for each tower, as identified in the Indicative Tower Schedule (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-3.1**).

6.3.4 The ZTV has been prepared based on a viewer height of 2 m above ground, with earth curvature and light refractivity, set to 0.075 in accordance with NatureScot guidance[4]

6.3.5 Whilst the ZTV is a useful tool for the identification of potential effects, it is not indicative of an effect in itself. The ZTV does not take into account the potential screening effects of woodland and other localised features such as buildings, trees or local landform which are not captured by the OS T5 data. Nor does it give indication of the way in which a development may relate to its broader landscape context and the receding scale and visibility of features with distance. However, consideration of these aspects is taken into account during the landscape and visual impact assessment including through professional judgement (see paragraph 6.5.2).

Visualisations

6.3.6 Five visualisations have been produced to support the LVIA work. These show the predicted appearance of the Proposed Alignment during operation, once landscape reinstatement of disturbed areas has been assumed to be fully established. The visualisations are from the following locations:

- Visualisation Location 1: Strathy Cemetery (OS Grid Reference: 283881 965605); (see **Volume 3a: Figure V1-VL1 a-c** and **Volume 3b: Figure V1-VL1 a-e**);
- Visualisation Location 2: A836 near Bighouse (OS Grid Reference: 290196 964007); (see **Volume 3a: Figure V1-VL2 a-c** and **Volume 3b: Figure V1-VL2 a-e**);
- Visualisation Location 3: A897 near Golval (OS Grid Reference: 289817 961783); (see **Volume 3a: Figure V1-VL3 a-c** and **Volume 3b: Figure V1-VL3 a-e**);
- Visualisation Location 4: A897 at Loch Earacha (OS Grid Reference: 289932, 960830); (see **Volume 3a: Figure V1-VL4 a-c** and **Volume 3b: Figure V1-VL4 a-e**); and
- Visualisation Location 5[5]: Totegan near Strathy Point (OS Grid Reference 282784, 968406); (see **Volume 3a: Figure V1-VL5a-b** and **Volume 3b: Figure V1-VL5a-b**).

6.3.7 The visualisations have been produced from locations agreed with The Highland Council (THC) at scoping stage to support the LVIA work. They were selected to show the appearance of the Proposed Alignment within the landscape setting. The Visualisation Locations (VL) have not been assessed as viewpoints. The visual assessment is a receptor-based assessment (giving consideration to all potential visual receptors) rather than a viewpoint-based assessment.

6.3.8 Two sets of visualisations have been produced to NatureScot 2017[6] and The Highland Council 2016[7] standards, included within the EIA Report as **Volume 3a** and **Volume 3b**, respectively. Further detail on the preparation of visualisations is included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.1: Technical Methodologies for Visual Representation**.

6.4 Consultation

6.4.1 The scope of the assessment has been determined through a combination of professional judgement, reference to the relevant guidance documents[1] and consultation with stakeholders, through scoping, and pre-application advice.

[4] Visualisation Representation of Wind Farms Guidance V2, February 2017, Scottish Natural Heritage

[5] As agreed during consultation with THC, the viewpoint from Strathy Point near Totegan has been produced as a wireline only

[6] Scottish Natural Heritage (2017) Visual Representation of Wind Farms (Version 2.2). Available at: https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-09/Guidance%20-%20Visual%20representation%20of%20wind%20farms%20-%20Feb%202017.pdf [Accessed December 2024]

[7] The Highland Council (2016) Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/12880/visualisation_standards_for_wind_energy_developments [Accessed December 2024]

6.4.2 The Scoping Opinion of the Scottish Ministers was issued in June 2024[8] (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-4.3**).

6.4.3 **Table V1-6.1** summarises the scoping and consultation responses relevant to the LVIA and provides information on where and/or how points raised have been addressed in this assessment.

Table V1-6.1: Consultation Responses

Organisation & Date	Summary of Consultation Response	EIA/Design Response to Consultee
The Highland Council (THC) 21st May 2024	THC expect the EIA considers the landscape and visual context of the development. The two elements require separate assessment. Assessment should cover impacts of all elements of the development.	This LVIA considers and assesses the subjects of landscape and visual amenity separately. Section 6.9 includes an assessment of likely significant landscape effects and Section 6.10 includes an assessment of likely significant visual effects.
	Assessments should cover impacts of all elements of the development, including security fencing, any tree felling and any lighting	The assessment takes into consideration all elements of the Proposed Development.
	The LVIA should provide a ZTV and identify key viewpoints to represent the most sensitive visual receptors. While this development is not a wind farm, THC welcome the Applicant's commitment to producing photomontages to THC standards in addition to those of NatureScot. The photomontages should be provided in hard copy in a A3 leaver arch ring bound folder.	Photomontages to assist with the assessment of the LVIA are included in accordance with NS guidance in **Volume 3a** and in accordance with THC guidance in **Volume 3b** of the EIA Report. They cover all relevant impacts of all elements of the Proposed Development. As described in paragraph 6.3.7, the visual assessment is receptor-based and considers all potential receptors within the study area rather than a small number of viewpoints, which provides a more detailed and robust assessment.
	THC are generally content with the four viewpoints included in the Scoping Report for the Proposed Development. The purpose of the selected and agreed viewpoints should be clearly identified and stated in the supporting information. Further consideration should be given to providing a viewpoint from the path to the lighthouse at Strathy Point. THC would be happy to review wireframes in the first instance to confirm whether this would be beneficial for inclusion in the EIA Report.	Paragraphs 6.3.6 - 6.3.7 identifies and describes the viewpoints used for production of the photomontages to support and inform the LVIA. The Applicant has conducted further consultation with the THC landscape officer regarding the inclusion of a viewpoint from Totegan near Strathy Point (VL5) used for the proposed Kirkton Wind Energy Hub EIA Report (see **Volume 1: Chapter 4: Scope and Consultation**)). It has been agreed that the inclusion of wireline for the Proposed Alignment will be sufficient from this viewpoint. A wireline from Totegan (near Strathy Point) is included in **Volume 3a** and **3b** of this EIA Report.

[8] Scottish Government (June 2024) Strathy South Wind Farm Grid Connection Scoping Opinion

Organisation & Date	Summary of Consultation Response	EIA/Design Response to Consultee
	When considering the impact on recreational routes please ensure that all core paths, the national cycle network, long distance trails are assessed. It should be noted that these routes are used by a range of receptors	The visual assessment in Section 6.10 considers the impacts on route-based receptors including recreational users of paths, tracks and other established walking and cycle routes.
	A landscaping, management and maintenance scheme for the site is required and as this will have wider habitat and biodiversity interest. Using planting material sourced locally should be explored and there may be scope to replicate this in a controlled manner in landscaping for the new sites and in restoration of the old.	The reinstatement of areas disturbed during construction would be fundamental to ensuring that the Proposed Development would be successfully accommodated into the existing landscape in the longer term. Further detail on these measures is included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-3.6: Outline Site Restoration Plan**.
	Whilst the Proposed Development does not sit within a Wild Land Area, WLA 39 East Halladale Flows is within close proximity. The Scoping Report states it is intended to scope out WLA 39 from the LVIA. Whilst NPF4 does not require a Wild Land Assessment to be carried out if a proposal sits outwith a Wild Land Area, THC recommend that regard still be given to Wild Land considerations.	WLA 39: East Halladale Flows lies 270 m from the Proposed Alignment to the south-east and is considered in Section 6.9 of this Chapter.
	THC support that the LVIA will assess the potential for effects on visual amenity of the recreational and tourist receptors as a result of the proposed and alternative development.	This has been noted. The potential for effects on recreational and tourist receptors is considered in Section 6.10 of this Chapter.
NatureScot 26th April 2024	The Proposed Route[9] is sited further inland and would not encroach on the narrow band of transition between intimate, settled coast and sweeping moorland (compared to the Alternative Route[9]) which NatureScot considers to be of high sensitivity to developments of this type. Though the ZTV shows some visibility from Melvich and the A836, the development would be viewed at distances of 1.5 km and above. Thus, the landscape and visual impacts effects on the distinctive coastline are not expected to be significant.	This LVIA considers potential effects, including cumulative effects, of the Proposed Development on landscape receptors and visual amenity during construction and operation.

[9] A Proposed Route and Alternative Route were included in the Strathy South Wind Farm Grid Connection Scoping Report (March 2024), as the Applicant had not completed alignment optioneering at that stage.

6.5 Methodology

Assessment Guidance

6.5.1 The LVIA has been prepared with reference to the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment,* Third Edition (GLVIA3)[2] and Landscape Character Assessment: *Guidance for England and Scotland*.[10]

Professional Judgement

6.5.2 GLVIA3 places a strong emphasis on the importance of professional judgement in identifying and defining the significance of landscape and visual effects. As part of this assessment, professional judgement has been used in combination with structured methods and criteria to evaluate landscape value (as defined in paragraph 6.5.12 and **Table V1-6.2**) and landscape and visual sensitivity (as defined in paragraph 6.5.25 – 6.5.27 and **Table V1-6.3**) magnitude of change (as defined in paragraph 6.5.28 – 6.5.29 and **Table V1-6.4**), and significance of effect (as defined in paragraph 6.5.30 – 6.5.34 and **Table V1-6.5**). The assessment has been undertaken and verified by two Landscape Professionals (Chartered Landscape Architects) to provide a robust and consistent approach.

Key Stages of the Assessment

6.5.3 GLVIA3 advises that landscape and visual effects should be assessed from a clear understanding of the development proposed and any mitigation measures which are being adopted.

6.5.4 The GLVIA3 methodology for landscape assessment involves an appreciation of the existing landscape resource, the susceptibility of its key components to accept the change proposed, and an understanding of the potential effects which could occur and how these could affect these key components.

6.5.5 Familiarity with the site and the extent, nature and expectation of existing views by visual receptors is a key factor in establishing the visual sensitivity in terms of the development proposed. The guidelines require evaluation of magnitude of change to views experienced by sensitive receptors, comprising individuals living, working, travelling and carrying out other activities within the landscape, and the subsequent evaluation of the significance of effects.

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

6.5.7 There are five key stages to the assessment:

- Establishment of the baseline;
- Appreciation of the development proposed;
- Identification of key landscape and visual receptors;
- Identification of potential effects; and
- Assessment of significance of effect.

Desk Study

6.5.8 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through a combination of desk study and site appraisal. The desk review has involved a review of the following general documents and sources:

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

- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)[11];
- The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) (THC, 2012)[12] and Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) (THC, 2018)[13];
- Scoping responses and other consultation responses for the Proposed Development (see **Table V1-6.1**);
- Online mapping and aerial photography resources from Ordnance Survey, Google, Bing and National Library of Scotland; and
- The ZTV for the Proposed Alignment (see **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.1**).

Field Survey

6.5.9 Site survey for the Proposed Development was undertaken in April and July 2024.

6.5.10 In addition, the following specific tasks were undertaken for the assessment of landscape and visual effects:

Landscape Assessment Baseline Tasks

6.5.11 The desk review for the landscape assessment has included a review of the following additional documents and resources:

- NatureScot Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Descriptions[14] (SNH, 2019 [online]);
- Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas (Horner + Maclennan and Wood, 2011)[15]; and
- Wild Land Areas map and descriptions[16] (SNH, 2014[online]).

Identification of Baseline Landscape Value

6.5.12 The value of the landscape is an important consideration in informing later judgement of the significance of effects. Landscape value concerns the perceived importance of the landscape when considered as a whole, and within the context of the study area and is established through consideration of the following factors:

- Presence of landscape designations, other inventory or registered landscapes / landscape features or identified planning constraints;
- The scenic quality of the landscape;
- Perceptual aspects, such as wildness or tranquillity;
- Conservation interests such as cultural heritage features or associations, or if the landscape supports notable habitats or species;
- Recreational value; and
- Rarity, either in the national or local context, or if it is considered to be a particularly important example of a specific landscape type.

[11] National Planning Framework (NPF) 4. Available at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/ [Accessed December 2024]
[12] The Highland Council (2012) *Highland-wide Local Development Plan.* Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan [Accessed December 2024]
[13] The Highland Council (2018) *Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan.* Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/19712/casplan_adopted [Accessed December 2024]
[14] NatureScot: (2019): Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions [ONLINE] https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions [Accessed December 2024].
[15] Horner + Maclennan and Wood, M (2011) Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas, The Highland Council.
[16] SNH (2014) Wild Land Areas map and descriptions [online] https://www.nature.scot/doc/wild-land-areas-map-and-descriptions-2014 [Accessed December 2024]

6.5.13 It should be noted that absence of a designation does not necessarily mean that a landscape or component is not highly valued, as factors such as accessibility and local scarcity can render areas of nationally unremarkable quality highly valuable as a local resource.

6.5.14 Criteria for the allocation of perceived landscape value are outlined in **Table V1-6.2** below:

Table V1-6.2: Landscape Value Criteria

Landscape Value	Criteria
High	• The landscape is closely associated with features of international or national importance which are rare within the wider context; • The landscape is of high scenic quality and forms a key part of an important designated landscape or planning constraint; and/or • The landscape is an example of a scarce resource within the local context and is of considerable local importance for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Medium	• The landscape forms part of a designated landscape or is associated with other features of importance but is not rare or distinctive within the local context; and/or • The landscape is one of a number within the local context appreciated for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Low	• The landscape characteristics are common within the local and regional context and the landscape is not associated with any particular features or attributes considered to be important; and/or • The landscape is of poor scenic quality and is not appreciated for any recreational or cultural associations.

Visual Assessment Baseline Tasks

6.5.15 A combination of desk and field survey was used to establish the range and distribution of potential visual receptors within the study area. Visual receptors can be defined as individuals occupying and using the study area with the potential to obtain views of the Proposed Development. Potential visual receptors included in the assessment have included those experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes, and popular viewpoints used by the public.

6.5.16 The following additional resources were used to enhance understanding of the use of the study area by potential visual receptors:

- The Highland Council (THC) Core Paths Interactive Map[17] (THC, 2024);
- Scottish Hill Tracks (Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways, 2011)[18]; and
- Other web based and published sources providing information on local resources and activities within the study area (see the list of references in Section 6.15).

6.5.17 Site visits were undertaken to verify the visual receptors identified through desk study, identify any further potential receptors which had been missed and to collate information on baseline visual amenity, including information on the types and activities of visual receptors likely to be present, and the nature of the existing views which are obtained. Site recording involved the completion of standardised recording forms and

[17] The Highland Council, Core Paths Interactive Map [ONLINE]: https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fd3fc9c72d545f7bcf1b43bf5c8445f [Accessed December 2024].
[18] The Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways) (2011): Scottish Hill Tracks (Fifth Edition) Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

annotation of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey plans, supported by a photographic record of views from key receptor locations.

Appreciation of the Development Proposed

6.5.18 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline landscape, and any peripheral or ancillary features proposed. Analysis of the proposed activities and changes which would take place leads to an understanding of the potential effects that may occur to the landscape and visual resource.

6.5.19 This stage has included review of all available desk-based information relating to the Proposed Development in terms of its long-term physical appearance and requirements for construction and access, as detailed in **Volume 1: Chapter 3: The Proposed Development**.

Identification of Key Landscape and Visual Receptors

6.5.20 The identification of key landscape and visual receptors with the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development is the first step in the analysis of the potential for significant effects to occur. Landscape and visual receptors can be described as follows:

- **Landscape receptors** comprise key characteristics or individual features which contribute to the value of the landscape and have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. Landscape receptors are identified through analysis of baseline characteristics when considered in relation to the impacts which might result from a development of the type proposed.
- **Visual receptors** comprise individuals experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes and popular viewpoints used by the public. Potential visual receptors are identified through analysis of desk resources, mapping and field survey, as described under 'Establishment of the Baseline' above. A review of the ZTV in the context of site survey is used to identify the potential for visual receptors to be affected by the Proposed Development.

Identification of Potential Effects

6.5.21 The next step in the assessment process involves the identification of potential effects which may occur as a result of the interaction of the Proposed Development with the identified landscape and visual receptors.

6.5.22 The assessment takes into account direct effects upon existing views, landscape elements, features and key characteristics and, also, indirect effects which may occur secondarily to changes affecting another landscape component or area. The identification of potential effects is a two-fold process, giving consideration as to how these effects may arise from aspects of the Proposed Development and how they may be accommodated by the existing baseline features.

6.5.23 Where it is established that potential effects could be limited by mitigation measures, these are also given consideration.

6.5.24 Potential effects are evaluated through the allocation of criteria for sensitivity and magnitude.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivity

6.5.25 Sensitivity concerns the nature of the baseline landscape or visual receptor, and the ability to accommodate development of the type proposed without compromising the key characteristics and / or composition.

6.5.26 There are two aspects which contribute to the evaluation of landscape and visual sensitivity: value and susceptibility to change. The consideration of these two separate aspects in the differing assessments for landscape and visual amenity are outlined below:

- Landscape
  - Value: The baseline value of the landscape and the contributory value of individual landscape receptors to the landscape as a whole; and
  - Susceptibility: The ability of landscape receptors to accommodate development of the type proposed without changing the intrinsic qualities of the landscape as a whole.
- Visual Amenity
  - Value: The baseline value of a particular view to the visual receptor, including the perceived; and
  - Susceptibility: The susceptibility of the viewer to changes to the view, giving consideration to the particular activity they may be involved in and also the composition of the baseline view and importance of the proposed area of change as a part of the view.

6.5.27 Criteria for the evaluation of sensitivity to change are presented in **Table V1-6.3**.

Table V1-6.3: Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Criteria

Sensitivity Rating	Landscape Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
High	A highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present.
Medium	A reasonably valued landscape with a composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and/or where some detracting features are present; • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and/or where some detracting features are present; • roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and • workplaces where the changed aspect is an important element of the view and there are no detracting features present.

Sensitivity Rating	Landscape Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape which is potentially tolerant of a large degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and/or numerous detracting features are present; • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and/or where numerous detracting features are present; • roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and/or where some detracting features are present; and • workplaces where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and/or where some detracting features are present.

Landscape and Visual Magnitude

6.5.28 Magnitude of change concerns the extent to which the existing landscape character or view would be altered by the Proposed Development. Elements specific to the evaluation of magnitude of change for the differing assessments of landscape and visual amenity are detailed below:

- Landscape
  - The degree to which features or characteristics may be removed, altered or added within the landscape;
  - The geographical extent of proposed changes;
  - Whether changes would be direct or indirect; and
  - The potential duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).
- Visual Amenity
  - The scale or extent of proposed changes within the view[19];
  - The location of proposed changes within the view, relevant to other existing features;
  - The extent to which this may alter the composition or focus of the view; and
  - The duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).

6.5.29 Criteria for the evaluation of magnitude of change are presented in **Table V1-6.4.** In recognition of the differing changes that would occur over time, two ratings for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and approximately 10 years post construction, once landscape / habitat reinstatement has had time to establish. The operational magnitude considers a baseline situation

[19] For the purposes of this assessment, the terms Low, Medium and High have been used to categorise the number of towers theoretically visible. Low refers to less than approximately 18, Medium refers to between approximately 18 and 36, and High refers to over approximately 36.

where the turbines of the consented Strathy South and Strathy Wood wind farms and the Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection would be in situ, as the OHL would be dependent on these developments.

Table V1-6.4: Landscape and Visual Magnitude of Change Criteria

Magnitude Rating	Landscape Magnitude	Visual Magnitude
High	Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive change over a more limited area.	The Proposed Development would result in a very noticeable change in the existing view.
Medium	Perceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to notable change in a localised area.	The Proposed Development would result in a noticeable change in the existing view.
Low	Virtually imperceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or perceptible change in a localised area.	The Proposed Development would result in a perceptible change in the existing view.
Negligible	No discernible change in any landscape characteristics or components.	The Proposed Development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view.

Assessment of Significance of Effects

6.5.30 Evaluation of the predicted significance of effect has been carried out through the analysis of the anticipated magnitude of change in relation to the landscape or visual sensitivity, taking into account any proposed mitigation measures, and is established using professional judgement.

6.5.31 In recognition of the potential for effects to vary over time, the assessment has been undertaken at two different stages: during the construction phase, and during operation, once landscape / habitat reinstatement measures have been allowed to establish. This is assumed to be approximately 10 years after the completion of construction and reinstatement works.

6.5.32 The significance of effect for landscape and visual elements is considered as follows:

- Landscape Effects
  - The assessment takes into account identified effects upon existing landscape receptors and assesses the extent to which these would be lost or modified in the context of their importance in determining the existing baseline character.
- Visual Effects
  - The assessment takes into account likely changes to the visual composition, including the extent to which new features would distract or screen existing elements in the view or disrupt the scale, structure or focus of the existing view.

6.5.33 The assessment takes into consideration the potential for effects to be adverse, where changes such as the addition of new distracting features, or the removal of existing positive features, are anticipated to negatively affect the landscape or view; or beneficial, where changes, such as the removal of existing distracting features or the addition of associated planting or other mitigation measures are anticipated to positively influence the landscape or view.

6.5.34 Criteria used for the assessment of effects are presented in **Table V1-6.5**. For the purposes of the LVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.

Table V1-6.5: Landscape and Visual Significance of Effect Criteria

Effect/ Significance	Landscape Effect	Visual Effect
Major Adverse/ Significant	The Proposed Development is at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and would be a dominant feature, resulting in considerable reduction in scenic quality and large-scale change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would become a prominent and very detracting feature and would result in a very noticeable deterioration to an existing highly valued and well composed view.
Moderate Adverse/ Significant	The Proposed Development is out of scale with the landscape, or inconsistent with the local pattern and landform and may be locally dominant and/or result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would introduce some detracting features to an existing highly valued view or would be more prominent within a pleasing or less well composed view, resulting in a noticeable deterioration of the quality of view.
Minor Adverse/ Not Significant	The Proposed Development does not quite fit with the scale, landform or local pattern of the landscape and may be locally intrusive but would result in an inappreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a perceptible but not detracting feature within a pleasing or valued view or would be a prominent feature within a poorly composed view of limited value, resulting in a small deterioration to the existing view.
Negligible/ Not Significant	The Proposed Development sits well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and/or would not result in any discernible reduction or improvement in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a barely perceptible feature within the existing view and/or would not result in any discernible deterioration or improvement to the view.
Minor Beneficial/ Not Significant	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a small or localised improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a fairly attractive feature and / or remove a fairly detracting feature from an existing less well composed view, resulting in a small improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.
Moderate Beneficial/ Significant	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would become a new attractive feature within, or result in the removal or partial removal of an existing detracting feature from, a poorly composed or less well composed view leading to a noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.
Major Beneficial/ Significant	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a very noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a prominent new attractive feature within, or result in the removal of an existing very detracting feature from, a poorly composed view leading to a very noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.

6.6 Limitations and Assumptions

6.6.1 The LVIA is subject to the following limitations and assumptions:

- The prominence of the Proposed Alignment in the landscape and views would vary according to the prevailing weather conditions. The LVIA has been carried out, as is best practice, by assuming the 'worst case' scenario i.e. on a clear, bright day in early spring, when neither foreground deciduous foliage nor haze can interfere with the clarity of the view obtained.
- The assessment of operational effects assumes a situation where the turbines of Strathy South and Strathy Wood wind farms and Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection would be in-situ and operational, because the Proposed Alignment would be dependent on these other developments.
- The assessment of operational effects assumes that disturbed areas not required for the operation of the Proposed Alignment (temporary tracks and working areas, excavations for tower foundations etc.) would be successfully reinstated to reflect, as far as possible, similar vegetation types and appearance to that present prior to construction. It is noted that these vegetation types may not necessarily comprise identical habitat types and value to those previously present. Habitat change is discussed separately in **Volume 1: Chapter 7: Ecology**.
- ZTVs are used to inform the landscape, visual and cumulative assessments. The limitations and technical specifications for production of ZTVs are included in paragraphs 6.3.2 to 6.3.5 and **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.1**.
- The field assessment of visual effects has been undertaken from public roads, footpaths or open spaces. For residential receptors, assumptions have been made about the types of rooms in buildings and about the types and importance of views from these rooms. For there to be a visual effect, there is the need for a viewer and therefore only buildings that are in use have been considered in the visual assessment.
- The assessment of effects on visual receptors occupying buildings such as residences and public buildings includes consideration of potential for views from exterior areas associated with the building including gardens where appropriate. These effects are referenced where relevant.
- The assessment reflects the baseline situation at the time of site work (April and July 2024) and therefore does not take account of any changes to the landscape fabric which may have occurred after this time.
- The cumulative assessment is limited to permanent effects as it is assumed that construction operations for the Proposed Alignment and other cumulative developments would occur concurrently.

6.7 Landscape Baseline Conditions

Overview

6.7.1 The study area for the Proposed Alignment is located on the north coast of Sutherland, to the south of the coastal settlements of Strathy and Melvich which lie to the west of Thurso and comprises a 10 km wide corridor (5 km either side of the OHL centreline). The Proposed Alignment proceeds northwards from Strathy Forest approximately parallel to the River Strathy, before heading northeast across open moorland to a point just north of Cnoc Eipteil. Thereafter, the OHL would proceed south eastwards, crossing Strath Halladale to terminate at Connagill 275/132 kV substation.

6.7.2 The study area encompasses all, or parts, of the settlements of Armadale, Strathy, Baligill, Portskerra and Melvich, which lie along the coast, and also scattered settlement inland in Strath Halladale as well as isolated properties near the River Strathy.

6.7.3 To the west of the River Strathy, the landform is undulating and rises to a maximum height of around 229 m above ordnance datum (AOD). The deeply incised Armadale Burn is a notable feature with isolated lochs and

lochans also present. Landcover is a mixture coniferous plantation immediately west of the river and open moorland further west. Wind turbines and an electricity substation (Strathy North substation) are present in Strathy Wood and the turbines are prominent features in the landscape. There are hill tracks, mainly to the west of the Armadale Burn.

6.7.4 Between the River Strathy and the Strath Halladale the landform is also undulating, rising to a maximum height of 254 m AOD at Beinn Ruadh. There are numerous lochs and lochans and small blocks of coniferous plantation. There are hill tracks in the northern and eastern parts of the interior of this area and Scottish Hill Track 344 which runs approximately north - southeast of the River Strathy. This area includes gravel workings and a wind turbine south of Melvich, as well as an existing wood pole mounted OHL (Strathy North 132 kV trident 'H' wood pole OHL) which the Proposed Alignment would replace in part.

6.7.5 Strath Halladale is an agricultural landscape of improved, semi-improved and rough grassland with areas of scrub woodland along the river and on side slopes, with scattered dwellings. It is visually contained by rising ground to the west and east with views channelled along the strath. There are, however, views of the steel lattice tower OHL (Beauly to Dounreay 275 kV OHL) which runs over higher ground from Connagill 275/132 kV substation to the east of the strath.

6.7.6 East of Strath Halladale, the landform is also undulating and rises to a maximum height of approximately 250 m AOD at Cean Mòr. Landcover is predominantly open moorland with some small blocks of coniferous forest and several lochs and numerous lochans. This area is largely uninhabited but is crossed by a steel lattice tower OHL (Beauly to Dounreay 275 kV OHL), which runs south-west from Dounreay to Connagill 275/132 kV substation and then southwards along Strath Halladale.

Landscape Designations

6.7.7 Landscapes can be ascribed an international, national, regional or local designation that recognises the importance of the landscape for its scenic interest or attractiveness. Areas of landscape may also be protected by planning policy at either a national or regional level.

6.7.8 The following areas designated for landscape quality or identified as wild land areas lie within, or partly within, the study area, as displayed on **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.2.**

- Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra Special Landscape Area (SLA); and
- Wild Land Area (WLA) 39: East Halladale Flows.

6.7.9 The SLA lies along the northern coast partly within the study area. There are four Special Qualities (SQ) listed in the citation for this SLA in the Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas[15]:

- SQ1 - Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea
- SQ2 - Moorland and Crofting Mosaic;
- SQ3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views; and
- SQ4 – Historical Dimension

6.7.10 The full citation for this SLA is included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.3 Assessment of Effects on Special Landscape Area 03. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra.**

6.7.11 WLA 39 falls partially within the south-eastern extent of the study area and, given the context where existing infrastructure is already present, it is unlikely that significant effects would occur. However, a review of the Proposed Alignment in relation to the Wild Land Qualities[20] is provided in Section 6.9 of this Chapter.

[20] Wild land qualities are seen as a combination of physical attributes and perceptual responses to them; the former being relatively easy to define and the latter being concerned with the way people react to them.

6.7.12 The identified qualities of the WLA[16] are:

- Q1 An awe-inspiring simplicity of landscape at the broad scale, with a strong horizontal emphasis, 'wide skies' and few foci.
- Q2 A remote, discrete interior, with limited access and a strong sense of solitude.
- Q3 A rugged and complex pattern of hidden burns, lochans and pools at the local level, despite the landscape's simple composition at the broad scale.
- Q4 A remarkably open landscape with extensive visibility, meaning tall or high features in the distance are clearly visible.

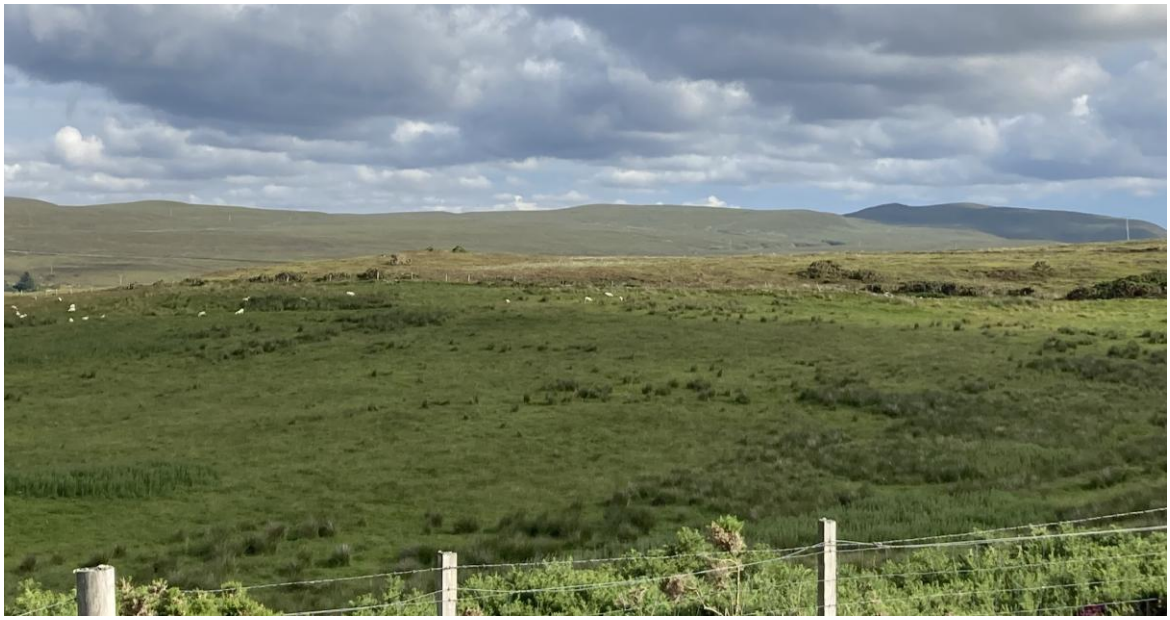
Landscape Character

6.7.13 NatureScot has undertaken detailed review and classification of various landscape areas and types of Scotland[14] (SNH, 2019 [online][14]). Six individual Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are identified within the 5 km study area for the Proposed Alignment, as follows (see **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.3**):

- LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows;
- LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland;
- LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes;
- LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays;
- LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland; and
- LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms.

6.7.14 These are described in further detail in **Tables V1-6.6** to **V1-6.11** below, along with the key characteristics which have been identified by NatureScot. Characteristics of specific note and relevance within the study area are also identified.

Table V1-6.6 LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows

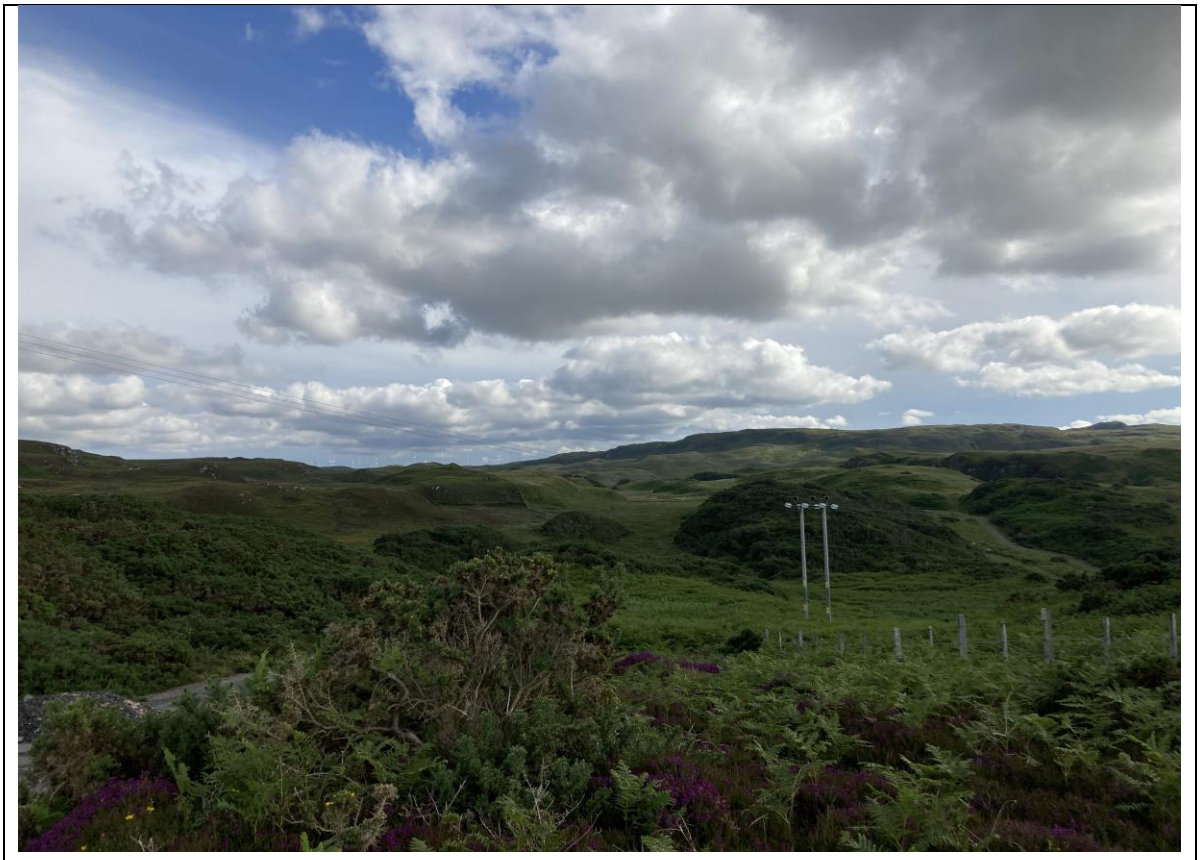


View over LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows from the A836 (OS Grid Ref: NC 82993, 65586)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Gently sloping or undulating landform which lies generally below 350 metres. • Occasional isolated hills of limited height form local landmark features. • Lochs and mature, meandering rivers. • Very distinct flora, dominated by sphagnum mosses, produced by the wetness and infertility of the flows. • Areas of peat cuttings and hagging. • Pockets of improved grazing, mainly within the outer fringes of sweeping moorland. • Coniferous forest forming a dominant characteristic within some parts of this landscape character type. • Ribbons of broadleaf woodland occasionally run along the water courses and loch edges. • Very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath. • Vehicular tracks within parts of the landscape. • Wind farms, transmission lines, the A9 and a network of minor roads are key features within the more modified outer fringes within Caithness. • Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space. • Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland. • Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau. • A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.
Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT occurs extensively throughout East Sutherland and Caithness. There are two instances of this LCT within the study area lying to the west and east of Strath Halladale and occupying the vast majority (over 70%) of the study area. The majority of the Proposed Alignment lies within this LCT.

Description	This flat, generally smooth and gently undulating landform largely coincides with areas of blanket bog supporting a diverse range of wet heath, grassland and mire. Lochs, lochans and the meandering River Strathy sit within the shallow valleys and basins as focal features. Large areas of flatter peatlands are patterned with a dominant intricate network of water courses, dubh lochans and a diverse range of pool systems, with wet, spongy, vegetation. The landcover is a simple composition of moorland and mire forming low, smooth and largely uninterrupted skylines. Coniferous forestry has a strong presence in the western half of the study area. There are fragmented areas of broadleaf scrub woodland. The interior of this area is extremely sparsely settled with buildings at Bowside and, Dallangwell and evidence of past habitation in the form of hut circles and sheep folds. On the fringes of this LCT there is scattered settlement at Strath Roy and Kirkton. Vehicular tracks are used mainly to provide access for deer stalking, to forests and fishing lochs. The wind turbines at Strathy North are prominent above the forest canopy to the west of the Proposed Alignment site and those at Strathy Wood and Strathy South wind farms would also be noticeable together with the Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection. The steel lattice Beauly-Dounreay 275 kV OHL, wood pole mounted overhead lines, forest access tracks and vehicle movements associated with timber harvesting detract from any strong sense of naturalness and remoteness experienced in other incidences of this LCT in East Caithness and Sutherland.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Landform generally below 350m with gentle slopes and undulations. • Lochs, lochans and the meandering River Strathy with associated pockets of semi-improved grazing. • Coniferous forest forms a dominant feature within the western part of the study area. • Very, very sparsely settled. • Vehicular tracks and forest accesses with associated vehicle movement. • Wind turbines are prominent features with transmission lines noticeable features particularly where they break the skyline. • Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines. • Sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau. • A strong sense of remoteness is diminished by the presence of forest tracks and timber harvesting activity.
Landscape Value	This coastal fringe of this LCT overlaps with an SLA and WLA 39 lies in part of the LCT east of Strath Halladale. The interior of this LCT west of Strath Halladale does not contain any area designated for landscape value and it is experienced largely by local residents, visitors, people travelling on the A836 (North Coast (NC) 500 / National Cycle Route (NCR) 1), people walking on Core Path SU 19.03 and Scottish Hill Track 344 - Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy, forest and farm workers and people fishing on the River Strathy. The landscape value of this LCT within the study area is considered to be **Medium**.

Table V1-6.7 LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland

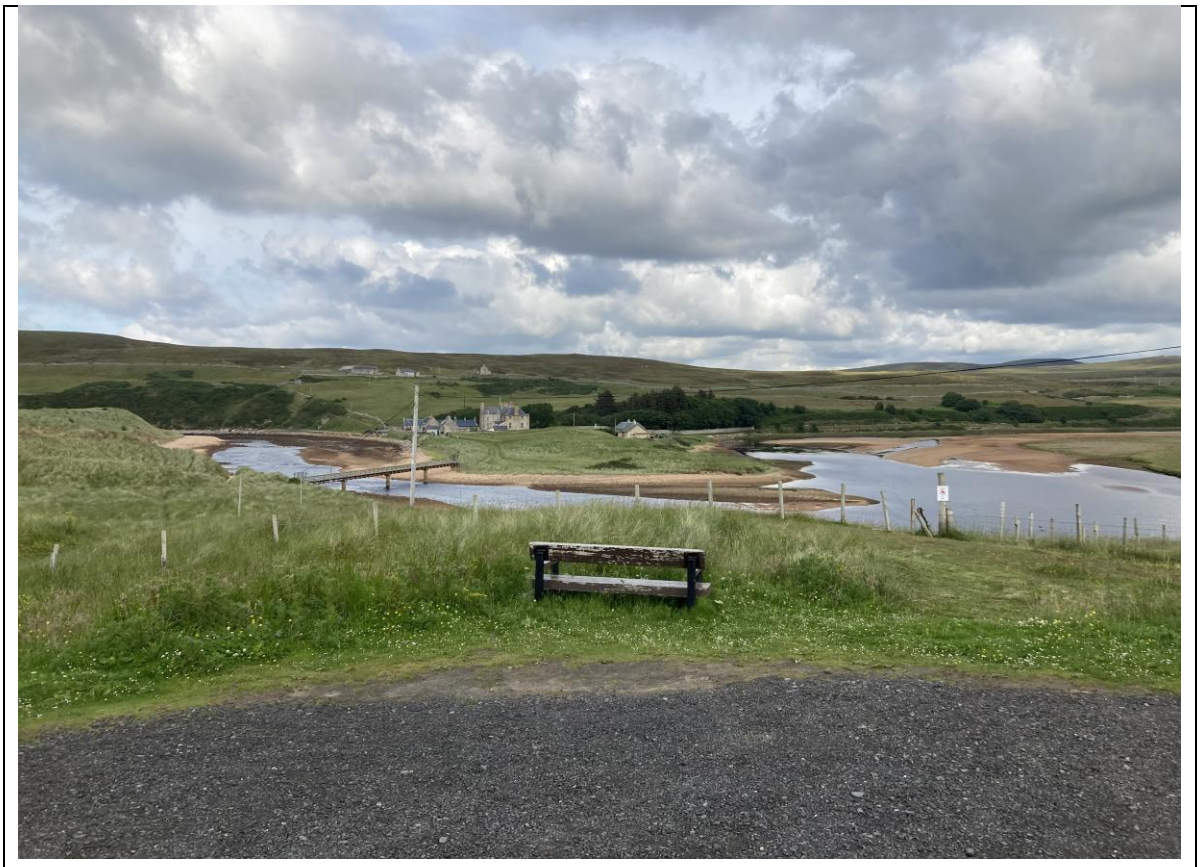


View over LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland from the A836 (OS Grid Ref: NC 79894, 63877)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Rough landcover with an abundance of scattered rocks, boulders and rock outcrops. • Many lochans sited within rocky-edged cavities contributing to the complexity of the rocky moorland. • Pockets of broadleaf woodland and scrub accentuating the rough texture of the rocky moorland. • Particularly distinctive rocky hills lying on the fringes of the Kyle of Tongue and at the head of Loch Eriboll. • A number of often prominent rocky hills outcropping along the coast, increasing scenic diversity. • Extensive moorland found in the Cape Wrath area with less exposed bedrock and some large areas of more gently undulating peatland. • Currently largely uninhabited landscape, although abutting more settled coasts and loch shores. • Numerous prehistoric and historic environment features, with concentrations around the straths and coasts. • Highly visible from the coast road around northwest Sutherland. • Provides the foreground to spectacular views over the coast and sea and also inland to the Lone Mountains. • Feeling of containment and seclusion, increased by small knolls, dips and narrow valleys.
Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT is principally found in the far northwest of Scotland, in a broad coastal band west of Bettyhill to Cape Wrath, and around the Kyle of Tongue and Loch Eriboll. There is one instance of this LCT lying to the west of the Proposed Alignment site and occupying approximately 10% of the study area.

Description	The lower-lying moorland is patterned with crags and has a rough complex landform with many rocky knolls, dips, lochans and narrow craggy gorges. The landscape is uninhabited. The eastern fringe of this LCT contains a commercial forest plantation.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Scattered boulders, rocks and rock outcrops. • Complex rocky moorland. • Largely uninhabited landscape. • Wind turbines at Strathy North are prominent features in the adjoining LCT and those at Strathy Wood and Strathy South and the Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection would also be noticeable. • Landform is largely blanketed with the coniferous plantation.
Landscape Value	A very small part of this LCT on the coast overlaps with an SLA but the interior does not contain any area designated for landscape value. The area is experienced largely by forest and farm employees. The value of this LCT is considered to be **Low** although the section near the coast would be of higher value.

Table V1-6.8 LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes



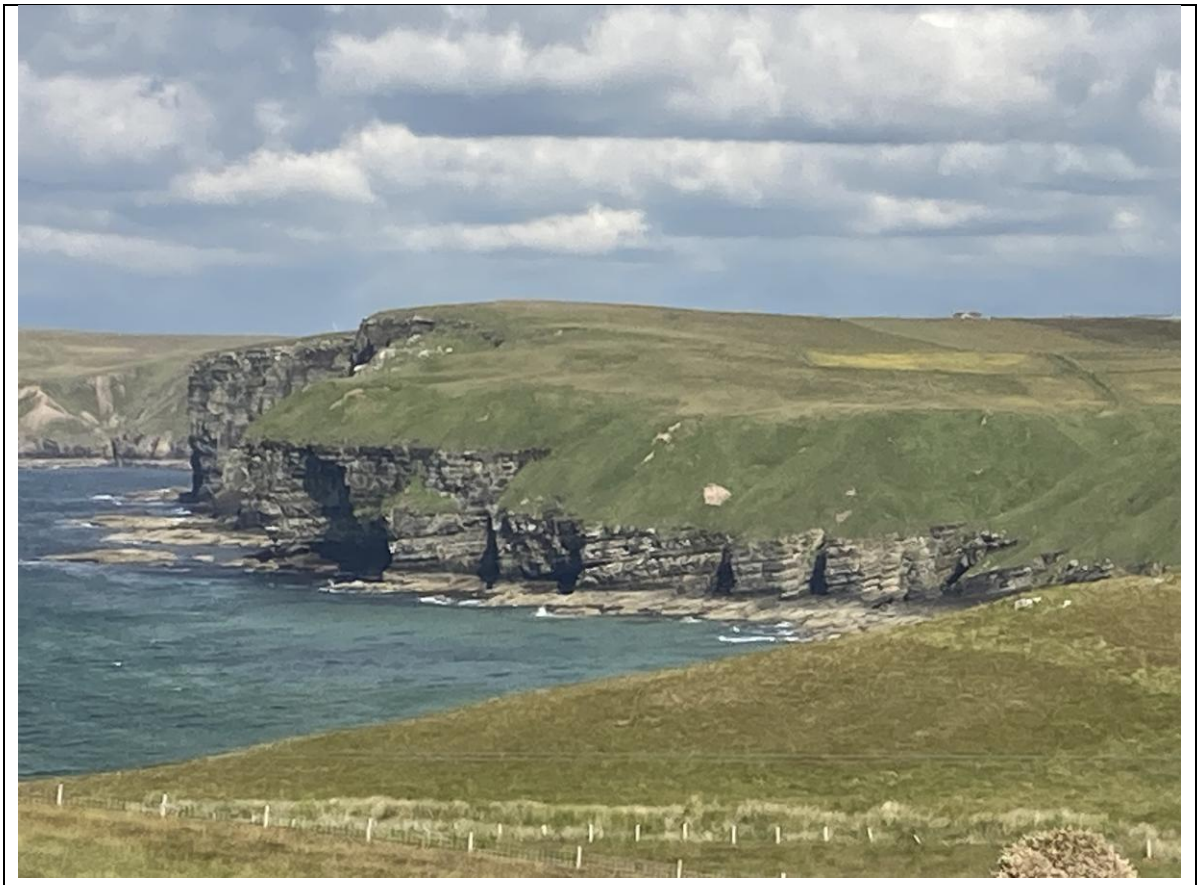
View over LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes from Strathy Bay Car Park (OS Grid Ref: NC 88701, 64761)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Near continuous stretch of sandy beach between the Dornoch Firth and Brora. • Low shingle ridges backing many of these sandy beaches and forming the base for dune systems. • Large sand banks, splayed sandy beach and spit occurring at the mouth of the Dornoch Firth, backed by low dunes and expansive grassy links. • Wide plain covered with gorse, heather and rough grazing land at Cuthill Links in the Dornoch Firth,

	• Shingle bars at the mouth of Loch Fleet. • Undulating machair abutting dunes and dune slacks along parts of the east Sutherland coast, with golf courses occupying some of these areas. • Post-glacial raised shorelines backed by relict cliffs to the north of Brora with the sandy beach being narrow in this area. • Long gently curved sandy arcs of Sinclair's Bay and Dunnet Bay in Caithness. • Striking complex landscape pattern at Torrisdale Bay • The long sandy beach at Balnakeil, with extensive dune system and machair. • Remoteness of Sandwood Bay in west Sutherland. • Focus for recreation with camp sites, caravan parks and car parks located close to more accessible areas of coast with golf courses present where links and machair areas are more extensive. • Many small crofting communities located on the fringes of beaches, particularly in north and west Sutherland. • Castles with historic gardens and designed landscapes, as well as prehistoric brochs and cists, cairns, and hut circles. • Strong sense of space, light and exposure, and extensive visibility on the larger and more open stretches of sandy beach. • Contained smaller beaches on the north coast with views focused along the beach to rocky headlands and out to sea to near shore islands. • Strong contrast of the white/pale pink sands of the beaches in the north-west with surrounding darker cliffs and moorland. • Wildness character to of all these seascapes, more intensely experienced on the more remote beaches along the north and west coasts of Sutherland
Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT consistently occurs along the east Sutherland coast between the Dornoch Firth and Brora. Areas at the mouths of Loch Fleet and the Dornoch Firth are particularly extensive. They also occur sporadically around the north and west coasts of Caithness. There is one incidence of this LCT within the study area at Melvich Bay to the north of the Proposed Alignment. It occupies less than 1% of the study area.
Description	Sandy beaches are a rarer feature along the predominantly rocky coastline of Caithness and north and west Sutherland where they usually occur at the mouths of rivers. The beaches on these coasts are relatively small, contained by rocky headlands. Areas of notably complex landscape pattern occur at Melvich, where sand dunes and machair has accumulated over, and against, large splays of sand and gravel outwash. The coast at Melvich is similarly striking, especially when seen in elevated views from the A836, due to the presence of interlocking spits and dunes which constrict the mouth of the Halladale River. Today settlement is limited to a number of small crofting communities located on the fringes of beaches, particularly in north and west Sutherland. The sandy beaches of Caithness and Sutherland are a focus for recreation. Despite modification natural qualities of sea, beach and dunes and the dynamism of coastal processes gives all these seascapes a degree of wild character but with this being more intensely experienced in the more remote beaches along the north and west coasts of Sutherland. The strong contrast of the white/pale pink sands of the beaches in the northwest with surrounding darker cliffs and moorland increases their attraction and contribution to these scenically diverse coastlines.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Low shingle ridges backing many of these sandy beaches and forming the base for dune systems. • Undulating machair abutting dunes and dune slacks. • Camp site and car park. • Small crofting community of Portskerra located on the fringe of this LCT. • Strong sense of space, light and exposure, and extensive visibility on the larger and more open stretches of sandy beach.

	• Contained small beach with views focused along the beach to rocky headlands and out to sea. • Relatively wildness character.
Landscape Value	This LCT lies within the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA and it is experienced by local residents and visitors to the bay. The value of this LCT is considered to be **High**.

Table V1-6.9 LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays

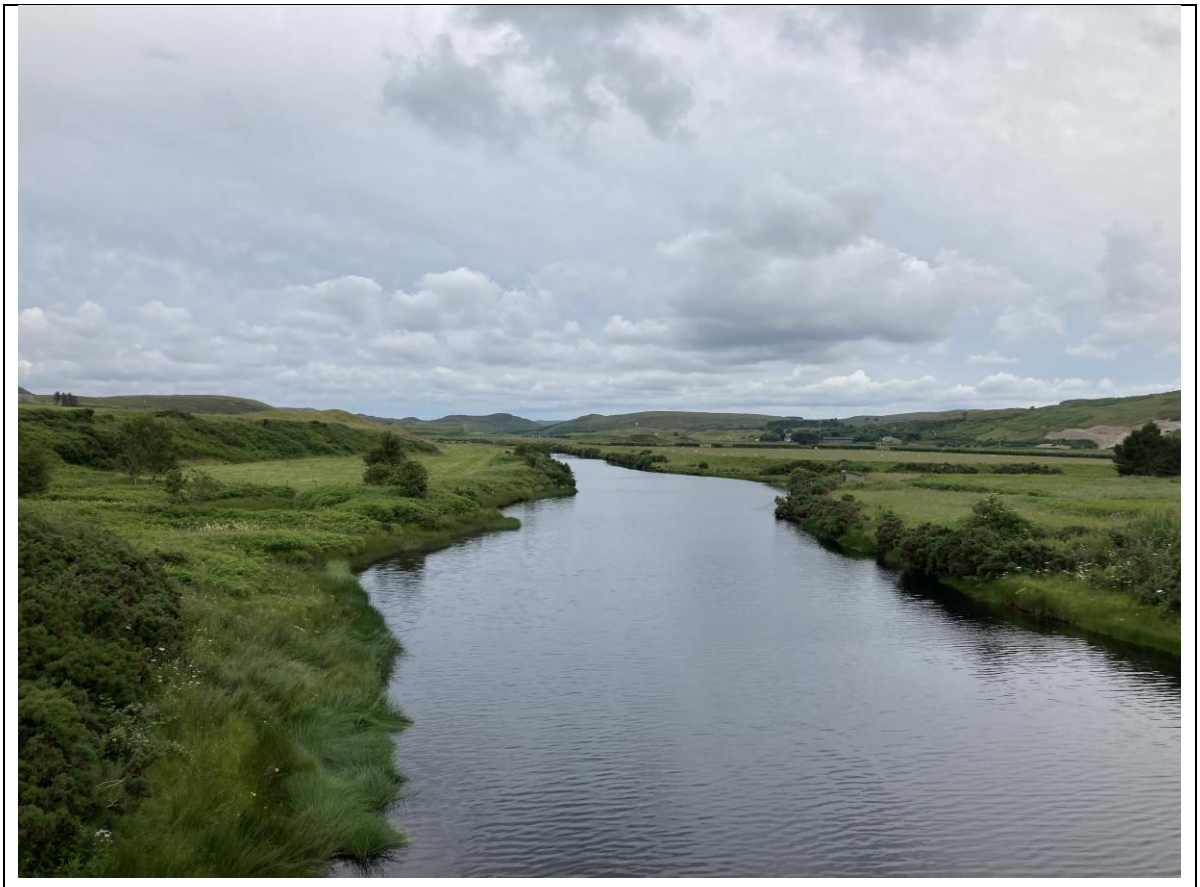


View over LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays from the minor road to Strathy Point (OS Grid Ref. NC 83054, 66402)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Duncansby Head, with high, fissured and blocky cliffs, jagged asymmetric rock stacks, arches and geos. • Dunnet Head, with towering cliffs edged by low rocky reefs. • Occasional inlets and coves, often with very deep and sheltered waters, and sometimes containing tiny harbours tucked between cliffs and not readily visible from the main coast road and settlement. • Harbours on the east Caithness coast which have a strong association with settlements which are perched above the cliff. • Moorland largely abutting this LCT which is particularly open and sweeping to the east and north within Caithness. • The most prominent and exposed headlands marked by lighthouses. • Exhilarating experience of being precariously perched upon a high edge on the cliff tops, offering open elevated views and a perception of huge space. • Views of turbulent currents at the juncture of the Pentland Firth and North Sea, heightening the sense of wildness experienced from the headland. • The absence of development along the remote stretches of coast and a strong sense of naturalness creating a wild landscape character.

Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT is found along much of the coastline of north and west Sutherland and Caithness. The cliffs are particularly high and/or dramatic, distinguishing the areas from other LCT's which abut the coast and have lower, more isolated cliff features. There are three incidences of this LCT within the study area at Strathy Point, between Strathy Bay and Melvich Bay and east of Melvich Bay. This LCT occupies less than 1% of the study area.
Description	A more fragmented indented coastline with many narrow headlands, inlets and small bays, reflecting a particularly complex geology. The majority of these coastal areas feature an intricate coastline of fissured cliffs, ravines, caves and stacks with small coves and narrow inlets regularly interrupting cliffs. Variations in geology produce different coastal rock features with harder gneisses at Strathy Head producing sheer cliffs. Moorland abuts this LCT. A very short mat of vegetation tends to cover the top edge of the cliffs and small ledges. The most prominent headlands are marked by lighthouses, making them a focal point for visitors. Historic environment features include the lighthouse at Strathy. This character type has an elemental character influenced by the proximity of often turbulent seas. This is heightened by the dramatic rugged character and sheer height of the cliffs. A strong sense of wild character is particularly associated with the more remote stretches of coast. This is intensified by the sight and sound of soaring and nesting seabirds. The cliff tops offer open, elevated views, yet views of this coastline from adjacent inland areas are often restricted due to convex slopes and sheer cliffs. Views tend to be directed along the coast and out to sea.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Occasional inlets and coves, often with very deep and sheltered waters, and sometimes containing tiny harbours tucked between cliffs and not readily visible from the main coast road and settlement. • Moorland abutting this LCT. • The most prominent and exposed headlands marked by lighthouse (Strathy Point – outwith the study area but visible from many locations). • Exhilarating experience being perched on a high edge with open elevated views over the Pentland Firth and a perception of huge space. • The absence of development and a strong sense of naturalness creating a wild landscape character.
Landscape Value	This LCT lies within the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA and it is experienced by local residents and visitors to the coastline. The value of this LCT is considered to be **High**.

Table V1-6.10 LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland

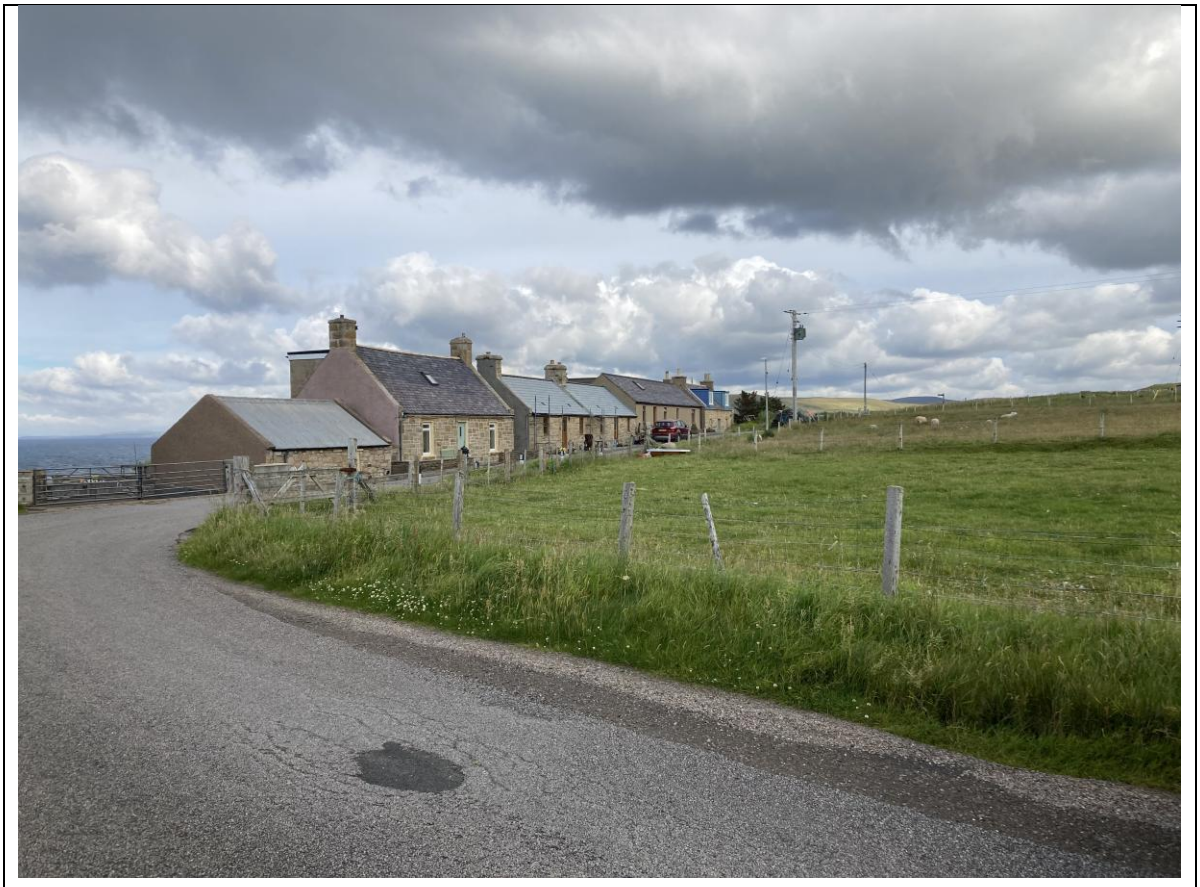


View south along Strath Halladale from Halladale Bridge (OS Grid Ref NC 89490, 63101)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Straths range from fairly straight deeply incised troughs to more winding valleys with a number of minor side glens. • River terraces and hummocky lower side slopes a common feature. • Water is a key characteristic with straths accommodating a central river meandering across the floodplain, often traced by clumps of birch and alder. • Lochs in some straths, where a string of small lochs add to the scenic richness of the lower strath. • Areas of wetland often present on the strath floors. • Smooth and fairly large pastures the predominant land cover on the floodplains of the straths, commonly enclosed by wire fences. • Semi-improved pastures, heather and grass moorland and coniferous plantations covering lower side slopes. • Increasing extent of moorland and woodland generally further up the straths, where the floodplain narrows and settlement is sparser. • Smaller strip-fields present on often hummocky, lower side slopes and associated with croft houses arranged in linear groups raised on terraces above the floodplain and sometimes backed by woodland. • Some crofts within the straths more randomly dispersed or staggered on lower hill slopes. • Occasional small farms located in the broader and more fertile parts of the straths. • Settlement generally denser within the lower reaches of many straths, especially at bridging points, on the coast and close to major roads. • Many areas rich in archaeology with cairns, roundhouses, brochs and old field systems, usually found on side slopes.

	• Abandoned crofts, particularly within the upper straths and in narrow side glens. • Focus in views from roads provided by a number of estate shooting lodges, and clustered, predominantly 19th Century, often estate style buildings. • Narrow roads, commonly aligned along the edge of the floodplain, from which views are strongly channelled by the side slopes. • Rounded hills often forming prominent edges to the straths with shapely well-defined hills, providing a distinctive skyline and scenic backdrop. • Highly scenic backdrop of mountains often revealed in some of the upper reaches of these straths.
Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT includes all of the major straths in Caithness and Sutherland. They create linear spaces, with open floors typically containing a river or loch. There is one incidence of this LCT at Strath Halladale. It occupies approximately 6% of the study area and the eastern end of the Proposed Alignment would pass through it to connect to Connagill 275/ 132 kV substation.
Description	Fairly straight strath which borders Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT. Floodplain predominantly under pasture with relatively large fields. Semi-improved and rough grazing interspersed with area of mixed woodland and some smaller strip-fields. Relatively well-settled with access roads and other communications. Some archaeological features. The existing wood pole mounted overhead line crosses this LCT to the west of Connagill. Views are generally focussed along straths from the narrow roads.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Relatively straight deep trough with a strong north – south emphasis. • River terraces and hummocky lower side slopes. • Central Halladale River meandering across the floodplain. • Larger scale smooth pastures the on the floodplains, generally enclosed by post and wire fences. • Semi-improved pastures, heather and grass moorland and coniferous plantations covering lower side slopes. • Smaller strip-fields present on often hummocky, lower side slopes and associated with croft houses arranged in linear groups on raised terraces. • Forts, hut circles and other archaeological remains. • Narrow roads, commonly aligned along the edge of the floodplain. • Strongly channelled views along the strath.
Landscape Value	This LCT does not lie within any area designated for landscape value. It is experienced by local residents and road users on the A897. The value of this LCT is considered to be **Medium**.

Table V1-6.11 LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms



View over LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms from a minor road at Portskerra (OS Grid Ref. NC 87650, 66306)

Identified Key Characteristics in LCA	• Narrow, settled and farmed coastal fringe with subtle variations in topography, from long stretches of strongly contained coastal shelves and raised beaches, to smaller pockets at river mouths and squeezed between dunes and areas of Cnocan – Caithness & Sutherland. • Pastures and occasional arable fields, most often divided by post and wire fences, with the division of fields marked by crop colour and texture rather than boundaries. • Low stone walls enclosing fields on the shelf above the High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays between Dunbeath and Wick. • Little woodland within the more exposed east and north Caithness coasts. • Small woodlands and clumps of trees present at the outlet of more sheltered straths or along the eastern shores of Kyle of Tongue and Loch Eriboll. • Settlement most concentrated where this LCT broadens at the mouths of major rivers along the east coast, where larger farms and crofts are concentrated. • Small, hunkered-down croft houses and outbuildings loosely clustered or sometimes aligned in a linear fashion on the top of terraces or ridges above the coast or a river floodplain. • More dispersed settlement pattern on the east coast to the north of Brora. • Newer housing most evident to the south of Brora with larger modern houses often infilling spaces between older croft houses and contrasting with the size and form of these original buildings. • A number of settlements, often located at bridging points and at the junction with the straths, many with harbours particularly on the east coast of Sutherland and Caithness. • Major communications routes on the east coast including the A9, the railway

	and transmission line aligned along the edge of this landscape. • A number of historic sites including churches, castles, mills and cemeteries. • Highly visible landscape, seen from major roads and, on the east Sutherland coast, the railway. • Complex visual composition of views tending to focus on the detail of houses, field patterns and crops, yet with the wider context of backdrop hills and sea adding diversity.
Context and Location within the Study Area	This LCT comprises a narrow, settled and farmed fringe around the coast of Caithness and Sutherland. It is more intermittent west of Thurso where settlement occupies rare areas of more fertile land at river mouths. There are three incidences of this LCT which occupies a total of approximately 4% of the study area. These are situated around Armadale Bay, Strathy Bay and west of Melvich Bay.
Description	This LCT has a distinct linear emphasis. The gently undulating landscape is farmed with well-managed, walled pastures studded with clumps of gorse on knolls and with rough grassland on steeper banks. These coastal landscapes predominantly support crofting although occasional small farms are also present. The coastal crofting communities have a strong connection with the sea with small harbours sited in sheltered coves at the foot of cliffs below settlements. The various characteristics of this landscape create a complex visual composition, with views tending to focus on the detail of houses, and field patterns with the wider context of backdrop hills and sea adding diversity to this landscape. This farmed and settled landscape is often seen in conjunction with intricate coastal features including sandy beaches, dunes, rocky headlands and islands, contributing to the richly scenic character of these coastal areas.
Key Local Characteristics within the Study Area	• Narrow, settled and farmed coastal fringe with subtle variations in topography. • Pastures, most often divided by post and wire fences. • Small, hunkered-down croft houses and outbuildings loosely clustered or sometimes aligned in a linear fashion on the top of terraces or ridges above the coast. • Settlements located at bridging points and at the junction with the straths. • A number of historic sites. • Complex visual composition of views tending to focus on the detail of houses, field patterns and crops, yet with the wider context of backdrop hills and sea adding diversity.
Landscape Value	This LCT lies within the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA and it is experienced by local residents and visitors. The value of this LCT is considered to be **High**.

6.8 Visual Baseline Conditions

Interpretation of ZTV

6.8.1 The ZTV (see **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.1**) indicates that there is extensive theoretical visibility of the Proposed Alignment over approximately 61% of the 5 km study area.

6.8.2 There is slightly fragmented theoretical visibility from much of the settled coastline north of the A836 with intermittent visibility from the road itself. Inland, visibility is widespread and largely continuous either side of the Proposed Alignment, becoming more fragmented with distance. Inevitably, the greatest number of towers would be seen from areas in close proximity to the Proposed Alignment.

6.8.3 The ZTV takes no account of the screening effects of vegetation and, as much of the area to the west of the River Strathy is under forest cover, the actual level of visibility in the western part of the study area would be

considerably less. Other blocks of coniferous plantation would also reduce the extent of visibility but to a lesser degree.

Visual Receptors

6.8.4 Visual receptors within the study area comprise residents (permanent or temporary) or others present in and around buildings and those using access tracks and recreational routes or features. The locations of visual receptors are shown on **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.4: Building Based Visual Receptors** and **Figure V1-6.5: Visual Receptors (Routes and Outdoor Based Visual Receptors)** and described below.

6.8.5 Building Based Visual Receptors within the study area are mainly concentrated along the coast and within Strath Halladale, and include:

Strathy and Baligill and (Refer to **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.4a**)

- Three groups of buildings and two individual buildings at Strathy;
- Two groups of buildings west of the River Strathy;
- Two groups of buildings, and one individual property at Strathy, east of the River Strathy; and
- One group of buildings at Baligill.

Melvich and Portskerra (Refer to **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.4b**)

- 14 groups of properties and three individual properties at Portskerra;
- A group of properties north of the A836;
- Four groups of properties and two individual properties at Melvich; and
- Three groups of properties at Bighouse.

Kirkton, Golval and Loch Earcha (Refer to **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.4c**)

- Two individual properties at Melvich and Kirkton gravel pits;
- a group of two buildings near Goval;
- a group of properties at Kirkton; and
- an individual property at Loch Earacha;

Strath Halladale near Achiemore and Upper Bighouse (Refer to **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.4d**)

- A group of nine houses along the A897 at northern Strath Halladale; and
- A group of three properties at Upper Bighouse;

Strath Halladale near Dalhalvaig (Refer to **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.4e**)

- Three groups of buildings and three individual properties in Strath Halladale north of Dalhalvaig;

River Strathy (Refer to **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.4f**)

- Four individual properties along the River Strathy.

Route Based Visual Receptors

6.8.6 Route based visual receptors include those using public roads and recreational users of paths, tracks and other established recreation routes. Views from the following routes experienced by people travelling in both directions have been identified within the study area (as displayed on **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.5**) for inclusion within the visual assessment:

- A836 (North Coast 500 and National Cycle Route 1);
- A897;
- Minor Road to Kirkton;
- Scottish Hill Track 344 Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy;
- Forest/wind farm access tracks around Dallangwell; and
- Core Paths (SU19.03);

6.8.7 The following core paths have been scoped out of the assessment:

- SU 19.01 Portskerra Coast Walk – very limited theoretical visibility of a low number of towers at more than 3 km distant from a route where attention is focussed on the coast and effects are unlikely to be significant.
- SU 19.05 Melvich Beach – theoretical visibility of a low number of towers at more than 2 km distant from a route where attention is focussed on the river, dunes and Bighouse and effects are unlikely to be significant.
- SU 19.07 Strathy Bay - very limited theoretical visibility of a low number of towers at more than 2.5 km distant from a route where attention is focussed on the river and the bay effects are unlikely to be significant.
- SU 19.08 Bayview Terrance-Low Road – very limited theoretical visibility of a low number of towers at more than 3 km distant from a route where neighbouring buildings are likely to screen the view.
- SU 19.11 Windy Knowe - very limited theoretical visibility of a low number of towers at more than 3 km distant from a route where neighbouring buildings are likely to screen the view; and
- SU 19.10 Rubha Bra - very limited theoretical visibility of a low number of towers at more than 3 km distant from a route where attention is focussed on the coast and effects are unlikely to be significant.

Outdoor Based Visual Receptors

6.8.8 Potential outdoor viewing receptors include those using public viewpoints, local recreational stops and locations of interest. Views from the following outdoor based receptors identified within the study area (as displayed on **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.5**) are included within the visual assessment. It should be noted that the outdoor receptor Scottish Hill Track 344 is assessed under route-based receptors. Recreation receptors on the NC500 / NCR1 are assessed under route-based receptor the A836.

- Strathy Cemetery / Strathy Bay car park;
- Strathy War Memorial;
- Melvich and Porskerra War Memorial;
- Portskerra car park;
- Portskerra Drownings Memorial and car park;
- Melvich Bay car park;
- Melvich Campsite - North Coast Touring Park;
- Kirkton Cemetery[21];
- Strath Halladale War Memorial;
- River Strathy; and
- Halladale River.

[21] **Volume 1: Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage** is of relevance to this receptor because it identifies and assesses potential effects on Kirkton Cemetery as a cultural heritage asset.

6.8.9 The baseline conditions for each of the visual built, route and outdoor receptors noted above, are described in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.5.**

6.9 Assessment of Likely Significant Landscape Effects

6.9.1 This section of the Chapter provides an assessment of the effects that the Proposed Alignment would have on the landscape character of the study area during construction and operation, where operational effects are assessed 10 years after completion, in accordance with the effects criteria set out in Section 6.5.

Landscape Designations and Wild Land Areas

6.9.2 The assessment of effects on the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA is set out in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.3** and concludes that there would be **No Effect** during construction or operation on two of the Special Qualities (SQ1 – Dramatically intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea and SQ4 – Historical Dimension), a **Minor adverse and not significant** construction and operational effect on one of the special qualities (SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic), and a **Negligible and not significant** construction and operational effect on the fourth special quality (SQ 3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views).

6.9.3 In terms of qualities of the WLA 39: East Halladale Flows, the Proposed Alignment would not be located within the WLA itself and would have **No effect** on Q2 (a remote, discrete interior, with limited access and a strong sense of solitude) during construction or operation. Similarly, it would have **No effect** on Q3 (a rugged and complex pattern of hidden burns, lochans and pools at the local level, despite the landscape's simple composition at the broad scale) during construction or operation.

6.9.4 The Proposed Alignment is not anticipated to have a significant effect on Q1 (awe-inspiring simplicity of landscape at the broad scale, with a strong horizontal emphasis, 'wide skies' and few foci) and Q4 (a remarkably open landscape with extensive visibility, meaning tall or high features in the distance are clearly visible) other than by increasing the number of tall structures visible from the WLA (i.e. features additional to activity, overhead line towers and wind turbines at Strathy South, Strathy North and Strathy Wood which would be already present and visible from the interior). Effects on these two qualities would be likely to be no greater than **Minor adverse and not significant** during construction or operation.

Table V1-6.12: Summary of Landscape Designations and Protected Areas Effects

Period	Construction		Operation	
Receptor	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**
Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA SQ1	No Effect	Not significant	No Effect	Not significant
Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA SQ2	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA SQ3	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA SQ4	No Effect	Not significant	No Effect	Not significant

Period	Construction		Operation	
WLA 39: East Halladale Flows Q1	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
WLA 39: East Halladale Flows Q2	None	Not significant	None	Not significant
WLA 39: East Halladale Flows Q3	None	Not significant	None	Not significant
WLA 39: East Halladale Flows Q4	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant

Landscape Character Types

6.9.5 Assessment of potential effects on the six LCTs within the study area (see **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.3**) are presented in Tables 6.4.1 to 6.4.6 of **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.4**. A summary of the effects on the LCTs during construction and operation is provided in **Table V1-6.13** below. Effects which are significant are shaded in grey.

6.9.6 Of the six LCTs one (LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows) has been predicted to accrue moderate (significant) direct and indirect effects during construction due to the temporary presence of activity and loss of landcover associated with the installation of the OHL, the dismantling of the existing OHL, the construction of new permanent and temporary access tracks, and the upgrading of existing access tracks. Significant effects during operation would be limited to indirect effects associated with the presence of the Proposed Alignment and its visibility.

6.9.7 One other LCT (LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland) has been assessed as accruing moderate (significant) direct and indirect effects during construction due to the temporary presence of activity and loss of landcover associated with the installation of the OHL, UGCs and the construction of new permanent and temporary access tracks, and the upgrading of existing access tracks. This LCT would not accrue significant effects during operation.

6.9.8 Other LCTs have been predicted to accrue not significant indirect effects due to the very limited nature of the visibility of the Proposed Alignment and associated infrastructure.

Table V1-6.13: Summary of Landscape Designations and Protected Areas Effects

Period	Construction		Operation	
Receptor	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**
LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows	Moderate direct	Significant	Moderate – Minor direct	Not significant
	Moderate indirect	Significant	Moderate indirect	Significant
LCT 136: Rocky Hills and Moorland	Minor indirect	Not significant	Minor indirect	Not significant

Period	Construction		Operation	
LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes	Minor indirect	Not significant	Minor indirect	Not significant
LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays	Minor indirect	Not significant	Minor indirect	Not significant
LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland	Moderate direct	Significant	Minor - Moderate indirect	Not significant
	Moderate indirect	Significant	Minor - Moderate indirect	Not significant
LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms	Minor indirect	Not significant	Minor indirect	Not significant

6.10 Assessment of Likely Significant Visual Effects

6.10.1 This section of the Chapter provides an assessment of the effects that the Proposed Alignment would have on the visual amenity of identified receptors within the study area during both construction and operation (with operational effects being assessed 10 years after completion), in accordance with the effects criteria set out in **Table V1-6.5**. It takes into account the dismantling works associated with the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL.

6.10.2 Detailed assessment of potential effects on the building-based, route-based and outdoor-based receptors are presented in Tables 1 to 3 of **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.5**.

Summary of Visual Effects on Building Based Receptors

6.10.3 The building-based receptors are generally grouped geographically and it should be noted that the changes to the views would not necessarily be experienced by all of the properties in the group. The changes described relate to people at those properties where principal views are in the direction of the Proposed Alignment: some properties main focus of view would be away from the Proposed Alignment.

6.10.4 As there is an alternative alignment being proposed, the groups presented in **Table V1-6.14** below include those built receptors which may be affected by the alternative alignment (i.e. those within the Alternative Alignment study area) but would not be affected by the Proposed Alignment (i.e. those outwith the Proposed Alignment study area). This is simply to allow comparison between the alignments by keeping the groupings of building-based receptors the same. Where building-based receptor groups are outwith the Proposed Alignment study area, these are in grey text in **Table V1-6.14.**

6.10.5 A summary of the effects on the building based visual receptors during construction and operation is provided in **Table V1-6.14**. Effects which are significant are shaded in grey.

Table V1-6.14: Summary of Visual Effects on building based visual receptors

Period	Construction		Operation	
Receptor	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**

Period	Construction		Operation	
B1 Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point (North Section)	None	None	None	None
B2 Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point (South Section)	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
B3 Strathy Bay Pods	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B4 Properties at Strathy along the A836 West of the River Strathy	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B5 The Old Post Office, Portskerra	None	None	None	None
B6 Strathy Village Hall	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B7 Properties at Strathy east of the River Strathy and north of the A836	Minor - Moderate	Not significant	Minor - Moderate	Not significant
B8 New House at Strathy	Minor - Moderate	Not significant	Minor - Moderate	Not significant
B9 Properties at Strathy east of the River Strathy and south of the A836	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B10 Properties at Baligill	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
B11 Properties in north east Portskerra	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B12 Berrigoe, Portskerra	None	None	None	None
B13 Properties in north west Portskerra	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B14 Properties to the rear of Mill House, Portskerra	None	None	None	None
B15 Properties in north central Portskerra	None	None	None	None
B16 Properties in north west central Portskera	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B17 Properties near Melvich Primary School	None	None	None	None
B18 Properties at east Portskerra	None	None	None	None

Period	Construction		Operation	
B19 Properties at central Portskerra	None	None	None	None
B20 Sunny Ridge	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B21 Properties at south central Portskerra	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B22 Properties in south Portskerra	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B23 Propertieds on A836 west of Portskera	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B24 Properties at south Portskerra	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B25 Melvich Park Cottage and Coastline Cafe	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B26 Propeties south of the Coastline Cafe	None	None	None	None
B27 Properties east of Melvich Terrace	None	None	None	None
B28 Properties at central Melvich central	None	None	None	None
B29 Propoerties at south Melvich	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B30 Halladale Inn	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B31 Bighoue Lodge, Strathview and the Barracks	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B32 The Netstore and Fishery Cottage	None	None	None	None
B33 Properties east of Bighouse Lodge	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
B34 Lochend, Melvich	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B35 Bridge House, Melvich	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B36 Properties at Strath Halladale north	Moderate - Major	Significant	Moderate - Major	Significant
B37 Properties at Kirkton	Moderate - Major	Significant	Moderate	Significant
B38 Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale	Major	Significant	Major	Significant

Period	Construction		Operation	
B39 Properties at Strath Halladale central	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B40 Properties at Upper Bighouse	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B41 Mission House	None	None	None	None
B42 Properties at Trantlemore	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B43 33 Chisley	None	None	None	None
B44 51 Dalhalvaig	None	None	None	None
B45 Strath Halladale South – west of the A897	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B46 Strath Halladale South – east of the A897	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
B47 Bowside Lodge	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B48 The Bothy	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
B49 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage)	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
B50 Dallangwell	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant

Summary of Significant Effects on Building Based Receptors

6.10.6 Significant effects are predicted for seven of the 50 building-based receptors within the study area.

6.10.7 Effects would be **Major adverse** during both construction and operation for built receptor B38: Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale due to the fact that construction works associated with a number of towers, as well as the CSE compound and UGC's, would be visible at approximately 1 km distant. These towers and the CSE compound would also be visible at less than 1 km during operation.

6.10.8 **Moderate - Major adverse** effects would occur during both construction and operation for built receptor B36: Properties at Strath Halladale North due to construction and operation of a medium to high number of towers being visible at distances of 1.5 km and greater, and for B37: Properties at Kirkton during construction due to a small to medium number of towers at between 1 km and 2.5 km reducing to **Moderate adverse** effects during operation.

6.10.9 Effects would be **Moderate adverse** during construction and operation for built receptors B2: Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point (South Section), due to construction and operation of a low number of towers being visible breaching the skyline at more than 3 km distant, for B10: Properties at Baligill, due to construction and operation of a low to high number of towers being visible traversing higher moorland with some towers sky lining, for B33: Properties East of Bighouse Lodge due to construction and operation of a medium to high number of towers being visible on the hillside with some towers breaching the skyline, and for B49: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage) due to construction works associated with three towers being visible at very close range and these towers being visible during operation.

6.10.10 For the other building-based receptors effects are either none where there are no views of the Proposed Alignment or not significant due to a range of factors including very limited theoretical visibility, distance and focus of view. The full assessment on building based receptors is set out in **Table 1** of **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.5: Visual Assessment Tables**.

Summary of Visual Effects on Route Based Receptors

6.10.11 The roads and other route-based receptors are linear routes which may be travelled in either direction and have therefore been assessed separately for each direction of travel. A summary of the effects on route based visual receptors, which includes the effects on people on recreational or tourist routes, during construction and operation of the Proposed Alignment is provided in **Table V1-6.15.** Effects which are significant are shaded in grey.

Table V1-6.15: Summary of Visual Effects on route based visual receptors

Period	Construction		Operation	
Receptor	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**
R1a A836 / NCR1 west-bound	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
R1b A836 / NCR 1 east-bound	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
R2a A897 north-bound	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
R2b A897 south-bound	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
R3a Minor Road to Kirkton north-bound	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
R3b Minor Road to Kirkton south-bound	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
R4a Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy south-bound	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
R4b Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy north-bound	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
R5 Forest / Estate Access Tracks at Dallangwell	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant

Period	Construction		Operation	
R6a Core Path SU19.03 north-bound	Major	Significant	Moderate - Major	Significant
R6b Core Path SU19.03 southbound	Moderate - Major	Significant	Moderate	Significant

Summary of Significant Effects on Route Based Receptors

6.10.12 Eleven route-based receptors within the study area were assessed (four roads (both directions of travel), one core path (both directions of travel) and one track (both directions of travel)). Six other core paths were identified but scoped out of the assessment on the basis of limited or no visibility / distance / focus of the views.

6.10.13 Nine of the eleven route-based receptors assessed were considered to accrue significant effects during construction and operation of the Proposed Alignment.

6.10.14 **Major adverse** construction effects and **Moderate – Major adverse** operational effects were also identified for route receptor R6a: Core Path SU19.03 northbound, due to construction operations associated with a low number of towers initially seen at distance. On passing through Am Bealach, construction works would be seen at increasingly closer range as users of the path approach the location of the OHL river crossing where ground level and high-level works would be very close to the route. Over the southern section of the route only very low numbers of towers would be visible, with some skylining across the strath, until users of the route pass through Am Bealach when medium to high numbers of towers would be visible for a short distance. Some of these would be seen at very close range as the core path approaches and passes below the OHL.

6.10.15 **Moderate – Major adverse** construction effects and **Moderate adverse** operational effects were identified for route receptor R6b: Core Path SU19.03 southbound, due to construction works would being seen to the west of the route and in views ahead. Both ground level and high-level works would be visible with the latter skylining. On the approach to the location of the OHL crossing the river, construction works would become more prominent and at close range. During operation there would be views of towers to the right and ahead. These would be seen at relatively close range and would be seen skylining. Towers at the river crossing would be backclothed for part of the route, then skylining as path users approach and pass below the OHL.

6.10.16 **Moderate adverse** construction and operation effects were identified for a number of route receptors, as follows:

- R1a: A836 / NCR1 west-bound, due to intermittent visibility from approximately 40% of the route with increasing visibility on the decent to Halladale Bridge;
- R1b: A836 / NCR 1 east-bound, due to continuous visibility from east of Armadale Bay to Strathy and intermittent visibility thereafter;
- R2a: A897 north-bound, due to tower construction and operation being theoretically visible from around two thirds of the route with close range views on the approach to Connagill 275/132 kV substation;
- R2b: A897 south-bound, due to theoretical visibility from around one third of the route with close range views on the approach to Connagill 275/132 kV substation;
- R3b: Minor road to Kirkton south-bound, due to continuous theoretical visibility of the Proposed Alignment with construction works and operational towers being seen on the skyline west of the road and crossing the strath;

- R4a: Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy south-bound, due to construction works being in relatively close proximity to the track and the Proposed Alignment being seen in views southwards with some towers skylining; and
- R4b: Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy north-bound, due to the Proposed Alignment becoming more prominent as track users head north with high level works and towers seen above the skyline.

6.10.17 For the other route based receptors effects are not significant due to a range of factors including very limited theoretical visibility, distance and focus of view/direction of travel. The full assessment on building based receptors is set out in **Table 2** of **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.5: Visual Assessment Tables**.

Summary of Visual Effects on Outdoor Based Receptors

6.10.18 A summary of the effects on the outdoor based visual receptors during construction and operation of the Proposed Alignment is provided in **Table V1-6.16**. Effects which are significant are shaded in grey.

Table V1-6.16: Summary of Visual Effects on outdoor based visual receptors

Period	Construction		Operation	
Receptor	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**	**Level of Effect**	**Significance**
Rec 1 Strathy Cemetery / Strathy Bay Car Park	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
Rec 2 Strathy War Memorial	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
Rec 3 Melvich and Portskerra War Memorial	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
Rec 4 Portskerra Car Park	None	None	None	None
Rec 5 Portskerra Drownings Memorial and Car Park	None	None	None	None
Rec 6 Melvich Bay Car Park	Negligible	Not significant	Negligible	Not significant
Rec 7 Melvich Campsite - North Coast Touring Park	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
Rec 8 Kirkton Cemetery	Moderate	Significant	Moderate	Significant
Rec 9 Strath Halladale War Memorial	Negligible	Not Significant	Negligible	Not Significant
Rec 10 River Strathy	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant
Rec 11 Halladale River	Minor	Not significant	Minor	Not significant

Summary of Significant Effects on Outdoor Based Receptors

6.10.19 Of the eleven outdoor based receptors within the study area that were assessed, only one was assessed as accruing significant effects. This is Rec 8: Kirkton Cemetery which was identified as having **Moderate adverse** effects during both construction and operation due to a medium number of towers being visible at distances ranging from approximately 600 m to just over 2 km. Other outdoor based receptors were not found to be likely to experience significant effects due to either no visibility or very limited visibility of small numbers of towers or parts of towers.

6.11 Cumulative Effects

6.11.1 The cumulative assessment is presented for a scenario comprising other known developments as of 24th October 2024[22], as displayed on **Volume 2: Figure V1-6.6**:

- Wind farm developments and their associated grid infrastructure (associated with the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections), namely:
  - Kirkton Energy Park (including on-site substation) (proposed);
  - Kirkton Energy Park Grid Connection (pre-scoping); and
  - Strathy Switching Station (pre-scoping).

6.11.2 The assessment is limited to permanent effects as it is unlikely that construction operations for the Proposed Alignment and other cumulative developments would occur concurrently.

6.11.3 The assessment does not give consideration to cumulative effects occurring as a result of the addition of the Proposed Alignment to other infrastructure developments which form part of the Connagill Cluster Grid Connection within the study area, which have already been considered as part of the baseline. This includes the consented Strathy South Wind Farm, Strathy Wood Wind Farm, and the proposed Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection. However, consideration of the contribution the Proposed Alignment would have in the context of the whole development cluster is also addressed in paragraph 6.11.41.

6.11.4 The assessment is restricted to those receptors predicted to accrue effects from the Proposed Alignment in isolation greater than negligible. It is considered that receptors which would experience negligible effects from the Proposed Alignment in isolation would be unlikely to experience greater levels of effect from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to other developments than those arising from the other developments in isolation or in combination.

6.11.5 The cumulative assessment is therefore limited to the addition of the Proposed Alignment to other developments for the following receptors (the effects stated are those arising from the Proposed Alignment during the operational phase):

- Landscape Receptors
  - Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic (Minor indirect).
  - WLA 39: East Halladale Flows Q1 (an awe-inspiring simplicity of landscape at the broad scale, with a strong horizontal emphasis, ‘wide skies’ and few foci) (Minor indirect) and Q4 (a remarkably open landscape with extensive visibility, meaning tall or high features in the distance are clearly visible) (Minor indirect);
  - LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows (Moderate-Minor direct and Moderate indirect);
  - LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland (Minor indirect);
  - LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes (Minor indirect);
  - LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays (Minor indirect);

[22] The list of cumulative developments was frozen on this date to allow sufficient time to compile the EIA Report.

  - LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland (Minor – Moderate direct and indirect); and
  - LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms (Minor indirect).
- Visual Built Receptors
  - B2 Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point (South Section) (Moderate);
  - B3 Strathy Pods (Minor);
  - B4 Properties at Strathy along the A836 West of the River Strathy (Minor);
  - B6 Strathy Village Hall (Minor);
  - B7 Properties at Strathy east of the River Strathy and north of the A836 (Minor – Moderate);
  - B8 New House at Strath (Minor – Moderate)
  - B9 Properties at Strathy east of the River Strathy and south of the A836 (Minor);
  - B10 Properties at Baligill (Moderate);
  - B30 Halladale Inn (Minor);
  - B31 Bighouse Lodge, Strathview and The Barracks (Minor);
  - B33 Properties east of Bighouse Lodge (Moderate);
  - B34 Lochend, Melvich (Minor);
  - B36 Properties at Strath Halladale North (Moderate – Major);
  - B37 Properties at Kirkton (Moderate);
  - B38 Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale (Major);
  - B47 Bowside Lodge (Minor);
  - B48 The Bothy (Minor)
  - B49 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeeper's Cottage) (Moderate); and
  - B50 Dallangwell (Minor).
- Visual Route Receptors
  - R1a A836 / NCR1 west-bound (Moderate);
  - R1b A836 / NCR1 east-bound (Moderate);
  - R2a A897 north-bound (Moderate);
  - R2b A897 south-bound (Moderate);
  - R3a Minor Road to Kirkton north-bound (Minor)
  - R3b Minor Road to Kirkton south-bound (Moderate);
  - R4a Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy south-bound (Moderate);
  - R4b Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy north-bound (Moderate);
  - R5 Forest / Estate Access Track at Dallangwell (Minor)
  - R6a Core Path SU19.03 north-bound (Moderate – Major); and
  - R6b Core Path SU19.03 south-bound (Moderate).
- Visual Outdoor Receptors
  - Rec 1 Strathy Cemetery/Strathy Bay carpark (Minor);
  - Rec 2 Strathy War Memorial (Minor);
  - Rec 7 North Bay Touring Park (Minor);
  - Rec 8 Kirkton Cemetery (Moderate);
  - Rec 10: River Strathy (Minor); and

- Rec 11: Halladale River (Minor).

Cumulative Landscape Assessment

6.11.6 The Kirkton Energy Park Grid Connection would comprise a very short section of wood pole mounted 132 kV OHL running approximately south-west from the Kirkton Energy Park substation to join the retained section of the existing 132 kV trident 'H' wood pole OHL. The substation would be located adjacent to existing trees and scrub. Given that effects of these two elements would be likely to be of a very localised nature, it is considered the effects of the addition of the Proposed Alignment to these would not give rise to any significant cumulative effect. The cumulative assessment therefore focusses on the effects of the addition of the Proposed Alignment to the Kirkton Energy Park wind turbines and the Strathy Switching Station development.

6.11.7 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA predicts moderate adverse and significant effects on the Farr Bay Strathy and Portskerra SLA without assessing the effects on the individual special qualities. The Strathy Switching Station development has yet to be the subject of a landscape and visual impact assessment, but it would likely have a relatively limited effect on the SLA with theoretical visibility likely from areas of elevated ground at Strathy Point. It is considered that the cumulative effects on the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic resulting from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park and the Strathy Switching Station development would be no greater than the level of effect arising from Kirkton Energy Park (**Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.8 In relation to the East Halladale Flows WLA, the Kirkton Energy Park EIA states that '*whilst it would result in significant effects on parts of the WLA, these would relate to areas up to between 8 km and 10 km. It is also notable that views to the south would be unaffected by the proposed development, with these being the directions in which a sense of wildness is most strongly expressed. Overall, Kirkton Energy Park would not fundamentally alter the key attributes and qualities and the East Halladale Flows WLA, when considered in relation to the overall WLA and its baseline context'*. The Strathy Switching Station development has yet to be the subject of a landscape and visual impact assessment, but it would likely have a relatively limited effect on the WLA due to the scale of the Switching Station and the >7 km distance from the WLA. It is considered that the cumulative effects on the East Halladale Flows WLA resulting from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park and Strathy Switching Station would be no greater than the level of effect arising from Kirkton Energy Park i.e. **Major to Major – Moderate adverse and significant** effect on Q1 (An awe-inspiring simplicity of landscape at the broad scale, with a strong horizontal emphasis, 'wide skies' and few foci) at distances of up to approximately 8 – 10 km; and **Major to Major - Moderate adverse and significant effect** on Q4 (a remarkably open landscape with extensive visibility, meaning tall or high features in the distance are clearly visible) at distances of up to approximately 8 – 10 km.

6.11.9 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA predicts moderate adverse and significant effects arising for LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows without differentiating between direct and indirect effects. The turbines would be located within this LCT, and it is therefore assumed that this level of effect applies to both direct and indirect effects. Strathy Switching Station would also be located within this LCT and there would likely be fragmented theoretical visibility from areas of high ground within the western part of this LCT. While the Proposed Alignment would add further energy infrastructure to this LCT and would extend the influence of man-made elements west of Kirkton Energy Park and south of Strathy Switching Station (although not markedly increasing the geographical extent of the area significantly affected), it is not considered that the level of effects would increase above those arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate adverse direct and indirect and significant**).

6.11.10 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA predicts moderate to minor adverse and not significant effects arising for LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland. Strathy Switching Station would likely be visible from limited areas of high ground within this LCT at more than 3 km distant. It is considered that the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park and Strathy Switching Station would not result in any increase in the level of effect from that arising from the proposed turbines at Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate to Minor adverse indirect and not significant**).

6.11.11 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA predicts moderate adverse effects arising for LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes. These are considered in the EIAR to be not significant as 'the primary focus and association with the coastline and sea to the north, is away from the development'. There is likely to be very limited and fragmented visibility of Strathy Switching Station from this LCT. Cumulative effects resulting from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to these two other developments would be no greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate adverse** but considered in the EIA for Kirkton Energy Park to be **not significant**).

6.11.12 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA predicts moderate to minor adverse and not significant effects on LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays. There is likely to be very limited and fragmented visibility of Strathy Switching Station from this LCT. It is not considered that the addition of the Proposed Alignment would result in any higher level of effect than that arising from the wind turbines at Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate to Minor adverse and not significant**).

6.11.13 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA predicts major adverse and significant effects arising for LCT 142 Strath - Caithness and Sutherland. It is assumed that this is an indirect effect as the turbines would not be located within this LCT. It is unlikely there would be visibility of Strathy Switching Station from this LCT. The addition of the Proposed Alignment is not considered to give rise to any direct effects greater than those arising the Proposed Alignment in isolation (**Minor - Moderate adverse and significant**). The addition of the Proposed Alignment is not considered to give rise to any indirect effects greater than those arising from the wind turbines at Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Major adverse indirect and significant**).

6.11.14 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA predicts moderate to moderate-minor adverse effects arising for LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms. These are considered to be not significant due to the primary focus and association with the coastline and sea to the north, away from the turbines. Strathy Switching Station is likely to be theoretically visible from parts of this LCT west of Strathy Bay and at Baligill at distances of around 2 km It is not considered that the addition of the Proposed Alignment to these two other developments would result in any higher level of effect than that arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate to Moderate – Minor** but considered in the EIA for Kirkton Energy Park to be **not significant**).

Cumulative Visual Assessment – Building Based Receptors

6.11.15 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA identifies major – moderate adverse and significant effects for properties on the road to Strathy Point. This would include receptors B2: Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point (South Section), and B3: Strathy Pods. There is also likely to be theoretical visibility of Strathy Switching Station from these properties. It is considered that the addition of the Proposed Alignment would not give rise to any cumulative effects greater than the effects predicted for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation **Major to Moderate adverse and significant)**.

6.11.16 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA identifies moderate adverse significant effects for a viewpoint west of Strathy which is an appropriate proxy for receptor B4: Properties at Strathy along the A836 West of the River Strathy. Strathy Switching Station is likely to be theoretically visible from only the northernmost of these properties. It is considered that the addition of the Proposed Alignment would not give rise to any cumulative effects greater than the effects predicted for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.17 There would be no visibility of Kirkton Energy Park from built receptors B6: Strathy Village Hall, B7: Properties at Strathy East of the River Strathy and north of the A836, B8: New House at Strath, and B9: Properties at Strathy East of the River Strathy and south of the A836. There is likely to be theoretical visibility from some of the individual properties within these receptor groups of Strathy Switching Station at distances in excess of 2 km. It is considered that the cumulative effects would be no greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (i.e. B6: Strathy Village Hall (**Minor adverse and not significant**); B7: Properties at Strathy east of the River Strathy and north of the A836 (**Minor – Moderate adverse and not significant**); B8: New House at Strath (**Minor – Moderate adverse and not significant**) and B9: Properties at Strathy East of the River Strathy and south of the A836 (**Minor adverse and not significant**)) and that cumulative effects would be not significant.

6.11.18 There would be visibility (mainly blade tips) of Kirkton Energy Park from built receptor B10: Properties at Baligill. The wind turbines would be more than 5 km distant. There is likely to be theoretical visibility of Strathy Switching Station from two of the houses in this receptor group. Cumulative effects would be no greater than those arising from the Proposed Alignment in isolation (**Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.19 Viewpoint 3 in the Kirkton Energy Park EIA is representative of the view seen from built receptor B30: Halladale Inn. It has been assessed as accruing moderate adverse effects from the wind turbines. Strathy Switching Station would be unlikely to be visible from this built receptor. Although the Proposed Alignment would add further energy infrastructure into the view, it is not considered that cumulative effects would be any higher than those arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.20 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA reports major – moderate significant effects for viewpoint 5 which is representative of built receptor B31: Bighouse Lodge, Strathview and The Barracks. Strathy Switching Station would unlikely be visible from this built receptor. The Proposed Alignment would add additional energy infrastructure into the view, but it considered that the cumulative level of effect would be no greater than that arising from the Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Major to Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.21 Strathy Switching Station would unlikely be visible from built receptor B33: Properties east of Bighouse Lodge. Viewpoint 4 in the Kirkton Energy Park EIA is a suitable proxy for this built receptor as it as at a similar elevation although closer to the proposed turbines. This viewpoint has been assessed as accruing major – moderate significant effects and although the Proposed Alignment would add additional energy infrastructure into the view, it is considered that the cumulative level of effect would be no greater than that arising from the Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Major to Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.22 Viewpoint 3 in the Kirkton Energy Park EIA is a suitable proxy for built receptor B34: Lochend, Melvich. It has been assessed as accruing moderate adverse effects from the wind turbines. Strathy Switching Station would unlikely be visible from this built receptor. Although the Proposed Alignment would add further energy infrastructure into the view, it is not considered that cumulative effects would be any higher than those arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.23 Major adverse significant effects are predicted for residents at viewpoint 2 in the Kirkton Energy Park EIA. This is representative of the view from built receptor B36: Properties at Strath Halladale north. Strathy Switching Station would be unlikely to be visible from this built receptor. While the Proposed Alignment would be seen in conjunction with the wind turbines, the cumulative effect can be no higher than those arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Major adverse and significant**).

6.11.24 Strathy Switching Station would unlikely be visible from B37: Properties at Kirkton. The EIA for Kirkton Energy Park does not include this location as a viewpoint but their viewpoint 1 can be considered as a proxy as it is also to the north-east of the turbines albeit a kilometre further away than B37. The assessment for this viewpoint in the Kirkton Energy Park EIAR identifies a major – moderate significant effect. For B37, the rotors of the turbines at Kirkton Energy Park would be seen similarly - behind the Proposed Alignment with turbines skylining. Cumulative effects would be likely to be greater than those arising from the Proposed Alignment or Kirkton Energy Park in isolation and would be (**Major adverse and significant**)

6.11.25 Although not assessed in the EIA for Kirkton Energy Park, built receptor B38: Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale is likely to accrue a similar level of effect to viewpoint 2 within the EIA (major adverse). Strathy Switching Station would unlikely be visible from this built receptor. This built receptor is also predicted to accrue major adverse effects from the Proposed Alignment. While the Proposed Alignment would add additional energy infrastructure into the view, the level of effect can be no higher than **Major adverse and significant**.

6.11.26 Kirkton Energy Park and Strathy Switching Station would not be visible from built receptors B47: Bowside Lodge, B48: The Bothy, B49: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeeper's Cottage) or B50: Dallangwell and no cumulative effects would arise from any of these receptors.

Cumulative Visual Assessment – Route Based Receptors

6.11.27 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA reports moderate – minor effects for the A836 (Receptors 1a and 1b in this assessment) overall with localised major - moderate effects in the vicinity of Halladale Bridge. Strathy Switching Station is likely to be theoretically visible intermittently between east of Armadale Bay and just east of the River Strathy. Cumulative effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to either or both of these other developments would be no greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation Route Receptor 1a. (i.e. **Moderate adverse and significant**), but in the vicinity of Halladale Bridge, cumulative effects are predicted to be **Major adverse and significant** as the Proposed Alignment would be seen in combination with the turbines at Kirkton Energy Park adding further man-made, although smaller vertical elements with horizontal wires, passing in front of the wind farm. Cumulative effects for route Receptor 1b would be no greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (**Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.28 The Kirkton Energy Park would be prominent in views from the A897 (Receptors R2a and R2b in this assessment) and the EIA reported major – moderate significant adverse effects for users of this route. Strathy Switching Station would not be visible from this route receptor. The addition of the Proposed Alignment would add further vertical man-made elements to the mid ground of the view for south-bound travellers of this route with turbines beyond. Cumulative effects would be **Major - Moderate adverse and significant** which is the same level of effect predicted for the Kirkton Energy Park in isolation. For north-bound travellers, the cumulative effect would be no greater than that arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (**Major to Moderate adverse and significant**) although the Proposed Alignment would also be visible intermittently from this route.

6.11.29 The Kirton Energy Park EIA does not assess the effects on the minor road to Kirkton (Receptors 3a and 3b in this assessment), but it would be continuously visible for south bound travellers beyond the Proposed Alignment. Strathy Switching Station would not be visible from this route receptor. The wind turbines are likely to be the dominant features in the view and cumulative effects are unlikely to be any greater than those arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (anticipated as **Moderate to Major adverse and significant**).

6.11.30 Kirkton Energy Park would not be visible from Scottish Hill Track 344 (Receptors 4a and 4b in this assessment). Strathy Switching Station would be visible from sections of the track around 1 km north of Bowside and from fragmented areas around Reroy. It is however considered that cumulative effects would be no greater than those arising from the addition of the Proposed Alignment for users of this route (i.e. **Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.31 Kirkton Energy Park would not be visible from Receptor R5: Forest / Estate Access Tracks at Dallangwell.

6.11.32 The EIA for Kirkton Energy Park assessed the effect on Core Path SU 19.03 (Receptor R6a and 6b in this assessment) as major – moderate and significant. Strathy Switching Station would not be visible from this route receptor. The cumulative effects resulting from the addition of the Proposed Alignment would be no greater than those arising from Kirkton Energy Park in isolation for south bound users of the core path (**Major to Moderate adverse and significant**) but **Major adverse and significant** cumulative effects can be anticipated for north-bound path users as the Proposed Alignment would be seen ahead in views with the turbines at Kirkton present on the skyline in the left hand side of the view.

Cumulative Visual Assessment – Outdoor Based Receptors

6.11.33 Kirkton Wind Energy Park would not be visible from outdoor receptor Rec 1: Strathy Cemetery / Strathy Bay Car Park. Strathy Switching Station is likely to be theoretically visible at approximately 3 km distant from this outdoor receptor. Cumulative effects are considered to be likely to be no higher than those arising from the Proposed Alignment in isolation (i.e. **Minor adverse and not significant**).

6.11.34 Kirkton Wind Energy Park would not be visible from outdoor receptor Rec 2: Strathy War Memorial. Strathy Switching Station is likely to be theoretically visible at approximately 2.6 km distant. Cumulative effects are considered to be likely to be no higher than those arising from the Proposed Alignment in isolation (i.e. **Minor adverse and not significant**).

6.11.35 Two blade tips of the turbines at Kirkton Energy Park would be visible from outdoor receptor Rec 7: Melvich Campsite North Coast Touring Park. Strathy Switching Station would not be visible from this outdoor receptor. Cumulative effects are not predicted to be any greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (i.e. **Minor adverse and not significant**).

6.11.36 The turbines at Kirkton Energy Park would be visible from outdoor receptor Rec 8: Kirkton Cemetery. Strathy Switching Station would not be visible from this outdoor receptor. Cumulative effects can be expected to be **Moderate to Major adverse and significant** as the Proposed Alignment would be seen in front of the proposed turbines from this outdoor receptor.

6.11.37 Kirkton Energy Park would not be visible from outdoor receptor R10: River Strathy. There is likely to be theoretical visibility of Strathy Switching Station from parts of the river to the immediate west. Cumulative effects on this outdoor receptor are however considered to be unlikely to be greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (i.e. **Minor adverse and not significant**).

6.11.38 The Kirkton Energy Park EIA identifies major – moderate significant effects for outdoor receptor Rec 11: Halladale River. Strathy Switching Station would not be visible from this outdoor receptor. As the Proposed Alignment would only be visible from Beat 4 (assuming the anglers focus is upstream), cumulative effects are not anticipated to be any greater than those arising from the wind turbines at Kirkton Energy Park (**Major to Moderate adverse and significant**).

6.11.39 **Table V1-6.17** summarises the effects of the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park.

Table V1-6.17: Summary of Cumulative Effects

Period Receptor	Effect of Proposed Alignment in isolation	Cumulative effect of the Proposed Alignment in addition to Kirkton Energy Park (and associated substation and grid connection) and Strathy Switching Station
Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
WLA 39: East Halladale Flows **Q1 An awe-inspiring simplicity of landscape at the broad scale, with a strong horizontal emphasis, 'wide skies' and few foci**	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major to Major – Moderate adverse and significant at distances of up to 8 – 10 km)
WLA 39: East Halladale Flows **Q4 A remarkably open landscape with extensive visibility, meaning tall or high features in the distance are clearly visible**	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major to Major – Moderate adverse and significant at distances of up to 8 – 10 km)
LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows (Minor - Moderate direct and Moderate indirect);	Minor - Moderate direct	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate direct adverse and significant).
	Moderate indirect	No greater than for either development in isolation (Moderate indirect adverse and significant).
LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland	Minor indirect	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate to Minor indirect adverse and not significant).
LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes	Minor indirect	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate indirect adverse and not significant due to the focus being on the coast and out to sea).
LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays	Minor indirect	No greater than for the Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate – Minor indirect adverse and not significant.
LCT 142 Strath - Caithness and Sutherland	Minor – Moderate direct	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor – Moderate direct and indirect adverse and not significant.
	Minor – Moderate indirect	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major indirect adverse and significant).
LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms	Minor Indirect	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate to Moderate – Minor indirect and not significant due to the focus being on the coast and out to sea).

Period Receptor	Effect of Proposed Alignment in isolation	Cumulative effect of the Proposed Alignment in addition to Kirkton Energy Park (and associated substation and grid connection) and Strathy Switching Station
B2 Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point (South Section)	Moderate	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).
B3 Strathy Pods	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).
B4 Properties at Strathy along the A836 West of the River Strathy	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
B6 Strathy Village Hall	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse and not significant).
B7 Properties at Strathy east of the River Strathy and north of the A836	Minor - Moderate	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor – Moderate adverse and not significant).
B8 New House at Strath	Minor - Moderate	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor – Moderate adverse and not significant).
B9 Properties at Strathy east of the River Strathy and south of the A836	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse and not significant).
B10 Properties at Baligill	Moderate	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
B30 Halladale Inn	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
B31 Bighouse Lodge, Strathview and The Barracks	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).
B33 Properties east of Bighouse Lodge	Moderate	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).
B34 Lochend, Melvich	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
B36 Properties at Strath Halladale north	Moderate - Major	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major adverse and significant).

Period Receptor	Effect of Proposed Alignment in isolation	Cumulative effect of the Proposed Alignment in addition to Kirkton Energy Park (and associated substation and grid connection) and Strathy Switching Station
B37 Properties at Kirkton	Moderate	The addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park would result in Major adverse and significant cumulative effects.
B38 Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale	Major	No greater than for either development in isolation (Major adverse and significant).
B47 Bowside Lodge	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse and not significant).
B48 The Bothy	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse and not significant).
B49 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeeper's Cottage)	Moderate	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
B50 Dallangwell	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse and not significant).
R1a A836/NCR1 west-bound	Moderate	For the majority of this route, effects would be no greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant). In the vicinity of Halladale Bridge, cumulative effects can be expected to be Major adverse and significant.
R1b A836/NCR1 east-bound	Moderate	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation Moderate adverse and significant.
R2a A897 north-bound	Moderate	Cumulative effects would be no greater than those arising from the Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).
R2b A897 south-bound	Moderate	Cumulative effects would be no greater than those arising from the Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).

Period Receptor	Effect of Proposed Alignment in isolation	Cumulative effect of the Proposed Alignment in addition to Kirkton Energy Park (and associated substation and grid connection) and Strathy Switching Station
R3a Minor Road to Kirkton north-bound	Minor	Cumulative effects are predicted from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park but these are unlikely to be any greater than those arising from the wind turbines in isolation (predicted as Moderate – Major adverse and significant).
R3b Minor Road to Kirkton south-bound	Moderate	Cumulative effects are predicted from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park but these are unlikely to be any greater than those arising from the wind turbines in isolation (predicted as Moderate – Major adverse and significant).
R4a Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy south-bound	Moderate	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
R4b Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy North-bound	Moderate	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Moderate adverse and significant).
R5 Forest / Estate Access Tracks at Dallangwell	Minor	Not greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse, not significant).
R6a Core Path SU19.03 north-bound	Moderate - Major	Major adverse and significant.
R6b Core Path SU19.03 south-bound	Moderate	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).
Rec1 Strathy Cemetery / Strathy Bay carpark	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse, not significant).
Rec 2 Strathy War Memorial	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse, not significant)
Rec 7 North Coast Touring Park	Minor	Cumulative effect would be no greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse and not significant).
Rec 8 Kirkton Cemetery	Moderate	Moderate – Major adverse and significant.

Period Receptor	Effect of Proposed Alignment in isolation	Cumulative effect of the Proposed Alignment in addition to Kirkton Energy Park (and associated substation and grid connection) and Strathy Switching Station
Rec 10 River Strathy	Minor	No greater than for the Proposed Alignment in isolation (Minor adverse, not significant).
Rec 11 Halladale River	Minor	No greater than for Kirkton Energy Park in isolation (Major – Moderate adverse and significant).

6.11.40 As detailed in paragraph 6.2.6, the Proposed Alignment would be closely associated with and dependent on the construction of the consented Strathy South and Strathy Wood wind farms and the proposed Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection. The assessment of effects has therefore taken these developments into account as part of the baseline for the Proposed Alignment. Other known development proposals within the study area likely to affect the baseline characteristics, including the proposed Kirkton Energy Park and its associated grid connection and the (pre-scoping stage) Strathy Switching Station, have been considered in the cumulative assessment of effects.

6.11.41 The combined effects of all developments on the landscape character and visual resource of the study area would lead to a notable change. The contribution of the Proposed Alignment to these effects would be noticeable but of a lesser degree than the contribution of the wind farms at Strathy South and Strathy Wood and Kirkton Energy Park due to the scale of the turbines.

6.12 Mitigation

Embedded Mitigation

6.12.1 Much of the mitigation for landscape and visual purposes has been embedded in the design for the Proposed Alignment, in the form of the route and alignment selection process. This process is discussed in detail within **Volume 1: Chapter 2 - The Routeing Process and Alternatives**. In general, the alignment has been designed to conform with topography and minimise potential prominence on ridgelines or fragmentation of areas of distinctive landscape character where possible. Care has also been given to minimise the potential prominence of the Proposed Alignment in views from properties, routes and outdoor locations.

Implementation Stage Mitigation

6.12.2 Mitigation measures to be considered during the implementation of the Proposed Alignment would include the use of best practice construction and restoration techniques.

6.12.3 The reinstatement of areas disturbed during construction would be fundamental to ensuring that the Proposed Alignment would be successfully accommodated into the existing landscape in the longer term. Careful reinstatement of landform would be employed across working areas, cable laying corridors and temporary tracks, re-using materials excavated during the construction period to reflect the terrain within adjacent areas. Further details on these measures are included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-3.6: Outline Site Restoration Plan**.

6.12.4 Landform would be remodelled around new steel lattice towers, and new, permanent tracks to ensure that these tie smoothly into their surroundings and to minimise the visual extent of these features where possible – for example, to help conceal foundations or the running surfaces of tracks from visual receptor locations or within the wider landscape.

6.12.5 Reinstatement of landform would include the creation of suitable gradients for cut and fill slopes associated with access tracks to enable the replacement of peat / soils and re-establishment of vegetation. Where the receiving terrain is not suitable to allow these gradients, the use of suitable geoengineering techniques, such as jute matting would be utilised to help establish vegetation and prevent erosion.

6.12.6 The natural regeneration of native species is the preferred method of achieving vegetation restoration, as outlined in the Outline Site Restoration Plan (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-3.6**), and Outline Peat Management Plan (PMP) (see **Volume 4: Appendix V1-9.2**). Where native soils or vegetation may be considered insufficient to support natural re-vegetation, this would be supplemented by seeding with an agreed seed mix.

6.12.7 Mitigation planting in the form of reinforcing and extending the existing woodland is proposed in the vicinity of the CSE compound at Connagill 275/132 kV substation to improve the visual appearance and assimilation of the Proposed Alignment into the landscape setting.

6.13 Residual Effects

6.13.1 The assessment of operational effects takes into account the likely benefits of the embedded and implementation phase mitigation measures which are proposed and therefore the operational effects identified should be considered representative of residual effects.

6.14 Summary and Conclusions

6.14.1 This Chapter describes the key sensitivities and potential changes to the physical and visual environment arising from the Proposed Development in combination with the Proposed Alignment.

6.14.2 The Proposed Alignment would be dependent on or associated with a number of other consented and proposed developments. Therefore, for the purposes of the LVIA, various other developments have been assumed to be present within the baseline landscape. The Proposed Alignment would be dependent on the presence of the consented Strathy South Wind Farm, Strathy Wood Wind Farm and the proposed Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection.

Landscape Effects

6.14.3 The landscape assessment has established that the only significant landscape effects resulting from the Proposed Alignment would be Moderate adverse direct and indirect effects on LCTs 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows during construction and Moderate adverse indirect effects during operation, and Moderate adverse direct and indirect effect on LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland during construction and operation. These two LCTs, however, occupy more than three quarters of the study area. Significant direct landscape effects are due to the presence of construction operations and the Proposed Alignment within these LCTs while significant indirect effects are associate with a high degree of visibility of construction operations and the Proposed Alignment from within these LCTs.

6.14.4 There would be no significant direct effects arising for the other four LCTs within the study area nor for any designated or protected landscapes because construction operations would not take place within these areas and the Proposed Alignment would not be located within these areas. There would be no significant indirect effects arising for the other four LCTs within the study area nor for any designated or protected landscapes because visibility of construction operations or the Proposed Alignment would either be non-existent or very limited.

Visual Effects

6.14.5 The detailed visual assessment set out in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.5: Visual Assessment Tables** has established that significant effects on visual receptors would be limited to seven building-based receptors, nine route based receptors (both directions of travel), and one outdoor based receptor.

6.14.6 Major adverse effects during both construction and operation are predicted for people at, or using, the following receptors:

- B38 Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale; and

6.14.7 Major adverse effects during construction, reducing to Moderate – Major adverse during operation, are predicted for people using the following route-based receptors:

- R6a Core Path SU19.03 (north-bound).

6.14.8 Moderate - Major adverse effects during both construction and operation are predicted for people at the following building receptors:

- B36 Properties at Strath Halladale north; and

6.14.9 Moderate - Major adverse effects during construction, reducing to moderate adverse during operation are predicted for people using the following route-based receptor:

- B37 Properties at Kirkton.
- R6b Core Path SU19.03 south-bound.

6.14.10 Moderate adverse effects during both construction and operation are predicted for people at, or using, the following receptors:

- B2 Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point (South Section);
- B10 Properties at Baligill;
- B33 Properties east of Bighouse Lodge;
- B49 Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage);
- R1a and R1b A836/NCR1 (west and east-bound);
- R2a and R2b A897 (north and south-bound);
- R3b Minor road to Kirkton (south-bound);
- Rec 4a and R4b Scottish Hill Track 344 – Strath Halladale (Trantlebeg) to Strathy (north and south-bound); and
- Rec 8 Kirkton Cemetery.

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

6.14.11 The cumulative landscape and visual assessment takes into account the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park, its associated substation and grid connection, and Strathy Switching Station.

6.14.12 The cumulative landscape assessment has identified that the cumulative landscape effects arising from the addition of the Proposed Alignment to the other developments would be no greater than the levels of effect arising from either the Proposed Alignment or Kirkton Energy Park in isolation.

6.14.13 The cumulative visual assessment has identified a very limited number of receptors which would experience an increase in the level of effect identified for either Kirkton Energy Park or the Proposed Alignment in isolation. These are:

- B37: Properties at Kirkton (Major adverse and significant);
- R1a: A836 / NCR1 west-bound in the vicinity of Halladale Bridge (Major adverse and significant);
- R6a: Core Path SU19.03 north-bound (Major adverse and significant); and
- Rec 8: Kirkton Cemetery (Moderate - Major adverse and significant).

Conclusions

6.14.14 The LVIA has established that there would be significant adverse construction effects for a small number of people:

- Those who may be present within LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows and in LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland;
- Those who may be present at building based receptors B2: Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point, B10: Properties at Baligill, B33: Properties East of Bighouse Lodge, B36: Properties at Strath Halladale north, B37: Properties at Kirkton, B38: Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale and B49: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage);
- Those who may be present on route based receptors R1: A836 / NCR1 (both directions), R2: A897 (both directions), R3: Minor Road to Kirkton (south bound), R4: Scottish Hill Track 344 (both directions), and R6: Core Path SU19.03 (both directions); and
- Those who may be present at outdoor based receptor Rec 8: Kirkton Cemetery.

6.14.15 Significant adverse effects during operation:

- Those who may be present within LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows;
- Those who may be present at building based receptors B2: Properties on Minor Road to Strathy Point, B10: Properties at Baligill, B33: Properties east of Bighouse Lodge, B36: Properties at Strath Halladale north, B37: Properties at Kirkton, B38: Tigh na Breac, Strath Halladale and B49: Bowside Cottage (Gamekeepers Cottage);
- Those who may be present on route based receptors R1a and R1b: A836 / NCR1 (both directions), R2a and R2b: A897 (both directions), R3b: Minor Road to Kirkton (south bound), R4a and R4b: Scottish Hill Track 344 (both directions) and R6a and R6b: Core Path SU19.03 (both directions); and
- Those who may be present at outdoor based receptor Rec 8: Kirkton Cemetery.

6.14.16 The cumulative visual assessment has identified there would be no cumulative visual effects for building based receptors greater than the levels of effect arising from either the Proposed Alignment or Kirkton Energy Park in isolation other than for building based receptor B37: Properties at Kirkton (Major adverse and significant).

6.14.17 Cumulative effects for route-based receptors are predicted for R1a: A836/NCR1 west-bound in the vicinity of Halladale Bridge (Major adverse and significant) and for R6a: Core Path SU19.03 north-bound (Major adverse and significant) as a result of the addition of the Proposed Alignment to Kirkton Energy Park. For all other route-based receptors assessed there would be no cumulative effects greater than those arising from either the Proposed Alignment or Kirkton Energy Park in isolation.

6.14.18 There would be no cumulative effects greater than those arising from either the Proposed Alignment or Kirkton Energy Park in isolation for any of the recreation outdoor based receptors assessed aside from receptor Rec 8: Kirkton Cemetery (Moderate – Major adverse and significant).

6.15 References

Armadale Wind Farm Environmental Statement, November 2013 [online]. Available at: https://www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk/CaseDetails.aspx?id=121110. Accessed December 2024.

Bing Mapping aerial photography [online]. Available at: https://www.bing.com/maps/ Accessed December 2024.

Geograph Britain and Ireland [online]. Available at https://www.geograph.org.uk/ Accessed December 2024.

Google Mapping aerial photography [online]. Available at: https://www.google.co.uk/maps/ Accessed December 2024.

Horner + Maclennan and Wood, M (2011), *Assessment of Highland Special Landscape* Areas. Commissioned by The Highland Council in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage, July 2011.

Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2013), *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, Third Edition.

Landscape Institute (2019), TGN 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals [online]. Available at: https://landscapewpstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2019/09/LI_TGN-06-19_Visual_Representation.pdf Accessed December 2024.

Kirkton Energy Park EIA Report [online]. Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00003244 Accessed December 2024.

Melvich Wind Energy Hub EIA Report [online]. Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00004514 Accessed December 2024.

NatureScot (2019), *Scottish Landscape Character Types – Map and Descriptions* [online]. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions Accessed December 2024.

Scottish Government (2023), *Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4).*

Scottish Natural Heritage and The Countryside Agency (2002), *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland.*

Scottish Natural Heritage (2017), *Visual Representation of Wind Farms. Version 2.2.* [online]. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/doc/visual-representation-wind-farms-guidance Accessed December 2024

Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (2011), *Scottish Hill Tracks, 5th edition,* Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

SSEN Transmission (2024) Connagill Cluster Grid Connections: Report on Consultation (Routeing Stage) (April 2024). Accessed May – July 2024.

SSEN Transmission (2024) Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection EIA Report. Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00005221 Accessed December 2024.

Strathy South Wind Farm EIA Report [online]. Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=EC00003113 Accessed December 2024.

Strathy Wood Wind Farm Environmental Statement Volume 1 November 2013 [online]. Available at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=EC00005239 Accessed December 2024.

The Highland Council, *Core Paths Interactive Map* [online]. Available at: https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fd3fc9c72d545f7bcf1b43bf5c8445f Accessed December 2024.

The Highland Council, *Development Planning* [online]. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans Accessed December 2024.

The Highland Council, *Outdoor Highlands* [online]. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/outdoorhighlands/ Accessed December 2024.

The Highland Council (2012), *Highland-wide Local Development Plan.* Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan Accessed December 2024.

The Highland Council (2016), *Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments*. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/12880/visualisation_standards_for_wind_energy_developments Accessed December 2024.

The Highland Council (2018), Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan. Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/19712/casplan_adopted Accessed December 2024.

Walk Highlands [online]. Available at: https://www.walkhighlands.co.uk/ Accessed December 2024.