VOLUME 4: APPENDIX V5-4.1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT TABLES – ALTERNATIVE ALIGNMENT

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1.1.1 The Appendix presents the assessment of the effects of the Proposed Development with the Alternative Alignment on the six Landscape Character Types (LCTs) present in the 5 km study area (see **Volume 2: Figure V5-6.3**). All effects are adverse unless otherwise stated.

Table 1: LCT 134: Sweeping Moorland and Flows

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this LCT which could be affected by the Alternative Alignment comprise: • The importance of the meandering River Strathy; • The strength of the low, isolated hills in providing local landform features; • The long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines; and • The sense of remoteness which is diminished by the presence of existing Strathy North wind farms, and forest plantation, forest tracks and timber harvesting activity in the south western part of the incidence of this LCT, west of Strath Halladale, The sense of remoteness would be further diminished by wind turbines at the consented Strathy South and Strathy Wood, in the south, and by the proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub in the north. The sense of remoteness is more strongly evident in the incidence of this LCT east of Strath Halladale although diminished to some extent by the presence of the 275 kV Beauly to Dounreay overhead line (OHL).
Landscape Sensitivity	**Medium:** The landscape is valued (by walkers on Scottish Hill Track 344; parts of the LCT east of the Alternative Alignment coincide with the East Halladale Flows WLA; parts of this LCT along the coast coincide with the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA) and has a composition (generally smooth and gently undulating landform) and characteristics (the presence of wind turbines at Strathy North, Strathy Wood, Strathy South and Melvich Wind Energy Hub; the Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection; wood pole mounted OHLs; and the potential screening effects of forest plantations) tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.
Potential Effects	Potential effects to landscape receptors may include: • The temporary loss of moorland/grassland to working areas; • The permanent loss of moorland/grassland to permanent tracks; • The extension north (north of the proposed wind turbines at Melvich Wind Energy Hub) and east of taller OHL towers (steel lattice in place of timber trident poles) leading to an increased influence of this type of development on the landscape character of the area; • An increase in infrastructue in the eastern section of the Alternative Alignment east of the Achridigill Burn, where the existing wood pole OHL would remain in situ, leading to an amplification of the influence of this type of development on the landscape character of the area; • The introduction of the Alternative Alignment in the foreground of views towards the River Strathy from areas to the east; • The appearance of the Alternative Alignment breaking the skyline tiogether with proposed wind turbines at Melvich Wind Energy Hub; and • A further diminishment of the sense of remoteness by the introduction of additional activity during construction and further man-made objects during operation.

Nature and Magnitude of Change	The Alternative Alignment would lie almost entirely within this LCT and would result in direct and indirect effects during both construction and operation. Direct temporary effects within this LCT would result from the loss of vegetation cover as a result of: • working areas at the tower locations (50 m x 50 m for each suspension tower, 70 m x 70 m for L7c angle towers, 80 m x 80 m for L8c angle towers); • new permanent access tracks (approximately 6.91 km length with 5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage); • (existing access tracks to be upgraded (approximately 9.19 km length with 5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage); • new temporary access tracks (approximately 6 km length with 3.5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage); • working areas at temporary wood pole locations; • cable sealing end (CSE) compound and underground cables (UGC); and • an increase in the level of vehicle movements and activity. Direct permanent effects within this LCT would result from the presence of the Alternative Alignment, and associated permanent access tracks (new and upgraded): • new permanent access tracks (approximately 6.91 km length with 3.5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage); • (existing access tracks to be upgraded (approximately 9.19 km length with 3.5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage); Indirect temporary effects would arise from construction operations being visible on the skyline in some locations and in views towards the River Strathy, and a further reduction in the sense of remoteness influenced by the presence of turbines at Strathy North, Strathy Wood, Strathy South and Melvich wind farms and grid infrastructure associated with Strathy Wood Wind Farm. Views towards the River Strathy would be interrupted by the Alternative Alignment when seen from areas to the east. From lower lying parts of this LCT, towers would be seen breaking the skyline and the existing sense of remoteness, already reduced by the presence of the existing Strathy North wind farms, forest tracks and existing OHL infrastructure, and would be further diminished by the turbines at Strathy Wood and Strathy South wind farms, and Melvich Wind Energy Hub, and proposed Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection. Direct changes during construction would be perceptible over the route of the Alternative Alignment (loss of land cover to temporary working areas, new and upgraded temporary and permanent access) and the magnitude of change would be **Medium**. Indirect changes during construction would be perceptible with theoretical visibility (bare ground – i.e. taking no account of the screening effects of forestry) of increased activity from the addition of construction operations over approximately 100 km^2 (77.24%) of the LCT from which existing forest extraction and vehicle movements associated with existing Strathy North and proposed Strathy South and Strathy Wood wind farms and substations would also be visible; and notable in localised areas at each tower location. Works associated with the dismantling of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL would be visible in the western part of this LCT. The works would also occur in the context of Melvich Wind Energy Hub. The magnitude of change would be **Low - Medium**. Direct changes during operation would result from the presence of towers and associated new permanent access tracks which would be perceptible over the LCT and notable over the route of the Alternative Alignment in the context of the proposed turbines at Melvich Wind Energy Hub and the magnitude of change would be **Low - Medium**. Indirect changes during operation would be perceptible with theoretical visibility (bare ground – taking no account of the screening effects of forestry) of the Alternative Alignment over approximately 100 km^2 (77.24%) of the LCT and notable in localised

	areas where towers and conductors would breach the skyline and interrupt views from areas of higher ground in the context of wind turbines, most notably those proposed at Melvich Wind Energy Hub. The magnitude of change would be **Low - Medium**
Effect and Significance	The Alternative Alignment would be locally prominent and would result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area during construction and a perceptible change during operation. The level of effects during construction would be **Moderate direct and indirect adverse and significant.** The levels of effect during operation would be **Minor - Moderate direct adverse** and not significant and **Moderate indirect adverse and significant.**

Table 2: LCT 136: Rocky Hills and Moorland

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this LCT which could be affected by the Alternative Alignment comprise: • The sense of remoteness perceived as a result of the lack of habitation.
Landscape Sensitivity	**Low - Medium:** Parts of this LCT along the coast lie within the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA. It is experienced by forest employees, walkers and estate workers in the interior and by visitors to the coast. It has a composition (low lying moorland and the presence of forest cover) tolerant of a degree of change of the type proposed.
Potential Effects	The Alternative Alignment would not lie within this LCT, and potential effects would be limited to indirect effects. Potential effects to landscape receptors may include: • The introduction of further man-made objects into the eastern landscape context which already include forestry, forest tracks and wind turbines, diminishing the sense of perceived remoteness due to the lack of habitation.
Nature and Magnitude of Change	Indirect temporary effects within this LCT would arise from construction operations being visible from 8.32 km^2 (43.58%) of the LCT in the context of other activity associated with the existing Strathy North Wind Farm, Strathy Wood Forest plantation, as well as the consented Strathy South and Strathy Wood wind farms, the proposed Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection, and proposed Melvich Wind Energy Hub. Visibility would be limited to areas of elevated ground and would be likely to be less than that indicated on the ZTV due to the screening effects of Strathy Forest. Works associated with the dismantling of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL would be unlikely to be visible from this LCT. The magnitude of change during construction would be **Low.** Indirect permanent effects within this LCT would arise from the Alternative Alignment being visible from 8.32 km^2 (43.58%) of the LCT in the context of the turbines at Strathy North, Strathy Wood and Strathy South wind farms, Strathy Wood Wind Farm Grid Connection and Strathy Forest. The magnitude of change during operation would be **Low.**
Effect and Significance	Construction and operation of the Alternative Alignment would result in inappreciable reduction in scenic quality and change to the intrinsic landscape character. The level of effect during both construction and operation would be **Minor indirect and not significant.**

Table 3: LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspects of this LCT which could be affected by the Alternative Alignment comprise: • Strong sense of space, light and exposure, and extensive visibility on the larger and more open stretches of sandy beach; and • Relatively wild character.
Landscape Sensitivity	**High:** The majority of this LCT lies within the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA and it has a particularly distinctive character which is susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.
Potential Effects	The Alternative Alignment would not lie within this LCT, and potential effects would be limited to indirect effects. Potential effects to landscape receptors may include: • The introduction of further man-made objects into the southern landscape context diminishing the sense of perceived wildness.
Nature and Magnitude of Change	Indirect temporary effects would arise from construction operations being visible from 0.2 km^2 (42.55%) of the LCT in the context of proposed wind turbines at Melvich Wind Energy Hub. Visibility would be limited to areas of elevated ground in the vicinity of the Portskerra Drownings Memorial, areas west of Bighouse and northeast of the North Coast Touring Park where the focus of views are generally northwards over the bay and north eastwards over the river. Works associated with the dismantling of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL would be unlikely to be visible from this LCT. The magnitude of change during construction would be **Low.** Indirect permanent effects would arise from the Alternative Alignment being visible from 0.32 km^2 (68.09%) of the LCT together with Melvich Wind Energy Hub. Visibility would be limited to areas where the focus of views are generally northwards over the bay and north eastwards over the river from elevated ground in the vicinity of the Portskerra Drownings Memorial, areas west of Bighouse and north-east of the North Coast Touring Park. The Alternative Alignment would not affect the key characteristics of dune systems, machair, camp site, strong sense of space, the beach or the relatively wild character. The magnitude of change during operation would be **Low.**
Effect and Significance	The Alternative Alignment may be locally intrusive but would not result in an appreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area. The level of effect during both construction and operation would be **Minor indirect and not significant.**

Table 4: LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspect of this LCT which could be affected by the Alternative Alignment comprises: • The absence of development and a strong sense of naturalness creating a wild landscape character.
Landscape Sensitivity	**High:** The majority of this LCT lies within the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA. It is a highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed and is experienced by residents and visitors to coast.
Potential Effects	The Alternative Alignment would not lie within this LCT and potential effects would be limited to indirect effects. Potential effects to landscape receptors may include: • The introduction of further man-made objects into the southern landscape context diminishing the sense of perceived wildness.
Nature and Magnitude of Change	Indirect temporary effects would arise from construction operations being visible, together with proposed turbines at Melvich Wind Energy Hub, from 0.72 km^2 (39.56%) of the LCT. Visibility would be limited to areas of elevated ground north of Strathy Bay, north of Baligill, around Rhua Beag and north of Rhuba an Tuir where the focus of views are generally out to sea. Works associated with the dismantling of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL would be unlikely to be visible from this LCT. The magnitude of change during construction would be **Low.** Indirect permanent effects would arise from the Alternative Alignment being visible from 0.72 km^2 (39.56%) of the LCT in the context of Melvich Wind Energy Hub. Visibility would be limited to areas where the focus of views are generally out to sea from elevated sections of the coastline north of Strathy Bay, north of Baligill, around Rhua Beag and north of Rhuba an Tuir. The magnitude of change during operation would be **Low.**
Effect and Significance	The Alternative Alignment may be locally intrusive but would not result in an appreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area. The level of effect during both construction and operation would be **Minor indirect and not significant.**

Table 5: LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspect of this LCT which could be affected by the Alternative Alignment comprises: • Strong north – south linear pattern. • Linear settlement pattern along communication routes. • Larger scale enclosed pastures and smaller strip fields. • Strongly channelled views along the strath.
Landscape Sensitivity	**Medium:** No landscape designation, but valued by residents, visitors and road users on the A897. Composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.
Potential Effects	The Alternative Alignment would cross this LCT west of Connagill and potential effects would include direct and indirect effects during construction and operation. Potential effects to landscape receptors may include those arising from: • The introduction of construction activity and further, taller man-made objects west of Connagill 275/132 kV substation. • The introduction of construction activity associated with improvements to existing tracks and new sections of track and UGCs, and the presence of permanent tracks during operation • The presence of the cable sealing end (CSE) compound.
Nature and Magnitude of Change	A short section of the Alternative Alignment would cross this LCT west of Connagill and the CSE compound / UGCs would be located on the edge of the LCT and would result in direct and indirect effects during both construction and operation. Direct temporary effects would result from the loss of vegetation cover as a result of the working areas at the tower locations (approximately 2.92 Ha); existing access tracks to be upgraded (approximately 1.71 km with 5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage); new permanent access tracks (approximately 0.99 km) with 5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage); and an increase in the level of vehicle movements and activity. Direct permanent effects would result from the presence of the Alternative Alignment, including the CSE compound and associated permanent new access tracks (approximately 0.99 km (3.5 m running width plus 1.5 m for drainage). Indirect temporary effects would arise from construction operations being visible on the skyline in the context of the proposed wind turbines at Melvich from some locations and in views along the Halladale River. Works associated with the dismantling of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL would be unlikely to be visible from this LCT other than from the most northerly parts near the estuary of the river. Indirect permanent effects would include visibility of towers in addition to the existing trident 'H' wood poles east of the Achridigill Burn. Many towers would be seen breaking the skyline and from some locations these would be seen in addition to the existing steel lattice towers (Beauly to Dounreay 275 kV OHL), which lie to the east of the Strath. Direct changes during construction would be perceptible over the route of the Alternative Alignment (loss of land cover to temporary working areas (approximately 2.92 Ha) and upgraded and new access tracks (approximately 2.7 km) and the magnitude of change would be **Medium**. Indirect changes during construction would be perceptible with theoretical visibility (bare ground – i.e. taking no account of the screening effects of forestry and scrub woodland) activity from the addition of construction operations over 9.95 km^2 (93.96%) of the LCT, and notable in localised areas at each tower location. Actual visibility can be expected to be substantially less due to the screening effects of scrub woodland and small forest plantations within the Strath. The magnitude of change would be **Medium**. Direct changes during operation would result from the presence of towers and associated permanent access tracks (0.99 km at 3.5 m running width plus 1.5 m for

	drainage) which would be perceptible over the LCT and notable over the route of the Alternative Alignment and the magnitude of change would be **Medium**. Indirect changes during operation would be perceptible with theoretical visibility (bare ground – taking no account of the screening effects of forestry) of the Alternative Alignment over 9.95 km^2 (93.96%) of the LCT and notable in localised areas where towers and conductors would breach the skyline. Actual visibility can be expected to be substantially less due to the screening effects of scrub woodland and forest plantation within the strath particularly for parts of this LCT south. The magnitude of change would be **Medium.**
Effect and Significance	The Alternative Alignment would be locally prominent and would result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area during construction and a perceptible change during operation. The level of effects during construction would be **Moderate direct and indirect adverse and significant.** The level of effect during operation would be **Moderate direct and indirect adverse and significant.**

Table 6: LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms

Landscape Receptors	The principal aspect of this LCT which could be affected by the Alternative Alignment comprises: • 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 Sensitivity	**Medium - High:** Parts of this LCT lie close to the coast within the Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra SLA. It has composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.
Potential Effects	The Alternative Alignment would not lie within this LCT, and potential effects would be limited to indirect effects. Potential effects to landscape receptors may include: • The introduction of further man-made objects into the southern wider landscape context (views) which already includes forestry, forest tracks, trident wood pole mounted overhead lines and wind turbines.
Nature and Magnitude of Change	Indirect temporary effects would arise from construction operations being visible from 4.81 km^2 (69.41%) of the LCT. There would be no visibility from the instance of this LCT at Armadale. Theoretical visibility from the instances of this LCT at Strathy and Baligill is relatively widespread at distances in excess of 1 km. Theoretical visibility from the instance of this LCT at Portskerra (less than 1.5 km distant) and Melvich (less than 0.5 km distant) would be relatively widespread. Actual visibility from these settlements is likely to be less due to the screening effects of buildings and vegetation. Works associated with the dismantling of the existing trident 'H' wood pole OHL would be unlikely to be visible from this LCT. Construction works would be seen in the context of moving wind turbine rotors at Melvich Wind Energy Hub. The magnitude of change during construction would be **Low.** Indirect permanent effects would arise from the Proposed Development being visible from 4.81 km^2 (69.41%) of the LCT. There would be no visibility from Armadale. There is theoretical relatively widespread visibility from Strathy, Baligill, Portskerra and Melvich from where the Melvich Wind Energy Hub would also be visible. Actual visibility of the Alternative Alignment from these settlements is likely to be less due to the screening effects of buildings and vegetation. The key characteristics related to topography, land use, settlement, history and visual focus would not be affected by the Alternative Alignment. The magnitude of change during operation would be **Low.**
Effect and Significance	The Alternative Alignment may be locally intrusive but would not result in an appreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area. The level of effect during both construction and operation would be **Minor indirect and not significant.**