

6 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 This chapter of the EIA Report evaluates the effects of the Proposed Development on the landscape and visual resource. The Proposed Development comprises up to 16 turbines with a range of tip heights between 180 and 200 m.
- 6.1.2 This assessment was undertaken by LUC on behalf of RSK. This Chapter of the EIA Report is supported by the following Technical Appendix documents provided in **Volume 3 Technical Appendices**:
- **Appendix A6.1** – Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and Visualisation Methodology;
 - **Appendix A6.2** – Aviation Lighting Assessment; and
 - **Appendix A6.3** – Wild Land Impact Assessment.
- 6.1.3 This chapter includes the following elements:
- Scope and methodology;
 - Consultation undertaken;
 - Statutory and planning context;
 - Existing landscape and visual context;
 - Mitigation;
 - Predicted impacts;
 - Summary of effects; and
 - References.
- 6.1.4 **Volume 2** of the EIA Report contains the EIA Report Figures. This chapter is supported by **Volume 2 LVIA Figures and LVIA Visualisations** (with visualisations provided to NatureScot and THC standards).

6.2 Scope and Methodology

- 6.2.1 The LVIA methodology was prepared based on the principles contained within Guideline for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition) (GLVIA3) and is described in detail in **Appendix A6.1**. **Appendix A6.1** should be referred to whilst reviewing the findings of this assessment in order to gain a clear understanding of how findings of significance are informed.
- 6.2.2 The key steps in the methodology for assessing both landscape and visual effects are as follows:
- the area from which the Proposed Development may theoretically be visible was established through creation of a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map covering a distance of up to 45 km from the outermost wind turbines of the Proposed Development, refer to **Figure 6.1.2a** and **b** for blade tip ZTV;
 - the landscape of the Study Area (45 km from outermost turbines) was analysed, and landscape receptors identified;

- the visual baseline was recorded in terms of the places where people will be affected by views of the Proposed Development, and the nature of views and visual amenity, as seen by different groups of people;
- viewpoints were selected (including representative viewpoints, specific viewpoints and illustrative viewpoints), in consultation with the Highland Council (THC) and NatureScot; and
- likely effects on landscape and visual resources were identified.

Study Area / Survey Area

- 6.2.3 The Study Area for the assessment is defined as 45 km from the outermost turbines of the Proposed Development in all directions, as recommended in SNH (now NatureScot¹³) good practice guidance¹⁴ for turbines of >150 m to blade tip height. The location of the Study Area is shown on **Figure 6.1.1**. The consideration of landscape and visual effects, including cumulative effects, on particular receptors is dealt with in the sections which follow.
- 6.2.4 To consider cumulative effects of the Proposed Development in relation to other schemes in the wider area, wind farms within 45 km of the outermost turbines of the Proposed Development are included for the purposes of modelling and detailed assessment, as agreed with NatureScot and THC. A review of patterns of development is also provided for wind farms in the wider area, as required following guidance from SNH. Wind farms within 45 km of the outermost turbines of the Proposed Development are shown on **Figure 6.1.6**.
- 6.2.5 A ZTV map was generated, illustrating areas from where the proposed wind turbines may be visible in the Study Area. The ZTV was based on bare earth topography and therefore does not take account of potential screening by vegetation or buildings. The ZTV is used as a tool for understanding where significant visual effects may occur. Receptors which are outside the ZTV will not have visibility of the Proposed Development and are not considered further in this LVIA. The ZTV to blade tip height (200 m for T1 – T11 and T16, and 180 m for T12 – T15) is shown at A3 scale on **Figure 6.1.2a** and A1 scale on **Figure 6.1.2b** and the ZTV to hub height (118.5 m for T1 – T11 and T16, and 98.5 m for T12 – T15) is shown at A3 scale on **Figure 6.1.3a** and A1 scale on **Figure 6.1.3b**.

Scope of Assessment

- 6.2.6 The key issues for the assessment of potential landscape and visual effects relating to the Proposed Development are listed below. The following effects are assessed in accordance with the principles contained within GLVIA3:
- Effects on the physical landscape of the turbine area (the area of the site in which the proposed turbines are located);
 - Effects on the perceived landscape character of Landscape Character Types (LCT) within a 20 km radius from the outermost wind turbines of the Proposed Development (effects on Wild Land Areas are considered in **Appendix A6.3**);

¹³ SNH rebranded as NatureScot in August 2020. Many reference documents were published prior to this name change. Where these have been published prior to the name change SNH is referred to.

¹⁴ SNH (2017). Visual Representation of Wind Farms Guidance. Version 2.2. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-09/Guidance%20-%20Visual%20representation%20of%20wind%20farms%20-%20Feb%202017.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/2021)

- Effects which could be of relevance to the reasons for designation as described by the key characteristics/special qualities of nationally and locally designated landscapes within the Study Area;
- Effects on visual receptors at representative viewpoints;
- Effects on visual receptors at settlements and routes in the Study Area;
- Cumulative landscape and visual effects (including combined, successive and sequential visual effects). Additional and total/ in-combination cumulative effects have been considered;
- Effects on residential visual amenity for properties within 2 km of the Proposed Development. There is a single small property cluster at Dalnessie Lodge, which has been included as an assessment viewpoint. Beyond this there are no other properties upon which effects on Residential Visual Amenity are likely to be a concern (Refer to **Figure 6.1.12**). Further information on effects on Residential Visual Amenity at the property cluster at Dalnessie is included in the viewpoint assessment from this property; and
- Night-time effects due to the requirement for aviation lighting. Further information is provided in **Appendix A6.2**.

Elements Scoped Out of Assessment

6.2.7 On the basis of the desk based and survey work undertaken, the professional judgement and experience of the assessment team, experience from other relevant projects, feedback received from consultees (refer to **Table 6.1**) and policy guidance or standards, the following potential effects are scoped out of the assessment:

- Effects on visual receptors beyond a 45 km radius from the outermost wind turbines of the Proposed Development, where it is judged that potential significant effects are unlikely to occur;
- Effects on landscape and visual receptors that have minimal or no theoretical visibility (as predicted by the ZTV) and are therefore unlikely to be subject to significant effects;
- Effects on landscape character beyond a 20 km radius from the outermost wind turbines of the Proposed Development and where the potential for significant effects on landscape character is limited, unless otherwise stated;
- Effects on designated landscapes beyond a 20 km radius from the outermost wind turbines of the Proposed Development and from where it is judged that potential significant effects on key characteristics and/or special qualities are unlikely to occur;
- Effects on views from routes and settlements beyond a 20 km radius from the outermost wind turbines of the Proposed Development and where the potential for significant visual and sequential effects is limited, unless otherwise stated; and
- Cumulative effects in relation to turbines under 50 m to blade tip height and single turbines beyond 5 km from the outermost wind turbines of the Proposed Development (except where otherwise stated).

Design Parameters

6.2.8 Potential landscape and visual effects associated with the Proposed Development were a key consideration in the design evolution, to be balanced against on-site constraints (including deeper areas of peat) and maximising wind yield. Landscape and visual objectives included the consideration of effects on residential visual amenity from nearby

properties and how the Proposed Development will interact with nearby operational and consented/ proposed wind farms as shown on **Figure 6.1.6**.

- 6.2.9 Micrositing of turbines (up to 50 m as specified in **Chapter 2: Proposed Development**) is considered unlikely to result in changes to predicted landscape or visual effects, and therefore will not materially alter the findings of this assessment.
- 6.2.10 Further information on the design process adopted for the Proposed Development is included in **Chapter 2**.

Baseline Survey Methodology

- 6.2.11 Field survey work was carried out during several visits to the Study Area under differing weather conditions between February 2021 and August 2021, and records were made in the form of field notes and photographs. Field survey work included visits to the site, viewpoints, designated landscapes, and extensive travel around the Study Area to consider potential effects on landscape character and on experiences of views seen from designated landscapes, settlements and routes.

Methodology for the Assessment of Effects

- 6.2.12 The significance of the potential effects of the Development has been determined by professional consideration of the sensitivity of the receptor and the magnitude of the potential effect.

Sensitivity of Receptors

- 6.2.13 The sensitivity of the baseline conditions, including the importance of environmental features on or near to the Site or the sensitivity of potentially affected receptors, was assessed in line with best practice guidance, legislation, statutory designations and professional judgement.
- 6.2.14 Judgements regarding the sensitivity of landscape or visual receptors require consideration of both the susceptibility of the receptor to the type of development proposed and the value attached to the landscape or visual resource. Judgements are recorded as high, medium, low or negligible. Detailed information about the approach to assessment of sensitivity is provided in **Appendix A6.1**.

Magnitude of Effect

- 6.2.15 The magnitude of potential effects was identified through consideration of the degree of change to baseline conditions predicted as a result of the Development, the duration and reversibility of an effect. This professional judgement was made in line with best practice guidance and legislation.
- 6.2.16 Judgements regarding the magnitude of landscape or visual change are recorded as high, medium, low or negligible and combine an assessment of the scale and geographical extent of the landscape or visual effect, its duration and reversibility. Detailed information about the approach to assessment of magnitude is provided in **Appendix A6.1**.

Significance of Effect

- 6.2.17 The sensitivity of the landscape or visual receptor and the magnitude of the predicted effects is used as a guide, informed by professional judgement, to predict the significance of the likely effects.
- 6.2.18 **Appendix A6.1** provides full details of the criteria considered in judging the identified aspects of sensitivity (susceptibility and value) and magnitude of change (size/scale, geographical extent, duration and reversibility), and the grades used to describe each.
- 6.2.19 Although a numerical or formal weighting system is not applied, consideration of the relative importance of each aspect is made to feed into the overall decision. Levels of effect are identified as negligible, minor, moderate or major where moderate and major effects are considered significant in the context of the EIA Regulations.
- 6.2.20 This determination requires the application of professional judgement and experience to take on board the many different variables which need to be considered, and which are given different weight according to site-specific and location-specific considerations in every instance. Judgements were made on a case by case basis, guided by the principles set out in **Diagram 1** in **Appendix A6.1**.
- 6.2.21 In terms of the nature of effects (positive or adverse) there is a wide spectrum of opinion with regard to wind energy development. Taking a precautionary stance, effects are assumed to be adverse, unless stated otherwise.

Assessment Limitations

- 6.2.22 No substantial information gaps were identified during the preparation of baseline information or undertaking of the assessment, and it is considered that there is sufficient information to enable an informed decision to be taken in relation to the identification and assessment of likely significant effects on landscape, views and visual amenity.

Embedded Mitigation

- 6.2.23 Landscape and visual effects are reduced by the embedded mitigation measures described in **Chapter 2**.

Visualisation Methodology

- 6.2.24 The methodology for production of the visualisations was based on current good practice guidance as set out by SNH¹⁵. Detailed information about the approach to viewpoint photography, ZTV and visualisation production is provided in **Appendix A6.1**.

6.3 Consultation undertaken

- 6.3.1 Consultation for this EIA Report topic was undertaken with the organisations shown in **Table 6.1**.

Table 6.1: Consultation Undertaken

¹⁵ SNH (2017). Visual Representation of Wind Farms Guidance. Version 2.2. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-09/Guidance%20-%20Visual%20representation%20of%20wind%20farms%20-%20Feb%202017.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/21)

| Type and Date | Type and Date Summary of Consultation Response | Response to Consultee |
|--|---|---|
| NatureScot | | |
| Scoping Response, 09/04/2020 | Advised that a detailed Study Area of 15 to 20 km within the initial 45 km Study Area is unlikely to capture all likely significant landscape and visual effects due to the height of turbines. | Whilst the LVIA tends to focus on effects on landscape character and designated landscapes within a 20 km radius, where there is potential for significant effects to occur in the wider area then this was considered. |
| | Requested further consultation on finalised viewpoints. Advised that careful consideration be given to those viewpoints for which wireframes only are provided. Recommended that further viewpoints within Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (35) Wild Land Area (WLA) and Reay – Cassley (34) WLA be included. | Further consultation was given to viewpoint locations, see below. |
| | Advised that draft 2017 guidance on assessing effects on WLAs should be used, rather than 2007 guidance as updated in 2014. Recommended consulting further on the application of the wild land methodology. | Guidance published in 2020 supersedes draft 2017 guidance and is used in the assessment, see below. |
| | Advised that the night time assessment should include a ZTV showing extent of visibility of lighting; a narrative describing effects on proposed lighting on landscape sensitivities; consideration of available mitigation; and a small number of visualisations demonstrating the effects of proposed lighting, including from within WLAs. | The night time assessment includes the requested elements. |
| | Advised that effects on WLAs are likely to be significant and may be to an extent that an objection is warranted by NatureScot. | Effects on WLA are considered in Appendix A6.3. The WLAs which were carried forward for detailed assessment were agreed through consultation with NatureScot. |
| LVIA Consultation Response (05/10/2020) | Advised that design objectives to contain views from the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (35) WLA do not go far enough to minimise effects of the Proposed | Effects on Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (35) WLA are considered in Appendix A6.3. |

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| | Development on WLAs surrounding the turbine area. | |
| | Welcomed the proposal to seek a reduced lighting scheme, but advised that smaller proposal without the need for aviation lighting would reduce effects on the surrounding highly sensitive landscapes. | Effects associated with permanent aviation lighting are considered in Appendix A6.2. |
| | Advised including Ben Sgeireach and Track to Loch Sgeireach. No further comments on viewpoint locations. | Viewpoints from Ben Sgeireach and Track to Loch Sgeireach are included in the assessment. |
| | Agreed that all of the qualities of the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest WLA be included for detailed assessment. Advised that the quality ' <i>A remote, secluded interior with very few human elements and a strong perception of sanctuary and solitude</i> ' for the Foinaven – Ben Hee (37) WLA be included for detailed assessment. | The identified quality of the Foinaven – Ben Hee (37) WLA are included in the assessment. |
| | Advised that 2020 guidance on Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas ¹⁶ should be applied to the Proposed Development, as this supersedes 2017 draft guidance. | 2020 guidance on Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas used within assessment. |
| Cumulative Consultation Response, 05/05/2021 | Content with final viewpoint list. Advised that THC be consulted regarding the inclusion of cumulative sites. | THC also consulted, see below. |
| WLA Dusk Visualisation Response 13/05/2021 | Content that dusk photography from the Ben Klibreck WLA track to Loch Choire Viewpoint (WLA Dusk Viewpoint 1) was not safe to capture due to ground conditions. Suggest that a wireline is provided from this viewpoint. | A wireline from this viewpoint, which indicates the location of hub permanent aviation lighting, is provided. A dusk montage, using manipulated day time photography, is also provided, for indicative use only. |
| Cumulative Final Consultation Response 29/08/2021 | Content with final cumulative list. Advised that THC be consulted regarding the inclusion of cumulative sites. | THC also consulted, see below. |

¹⁶ NatureScot (2020). Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas Technical Guidance. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2020-09/Guidance%20-%20Assessing%20impacts%20on%20Wild%20Land%20Areas%20-%20technical%20guidance.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/21)

| THC | | |
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| Scoping Response, 27/04/2020 | Requested photomontages compliant with THC Visualisation Standards. | Compliant visuals are provided to THC standards, refer to Figures 6THC.2.1 – 6THC.2.12. |
| | Requested the assessment of all elements of the Proposed Development, including the effects of on-site borrow pits and access roads. | Likely effects from all elements of the Proposed Development are included within the assessment. |
| | Recommended using THC Wind Turbine map to inform the inclusion of schemes within the cumulative assessment. | THC Wind Turbine map was referred to when determining schemes for inclusion in the cumulative assessment. |
| | Recommended consulting with ECU to identify schemes at scoping stage which may progress at the same pace at the Proposed Development. | A cut-off date of 27/08/2021 was applied for schemes included within the cumulative assessment; any schemes still at scoping stage on this date are not included. |
| | Requested additional viewpoints from Falls of Shin, Morven, Rogart. Advised that consideration would need to be given to effects on Wild Land Areas (WLAs) and that this assessment would require sufficient viewpoints within the WLAs which are likely to be affected by the Proposed Development. Advised that viewpoints should be agreed with NatureScot and THC. | Further consultation on viewpoint requests undertaken, see below. Additional viewpoints within WLAs are included within the assessment. |
| | Requested a consideration of effects on Special Landscape Areas (SLAs). | Included within assessment. |
| | Agreed with 45 km Study Area and advised that a detailed assessment of effects should be undertaken across the whole Study Area. | Whilst the LVIA tends to focus on effects on landscape character and designated landscapes within a 20 km radius, where there is potential for significant effects in the wider area, these are considered. |
| | Requested the assessment of effects on all core paths, the national cycle network, long distance trails and the North Coast 500 route if effects are considered likely. | Effects on recreational routes across the Study Area are included within the assessment. |

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| | Advised that the Study Area for the CLVIA should extend to a minimum of 35 km from the Proposed Development. | CLVIA Study Area extends to 45 km from the Proposed Development. |
| | Requested an assessment of the Proposed Development against the criteria included in THC Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance ¹⁷ (OWESG). | Included within assessment. |
| | Effects on residential visual amenity and effects arising from night time aviation lighting should be considered. | Included within assessment. |
| LVIA Consultation Response | Consulted on 22/09/2020, no response received. | - |
| Cumulative Consultation Response | Consulted on 05/05/2021, no response received. | - |
| Cumulative Final Consultation Response, 07/09/2021 | Not aware of any obvious omissions from the cumulative study. Context with scope of LVIA, to be confirmed through Gatecheck. | - |
| Mountaineering Scotland | | |
| Scoping Response, 17/03/2020 | Agreed with proposed mountain viewpoints (Ben Klibreck, Ben Hee, Ben Armine and Assynt). Agreed that a full wild land assessment is required for the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest WLA. | No further comment. |
| ScotWays | | |
| Scoping Response, 15/04/2020 | Advised that Right of Way HS29, Scottish Hill Track 341 Lairg to Crask Inn by Loch Choire and Heritage Path 308 Strath Tirry to Badenloch Tracks pass in close proximity to the turbine area. Advised that Core Path Plans should be consulted to determine whether the Proposed | Assessment of effects on identified paths are included within the assessment. |

¹⁷ The Highland Council (2017), Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, November 2016 (with addendum, December 2017). [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712079/onshore_wind_energy (Accessed 14/04/2021)

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| | Development is likely to result in effects on core paths. | |
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6.4 Statutory and planning context

6.4.1 The following guidance, legislation and information sources are considered in carrying out this assessment. For full details on planning policy of relevance refer to **Chapter 5, Planning Policy Context**.

Legislation and Assessment Guidance

- The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017¹⁸;
- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3)¹⁹;
- Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments²⁰;
- A Handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment, Appendix 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Version 5²¹;
- Visual Representation of Wind Farms, Version 2.2²²;
- Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments²³;
- Technical Guidance Note 06/19 Visual representation of development proposals²⁴;
- Technical Guidance Note 2/19: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA)²⁵;
- Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas – technical guidance²⁶;

¹⁸ The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017. London: HMSO [Online] Available at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/101/contents/made> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

¹⁹ Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment (2013), Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3)

²⁰ Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (2012), Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/guidance-assessing-cumulative-impact-onshore-wind-energy-developments> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

²¹ SNH (2018), A Handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment, Appendix 2: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Version 5. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-05/Publication%202018%20-%20Environmental%20Impact%20Assessment%20Handbook%20V5.pdf> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

²² SNH (2017), Visual Representation of Wind Farms, Version 2.2. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/visual-representation-wind-farms-guidance> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

²³ The Highland Council (THC) (2016), Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments. [Online] Available at: http://www.highland.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/12880/visualisation_standards_for_wind_energy_developments.pdf (Accessed 13/04/2021)

²⁴ Landscape Institute (2019), Technical Guidance Note 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 13/04/2021)

²⁵ Landscape Institute (2019), Technical Guidance Note 2/19: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA). [Online] Available at: <https://landscapewpstorage01.blob.core.windows.net/www-landscapeinstitute-org/2019/03/tgn-02-2019-rvaa.pdf> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

²⁶ SNH (2020), Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2020-09/Guidance%20-%20Assessing%20impacts%20on%20Wild%20Land%20Areas%20-%20technical%20guidance.pdf> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

- General pre-application and scoping advice for onshore wind farms²⁷; and
- Guidance for Assessing Effects on Special Qualities and Special Landscape Qualities. Working Draft 11²⁸.

Design and Locational Guidance

- Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape, Version 3²⁹;
- Policy Statement No 02/02: Strategic Locational Guidance for Onshore Windfarms in Respect of the National Heritage³⁰;
- Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – natural heritage considerations, Guidance³¹;
- Good Practice During Windfarm Construction, Version 3³²; and
- Constructed Tracks in the Scottish Uplands, 2nd Edition³³.

Local Development Plans and Supplementary Planning Guidance

- Highland-Wide Local Development Plan³⁴;
- Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan³⁵; and
- Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, November 2016 (with addendum, December 2017)³⁶.

Data Sources

- Ordnance Survey (OS) Landranger 1:50,000 scale and Pathfinder 1:25,000 scale maps; and
- Online map search engines.

²⁷ SNH (2020), General pre-application and scoping advice for onshore wind farms. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/general-pre-application-and-scoping-advice-onshore-wind-farms> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

²⁸ SNH (unpublished, 2018). Guidance for Assessing Effects on Special Qualities and Special Landscape Qualities. Working Draft 11

²⁹ SNH (2017), Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape, Version 3. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/siting-and-designing-wind-farms-landscape-version-3a> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

³⁰ SNH (2009), Policy Statement No 02/02: Strategic Locational Guidance for Onshore Windfarms in Respect of the National Heritage.

³¹ SNH (2015), Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – natural heritage considerations, Guidance. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-10/Guidance%20-%20Spatial%20Planning%20for%20Onshore%20Wind%20Turbines%20-%20natural%20heritage%20considerations%20-%20June%202015.pdf> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

³² SNH (2015), Good Practice During Windfarm Construction, Version 3. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/guidance-good-practice-during-wind-farm-construction> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

³³ SNH (2015), Constructed Tracks in the Scottish Uplands, 2nd Edition. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/Publication%202015%20-%20Constructed%20tracks%20in%20the%20Scottish%20Uplands.pdf> (Accessed 13/04/2021)

³⁴ The Highland Council (2012), Highland-Wide Local Development Plan. [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan (Accessed 13/04/2021)

³⁵ The Highland Council (2018), Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan. [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/19712/casplan_adopted (Accessed 14/04/2021)

³⁶ The Highland Council (2017), Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, November 2016 (with addendum, December 2017). [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/712079/onshore_wind_energy (Accessed 14/04/2021)

Modelling

- OS Terrain® 5 height data (DTM);
- OS Terrain® 50 height data (DTM);
- Raster Data at 1:50,000 (to show surface details such as roads, forest and settlement detail equivalent to the 1:50,000 scale Landranger maps); and
- Raster Data at 1:250,000 (to provide a more general location map).

Cumulative Assessment

- Data from other wind farm applications³⁷.

6.5 Existing Landscape and Visual Context

Landscape Baseline Conditions

Introduction

- 6.5.1 This section presents an overview of the landscape baseline covering current landscape character (including constituent landscape elements), landscape condition and any designations attached to the landscape.

The Turbine Area and Context

- 6.5.2 The context of the turbine area and detailed information on the Proposed Development is provided in **Chapter 2** and shown on **Figure 2.2**.
- 6.5.3 The turbine area is located approximately 10 km to the north of Lairg, as shown on **Figure 6.1.1**. It is located within the boundaries of THC.
- 6.5.4 The turbine area is located on the lower slopes of a rounded hill above an area of sweeping moorland and flows to the east of Strath Tirry. This hill forms part of the south-western edge of the Ben Armine Forest and is one of the lower-lying hills in the surrounding area. The landform of the turbine area slopes down to the south-west, away from the ridge to the north and north-east formed by the hills of Sron Leathad Chleainsaid and Creag Dhubh which runs north-west to south-east. The topography across the turbine area ranges from approximately 200 m AOD at the south-eastern extent to a high point of 392 m AOD, at the summit of Sron Leathad Chleainsaid at the north-eastern boundary.
- 6.5.5 There are a number of watercourses across the turbine area, most notably the Allt nan Con-uisge which flows through a valley in the south-western part of the turbine area. The River Brora is situated adjacent to the eastern boundary of the turbine area, and the Allt nan Con-uisge flows into this river near Dalnessie to the south-east.
- 6.5.6 Coniferous forestry influences the character of the surrounding landscape, with blocks of forest located to the south and west of the turbine area. The current land cover of the turbine area comprises open moorland.
- 6.5.7 The closest settlement to the turbine area is Lairg, located approximately 10 km south of the turbine area. There are a number of individual properties and small clusters of

³⁷ A cut-off date of 27 August 2021 was applied for the inclusion of developments within the cumulative assessment.

properties in the surrounding area, including at Dalnessie, approximately 1 km to the south-east of the application boundary, and Rhian, 5 km west of the turbine area.

- 6.5.8 There are no formal tracks or paths through the turbine area. Right of Way HS29, which is designated as a Heritage Path and Scottish Hill Track, passes to the east.

Landscape of the Study Area

- 6.5.9 The Study Area, shown on **Figure 6.1.1**, extends to a 45 km radius from the outermost turbines of the Proposed Development in all directions. The full extent of the Study Area is contained within the boundaries of THC. It extends to the north coast at Skerry to the north; the east coast at Helmsdale and the Dornoch Firth to the east; Loch Glass in the south; and Assynt in the west. The landscape character of the Study Area is varied, and includes farmland, open moorland, straths, lochs and mountain ranges.
- 6.5.10 The surrounding landscape character is primarily influenced by the rolling moorland hills. Within the more immediate Study Area, coniferous forestry is also a prominent feature. There are large blocks of forestry on the adjacent lower-lying hills to the south and west, as well as more scattered blocks to the north and east. Much has been felled and some replanted in recent years, giving the landscape a somewhat degraded appearance.
- 6.5.11 The nearest residential properties are approximately 1 km south-east of the proposed turbine area at Dalnessie, and there are other residential properties within approximately 5 km at Rhian to the west. The settlement of Lairg is situated approximately 10 km to the south. Within the wider Study Area, settlement is generally sparse. The main transport routes within the Study Area include the A9 and the Far North Railway Line between Inverness and Wick.
- 6.5.12 The closest commercial scale wind farm to the turbine area is Strath Tirry Wind Farm, for which an application was submitted in December 2020. The relationship of the Proposed Development with consented and application stage wind farms is considered in more detail in the cumulative assessment. The nearest operational wind farm is Lairg, 12 km to the south.
- 6.5.13 There are a number of large scale operational, under construction, consented and proposed wind farms across the Study Area, as shown on **Figure 6.1.6**. These include Strathy Wood, Strathy North and Strathy South to the north; Gordonbush and its extension and Kintradwell to the east; Kilbraur and its extension and South Kilbraur to the south-east; Lairg, Lairg II and Garvary to the south and Beinn nan Oighrean, Beinn Tharsuinn, Coire na Cloiche, Strathrory and Novar Phase 1 & 2 further south; Braemore, Rosehall, Achany and Achany Extension to the south-west with Meall Buidhe further south-west; and Sallachy to the west and Creag Rhiabhach, which is under construction, to the north-west.

Landscape Character Types

- 6.5.14 This section provides a description of landscape character (including constituent landscape elements), drawing on published studies, supplemented with project specific research and field work where relevant.

- 6.5.15 In 2019 SNH made available via their website an updated national Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) for Scotland³⁸. This LCA has been used to inform the assessment.
- 6.5.16 The south-western part of the turbine area is classified as Sweeping Moorland and Flows (134) LCT, while the north-eastern part is classified as Rounded Hills (135) LCT.
- 6.5.17 The LCTs within the Study Area are illustrated on **Figure 6.1.4a**. Consideration of the key characteristics; influence of existing operational wind farms; and potential relationship with the Proposed Development (including the extent of the ZTV and actual visibility on the ground – refer to **Figure 6.1.4b**) is used as a means of identifying which LCTs require further assessment, and which LCTs can be scoped out because they are unlikely to experience significant effects arising from the Proposed Development. LCTs beyond 20 km from the turbine area, and those with limited actual visibility within 20 km of the Site, are not considered further within the assessment. Details are provided in **Table 6.2**, with LCTs to be included shown in bold.

Table 6.2: Landscape Character Types

| Landscape Character Types | Theoretical visibility of Proposed Development (ZTV coverage) and other considerations to determine if LCT carried forward for detailed assessment |
|--|--|
| 134. Sweeping Moorland and Flows | The turbine area is located in this LCT and there is widespread theoretical visibility within 20 km – considered further. |
| 135. Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland | The northern fringes of the turbine area are within this LCT and there is widespread theoretical visibility within 20 km – considered further. |
| 136. Rocky Hills and Moorland | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 137. Cnocan – Caithness & Sutherland | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 138. Lone Mountains | Widespread theoretical visibility across hill flanks facing the turbine area, within 20 km – considered further. |
| 139. Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland | Somewhat limited theoretical visibility across hill flanks facing the turbine area, beyond 20 km. From limited areas with theoretical visibility, long distance and large scale views which typically reveal views of wider operational wind farms are available. As such, effects on landscape character associated with the Proposed Development are unlikely to be significant. Visual effects from these areas are |

³⁸ SNH (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 14/04/2021)

| | |
|--|--|
| | considered through viewpoints from Ben Hee and Assynt – LCT not considered further. |
| 140. Sandy Beaches and Dunes | Very limited theoretical visibility beyond 20 km with key views orientated over the Dornoch Firth (opposite direction from turbine area) – not considered further. |
| 141. High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays | Very limited theoretical visibility beyond 20 km with key views orientated over the Dornoch Firth (opposite direction from turbine area) – not considered further. |
| 142. Strath – Caithness & Sutherland | Widespread theoretical visibility across parts, particularly to the south-west and within 10 km - considered further. |
| 144. Coastal Crofts & Small Farms | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 145. Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting | Widespread theoretical visibility, including within 20 km and around the settlement of Lairg - considered further. |
| 146. Coastland Farmland & Woodlands | Limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 328. Rugged Mountain Massif – Ross & Cromarty | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 329. Rounded Mountain Massif | Theoretical visibility across higher ground and north-facing hill slopes; however, this is beyond 20 km and views of intervening operational wind farms between this LCT and the turbine area have already altered outward views, with associated effects on landscape character – not considered further. |
| 330. Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes – Ross & Cromarty | Theoretical visibility across hill flanks and slopes facing the turbine area; however, this is beyond 20 km. Furthermore, operational wind farms within this LCT have already altered the landscape character – not considered further. |
| 332. High Rocky Moorland and Plateau – Ross & Cromarty | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 333. Rocky Moorland and Rugged Hills | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 334. Cnocan – Ross & Cromarty | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 339. Inland Strath | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 340. Strath – Ross & Cromarty | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 341. Forest Edge Farming | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 343. Coastal Shelf | Limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 344. Lowland Farmed Plain – Ross & Cromarty | Theoretical visibility across parts; however, this is beyond 20 km and views of intervening operational wind farms between this LCT and the turbine area have already altered outward views, with associated effects on landscape character – not considered further. |
| 345. Farmed and Forested Slopes – Ross & Cromarty | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| 348. Cliffs and Rocky Coasts – Ross & Cromarty | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |

Designated Landscapes and Wild Land Areas

- 6.5.18 The turbine area is not within any designated landscapes, although there are several landscape designations within the 45 km Study Area, including National Scenic Areas (NSAs) and a number of local landscape designations. These are shown on **Figure 6.1.5a** and are listed in **Table 6.3** below.
- 6.5.19 Wild Land Areas (WLA) are not designated but are identified and mapped, with accompanying WLA descriptions published by SNH in January 2017³⁹, and are considered sensitive to development. They are afforded ‘areas of significant protection’ status within SPP (Table 1, Page 39, SPP) which states that development proposed within these areas should ‘demonstrate that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation’. WLAs are shown alongside designated landscapes on **Figure 6.1.5a** and are listed in **Table 6.3** below.
- 6.5.20 The ZTV for the Proposed Development, along with an understanding of actual visibility on the ground, as well as the special qualities of each area, is used as a means of identifying which designated landscapes and WLAs require further assessment. **Figure 6.1.5b** shows the ZTV at blade tip height (180 m for T12 – T15, 200 m for T1 – T11 and T16) across designated landscapes and WLAs within the 45 km Study Area. Details are provided in **Table 6.3**, with designated landscapes to be included shown in bold.
- 6.5.21 An assessment of the likely effects of the Proposed Development on WLAs which require further assessment, based on the findings listed in **Table 6.3**, is contained within **Appendix A6.3**.

Table 6.3: Designated Landscapes and WLA within the Study Area

³⁹ SNH (2017) Wild Land Area descriptions. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/wild-land-area-descriptions> (Accessed 14/04/2021).

| Designated Landscape | Theoretical visibility of Proposed Development (ZTV coverage) and other considerations to determine if Landscape Designation carried forward for detailed assessment |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| National Scenic Areas | |
| Dornoch Firth | Very limited theoretical visibility, mainly focused to offshore areas at the eastern end of the NSA and beyond 25 km – not considered further. |
| Assynt – Coigach | Theoretical visibility across eastern extents; however, this is beyond 25 km and from elevated areas which offer long distance and large scale views in which operational wind farms area already a feature. Visual effects from these areas are considered from viewpoint from summit of Assynt. NSA not considered further. |
| Kyle of Tongue | Very limited theoretical visibility and largely beyond 25 km – not considered further. |
| North-West Sutherland | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 30 km – not considered further. |
| Special Landscape Areas (SLA) | |
| Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire | Theoretical visibility across parts within 20 km – considered further. |
| Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth | Limited theoretical visibility focused along north-western fringes and beyond 20 km. Operational wind farms to the immediate north-west of this SLA have already altered the landscape context – not considered further. |
| Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencalvie | Limited theoretical visibility from hill flanks facing the turbine area beyond 30 km – not considered further. |
| Bens Griam and Loch nan Clar | Very limited theoretical visibility across parts within 20 km – not considered further. |
| The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast | Limited theoretical visibility from western fringes and beyond 30 km – not considered further. |
| Eriboll East and Whiten Head | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 40 km – not considered further. |
| Ben Wyvis | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 40 km – not considered further. |
| Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 40 km – not considered further. |
| Wild Land Areas (WLA) | |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Rhiddoroch – Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis | Limited and intermittent theoretical visibility and beyond 25 km – not considered further. |
| Inverpolly – Glencanisp | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 35 km – not considered further. |
| Quinag | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 35 km – not considered further. |
| Reay Cassley | Widespread theoretical visibility within 20 km – considered further. |
| Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest | Widespread theoretical visibility within 20 km – considered further. |
| Causeymire – Knockfin Flows | Theoretical visibility across western extents; however, this is largely beyond 30 km – not considered further. |
| Foinaven – Ben Hee | Widespread theoretical visibility within 20 km – considered further. |
| Ben Hope – Ben Loyal | Very limited theoretical visibility and beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| East Halladale Flows | Very limited theoretical visibility and largely beyond 45 km – not considered further. |

Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Regional Parks and Country Parks

- 6.5.22 There are no Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDL) within 20 km of the outermost turbines although there are several within the 45 km Study Area, as shown on **Figure 6.1.5a**. The closest GDL is Dunrobin Castle, which lies beyond 25 km to the south-east and is not within the ZTV as shown on **Figure 6.1.5b**. There are five other GDLs within the study area, none of which are within the ZTV. Further information on effects on the setting of GDLs is provided in **Chapter 7: Cultural Heritage and Archaeology**.
- 6.5.23 There are no Country Parks, Regional Parks or Dark Sky Parks within the Study Area, and these are not considered further within the LVIA.

Visual Baseline Conditions

Introduction

- 6.5.24 This section identifies the extent of potential visibility of the Proposed Development and identifies visual receptors that are assessed as part of the LVIA. This section also introduces the viewpoints that are used as representative points from which to assess effects on visual receptors (people) and particular views, including reasons for their selection.

Analysis of Visibility of the Development

- 6.5.25 **Figure 6.1.2a** and **Figure 6.1.2b** show the theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development to maximum wind turbine blade tip height (180 m for T12 – T15 and 200 m

for T1 – T11 and T16) and hub height (98.5 m for T12 – T15 and 118.5 m for T1 – T11 and T16) respectively.

- 6.5.26 The ZTV indicates that across the Study Area theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is more widespread within 5 km. Beyond this, theoretical visibility is focussed on higher ground to the north and south of Loch Shin, west of the turbine area; on south-facing hill flanks within the Ben Klibreck and Armine Forest ranges to the north; and on higher ground to the west of the Dornoch Firth to the south. Scattered, intermittent visibility is indicated across higher ground to the east, south and west of the Study Area. Visibility from northern parts of the Study Area will be limited by high ground to the north of the turbine area.

Key Visual Receptors

- 6.5.27 Potential visual receptors include:
- Residents, including views from isolated properties or settlements;
 - Road users (including tourists);
 - Those engaged in recreational activities (e.g. hill walkers and cyclists); and
 - People at their place of work, including agricultural workers.

Selection of Viewpoints for Assessment

- 6.5.28 This section sets out the viewpoints that are used to represent and assess the visual effects of the Proposed Development. The viewpoint list is a representative selection of locations agreed with the statutory consultees; it is not an exhaustive list of locations from which the Proposed Development will be visible.
- 6.5.29 A total of 15 viewpoints were selected across the 45 km Study Area through desk study, site work and discussions with statutory consultees. These viewpoints are all publicly accessible, as advocated by GLVIA3, and include:
- Locations selected to represent the experience of different types of receptor;
 - Locations at different distances to provide a representative range of viewing angles and distances (i.e., short, medium and long distance views);
 - Locations which illustrate key cumulative interactions with other existing, consented and/or proposed wind farms (either in combination or succession);
 - Locations which represent a range of viewing experiences (i.e., static views and points along sequential routes);
 - Specific viewpoints selected because they represent promoted views or viewpoints within the landscape; and
 - Illustrative viewpoints chosen specifically to demonstrate a particular visual effect or specific issue (which could include restricted visibility in particular locations).
- 6.5.30 The viewpoints are listed in Table 6.4 and shown alongside the blade tip height ZTV on **Figure 6.1.2a**.

Table 6.4: Viewpoint Locations

| No. | Location | Receptors represented | Grid Reference | Approx. Distance (km) ⁴⁰ |
|-----|--|--|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Right of Way near Dalnessie | Recreational users of the Right of Way and residential receptors at Dalnessie. Effects on residential visual amenity have also been considered from the small property cluster here. | 263137, 915279 | 1.53 km |
| 2 | A836 Rhian Bridge | Road users along the A836 and residential receptors at Rhian. | 256312, 916632 | 4.43 km |
| 3 | Saval, Lairg | Residential receptors to the north of Lairg. | 258773, 908502 | 7.96 km |
| 4 | Dalchork Bird Hide | Recreational receptors including birdwatchers. | 256832, 909373 | 8.15 km |
| 5 | The Ord above Ferrycroft Visitors Centre | Recreational receptors including visitors to the archaeological site at the Ord. | 257400, 905563 | 11.2 km |
| 6 | Torroble | Representative of residential receptors on higher ground to the east of the A836. Sequential views from the A836 are somewhat limited by roadside vegetation. A night time assessment, with supporting visualisation, was also prepared from this location (refer to Appendix A6.2). | 258725, 903925 | 12.34 km |
| 7 | Rhilochan | Road users and scattered residential receptors within Strath Brora, north-west of Rhilochan. | 272920, 908934 | 13.05 km |
| 8 | Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers. | 258524, 929910 | 11.16 km |
| 9 | Ben Armine | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers. | 269518, 927236 | 12.07 km |
| 10 | Reay – Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers. | 245356, 911822 | 16.36 km |
| 11 | Ben Hee | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers. | 242654, 933940 | 23.35 km |

⁴⁰ Distance between viewpoint and the nearest wind turbine of the Proposed Development.

| | | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---|----------------|----------|
| 12 | Ben More Assynt | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers. | 231815, 920123 | 28.75 km |
| WLA VP1 | Ben Klibreck WLA track to Loch Choire | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers. This viewpoint was requested by NatureScot specifically to consider effects on the WLA and night time effects. Refer to Appendix A6.2 for night time assessment and Appendix A6.3 for WLA assessment. | 261835, 923100 | 4.26 km |
| WLA VP2 | Track to Loch Sgeireach | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers and anglers. This viewpoint was requested by NatureScot specifically to consider effects on the WLA and night time effects. Refer to Appendix A6.2 for night time assessment and Appendix A6.3 for WLA assessment. | 250278, 912667 | 11.5 km |
| WLA VP3 | Cnoc Allt an Ulbhaidh | Recreational receptors including hillwalkers. This viewpoint was requested by NatureScot specifically to consider effects on the WLA and night time effects. Refer to Appendix A6.2 for night time assessment and Appendix A6.3 for WLA assessment. | 247357, 926461 | 15.19 km |

Settlements

- 6.5.31 Within 20 km, there are various dispersed small property clusters. Due to their size these small property clusters are not considered further. Within 20 km, the key larger settlements are Rogart and Lairg. The ZTV indicates that theoretical visibility from both will be very limited, as shown on **Figure 6.1.2a** and **b**.
- 6.5.32 From the centre of Lairg, including the central thoroughfare and loch side locations, higher ground to the north of the settlement screens views in this direction, and views towards the turbine area are very limited. The LVIA includes three viewpoints which represent views towards the Proposed Development from the wider surroundings of Lairg: from the A836 on the southern approach to Lairg (VP6); from the Ord, a popular minor summit to the south-east of Lairg (VP5); and from a minor summit near Saval, to the north of Lairg (VP3). These all represent locations surrounding and outside the main core of the settlement. Effects on visual receptors at these locations are considered further within the viewpoint assessment.
- 6.5.33 Rogart lies to the south-east of the turbine area, on lower ground alongside the Garbh-allt watercourse to the north of Strath Fleet. Higher ground to the north and west of the

settlement largely screens views towards the turbine area, and theoretical visibility is very limited, as shown in **Figure 6.1.2a** and **b**.

- 6.5.34 Due to the limited opportunity for views towards the turbine area from both these larger settlements, effects on settlements are not considered further, albeit the approach to and departure from Lairg are considered, as noted above.

Residential Visual Amenity

- 6.5.35 An examination of effects on views from residential properties within 2 km of the nearest wind turbine of the Proposed Development was undertaken. This is limited to the small property cluster at Dalnessie, which is considered under VP1.

Routes

- 6.5.36 Visibility from a route is not uniform along its entire length. This is because views of the surrounding landscape change as one moves along the route depending on the surrounding topography, buildings, structures, tree cover and vegetation along the route. Theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development from routes across the Study Area is illustrated by **Figure 6.1.2a**. The routes include a hierarchy of roads, railways and recreational routes (promoted long distance footpaths, core paths and cycle routes). Road and rail routes tend to use low lying areas or valleys and passes, but walking routes are more variable and can pass over hills and along ridges.
- 6.5.37 Based on an analysis of theoretical visibility and potential views, **Table 6.5** provides information on which routes are carried forward for detailed assessment (highlighted in bold). Due to their lower receptor susceptibility, roads and railways beyond 10 km from the turbine area are scoped out from this table. Due to the higher susceptibility of receptors using promoted long distance footpaths and cycle routes, these are included up to 20 km from the outermost turbines. Core Paths and rights of way within 5 km of the proposed turbines are mapped. Where there is limited theoretical visibility, or where actual visibility from a route is likely to be limited due to localised screening, these routes are not considered further in this LVIA, as the likelihood for significant sequential effects is limited.

Table 6.5: Routes within the Study Area

| Route | Theoretical visibility of Proposed Development (ZTV coverage) and other considerations to determine if route carried forward for detailed assessment |
|-------------------------|---|
| A836 (and NCN 1) | Widespread theoretical visibility within 20 km – considered further. |
| A838 | Theoretical visibility within 10 km along a short stretch of the route at its eastern extent, near the junction with the A836; beyond this theoretical visibility is very limited – not considered further. |
| A839 | Theoretical visibility within 10 km along a short stretch of the route on the approach to Lairg; woodland to the north of the route |

| | |
|---|--|
| | may filter/ screen views towards the turbine area along this stretch. Beyond this, theoretical visibility is very limited – not considered further. |
| B873 | Very limited theoretical visibility and largely beyond 20 km – not considered further. |
| Far North Railway Line | Theoretical visibility along a stretch of the route around Lairg Station, within 15 km to the south of Lairg. Actual visibility on the ground is likely to be reduced by coniferous forest to the north of the route – not considered further. |
| Core Paths and Right of Way HS29, Hill Track and Heritage Path to east of turbine area | Widespread theoretical visibility within 5 km – considered further. |

Other Wind Farm Development

Existing Wind Farm Development

- 6.5.38 There are a number of operational wind farms and wind farms under construction located across the Study Area, as listed in **Table 6.6** and shown on **Figure 6.1.6**. Operational wind farms and those under construction, as listed in **Table 6.6** below, are included as part of the baseline for the LVIA and considered as part of the primary LVIA assessment.

Identification of Developments included in the CLVIA

- 6.5.39 In accordance with SNH guidance⁴¹, the scope for the assessment of cumulative landscape and visual effects included wind farms and wind farm proposals within an initial 60 km radius search area from the Proposed Development, to identify the distribution of wind energy development in the wider area.
- 6.5.40 The assessment of effects focuses on developments that are likely to give rise to significant cumulative effects and concentrates on the relationship between the Proposed Development with other operational, consented and proposed developments (i.e., developments with a valid application or awaiting determination following appeal/public inquiry). In this instance it was not considered necessary to include other developments located beyond the 45 km Study Area, because of the limited scope for significant cumulative effects, which are more likely to be focused to wind farms within the more immediate landscape context.
- 6.5.41 In terms of scoping stage schemes, within the more immediate context, Dalchork Wind Farm scoped in 2013. The site is within 5 km in forested areas to the west of the Proposed Development. The 2013 scoping report⁴² for the project states that the proposed turbines will have a maximum tip height of 150 m (65 turbines proposed). The project information webpage⁴³ (which references environmental studies ongoing in 2020) for the project

⁴¹ SNH (2012). Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind energy developments.

⁴² https://wam.highland.gov.uk/wam/files/F9D324655D65C51BFA36C799E8730A15/pdf/13_01030_SCOP-SCOPING_REPORT-490495.pdf

⁴³ <https://uk-ireland.rwe.com/project-proposals/dalchork>

states that the number of planned turbines is 18, with a tip height of up to 210 m. Given the uncertainties around layout, and timescales involved in the pre planning process, it is unlikely that this project will progress quickly to application stage and this scheme has been scoped out of the cumulative assessment.

- 6.5.42 There are further scoping stage schemes in the wider context, including Strath Oykel (scoped at 16 turbine at 250 m to tip) which is beyond 22 km to the south-west, and located beyond intervening operational wind farms. Given the distance between these schemes, and intervening operational wind farms, the potential for significant additional cumulative interactions is limited.
- 6.5.43 Single turbines within 5 km of the outermost turbines of the Proposed Development were given consideration where it was judged that potential interactions with the Proposed Development may give rise to significant cumulative effects. Single turbines over 5 km are not considered.
- 6.5.44 Wind energy developments located within the 45 km radius Study Area which are considered likely to give rise to significant cumulative effects and therefore included in the CLVIA are selected as follows:
- Single wind turbines of ≥ 50 m blade tip height within a 5 km radius of the outermost proposed wind turbines; and
 - Wind farms (e.g., clusters of 2 or more wind turbines) with wind turbines of ≥ 50 m blade tip height within a 45 km radius of the outermost proposed wind turbines.
- 6.5.45 Consented wind farms and wind farms currently in the planning system are considered as part of the assessment of potential future cumulative effects and included in the CLVIA.
- 6.5.46 A cut-off date of 27th August 2021 was applied for the inclusion of developments within the cumulative assessment and the final list was agreed with statutory consultees (see **Table 6.1** for details). These developments are listed in **Table 6.6** below and shown on **Figure 6.1.6**.

Table 6.6: Other Wind Farm Developments in the Study Area

| Distance (km) ⁴⁴ | Name | Status | Blade Tip Height (m) | Number of Wind Turbines |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Operational and Under Construction | | | | |
| 13.83 | Creag Riabhach | Under Construction | 125 | 22 |
| 13.86 | Lairg | Operational | 99.5 | 3 |
| 16.81 | Achany | Operational | 102 | 19 |
| 18 | Rosehall | Operational | 90 | 19 |
| 20.38 | Kilbraur Extension | Operational | 125 | 8 |

⁴⁴ Approximate distance between the centre point of the Proposed Development and the centre point of the wind energy development listed.

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|-------|----|
| 20.7 | Kilbraur | Operational | 115 | 19 |
| 24.03 | Gordonbush Extension | Operational | 149.9 | 11 |
| 25.26 | Gordonbush | Operational | 110 | 35 |
| 35.57 | Beinn nan Oighrean | Operational | 99.5 | 2 |
| 36.4 | Beinn Tharsuinn | Operational | 80 | 17 |
| 37.55 | Coire na Cloiche | Operational | 99.5 | 13 |
| 44.23 | Strathy North | Operational | 107 | 33 |
| 44.63 | Bettyhill | Operational | 120 | 2 |
| 46.24 | Novar Phase1 | Operational | 55.5 | 34 |
| 46.76 | Novar Phase2 | Operational | 106 | 16 |
| Consented | | | | |
| 17.78 | Braemore | Consented | 125 | 18 |
| 15.15 | Lairg II | Consented (note the larger proposed scheme, see below, has been modelled into the visuals) | 180 | 10 |
| Proposed and Appeal / Public Inquiry | | | | |
| 4.63 | Strath Tirry | Application Submitted | 135 | 4 |
| 15.15 | Lairg II | Application Submitted ⁴⁵ | 200 | 10 |
| 17.46 | Achany Extension (formerly Glencassley) | Application Submitted | 149.9 | 20 |
| 17.71 | Garvary | Application Submitted | 180 | 37 |
| 19.49 | Sallachy | Application Submitted | 149.9 | 9 |
| 20.83 | South Kilbraur | Appeal/Public Inquiry | 149.9 | 7 |

⁴⁵ Variation of previously consented scheme. Consented following cumulative cut off.

| | | | | |
|-------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------|----|
| 27.3 | Meall Buidhe | Application Submitted | 149.9 | 8 |
| 28.84 | Kintradwell | Application Submitted | 149.9 | 15 |
| 37.83 | Strathy South | Application Submitted ⁴⁶ | 200 | 39 |
| 39.55 | Strathrory | Appeal/Public Inquiry ⁴⁷ | 180 | 8 |
| 43.2 | Strathy Wood | Appeal/Public Inquiry ⁴⁸ | 180 | 13 |

6.5.47 It should be noted that the baseline situation to the cumulative assessment is constantly evolving, and there may be changes to the status or list of wind energy developments considered between carrying out the assessment and the determination of the application. Unless there are substantial changes to proposals that will materially alter the pattern of cumulative development (such as the addition of a large wind farm located within a 10 km radius of the Proposed Development), it is considered that the cumulative assessment undertaken for the relevant landscape and visual receptors will remain relevant.

6.5.48 Although all of these wind farms are considered in the cumulative assessment, the assessment focuses on the relationship of the Proposed Development with the closest wind farms or groups of wind farms. For the cumulative assessment, these expanded wind farm groupings include:

- South-east wind farm group, which focuses on operational and appeal stage wind farms to the south-east, within 20 km;
- South-west wind farm group, which focuses on operational, consented and proposed wind farms to the south-west, within 20 km; and
- The under construction Creag Riabhach and proposed Strath Tirry and Sallachy, all located within 20 km to the north-west.

6.5.49 Given the varied status, and therefore certainty, associated with un-built wind farms across the Study Area the CLVIA is structured so as to report on two potential development scenarios:

- Scenario 1: Higher level of certainty: the addition of the Proposed Development to a landscape with operational, under construction (both also considered as part of the primary LVIA) and consented wind farms; and
- Scenario 2: Lower level of certainty: the addition of the Proposed Development to a landscape with operational, under construction (both also considered as part of the primary LVIA), consented and undetermined valid wind farm applications.

6.5.50 The CLVIA focused on the assessment of 'additional' cumulative effects, i.e., the effect of adding the Proposed Development to a baseline of other built or unbuilt wind farms.

⁴⁶ Consented (as submitted) following cumulative cut-off date.

⁴⁷ Consented (7 turbines at 149.9 m to tip height) following cumulative cut off.

⁴⁸ Consented (as submitted) following cumulative cut-off date.

'Total' cumulative effects (i.e., where all current, past and future proposals are deemed present, including the Proposed Development) are also considered.

- 6.5.51 Combined ZTVs (**Figures 6.1.7 to 6.1.11**) for other wind farms were prepared to show where ZTVs overlap and where cumulative views may occur. This includes combined views – two wind farms seen at the same time in a similar direction - and successive views - two wind farms seen from the same location but in different directions.
- 6.5.52 General observations based on cumulative ZTV include:
- For the south-east wind farm group (refer to **Figure 6.1.7a and b**) the cumulative ZTV overlap follows an intermittent pattern, generally focused on the south-eastern quadrant of the LVIA study area. This includes parts of the River Brora valley and southern hill flanks around Ben Klibreck; western facing upper hills flanks to the east of the study area; and south-eastern facing upper hills flanks to the south of the study area.
 - For the south-west wind farm group (refer to **Figure 6.1.8a and b**) the cumulative ZTV overlap follows an intermittent pattern, occurring across a loose south-east to north-west band of high ground through the Study Area and higher north facing hills flanks to the south of the Study Area. Proposed wind farms introduce notable additional visibility of wind farms to the south of the Study Area, and further intermittent visibility of wind farms to the north of the Study Area.
 - With the proposed Strath Tirry (refer to **Figure 6.1.9**), Sallachy (refer to **Figure 6.1.10**) and under construction Creag Riabhach (refer to **Figure 6.1.11**) cumulative ZTV overlap is generally focused across the south-western quadrant of the Study Area and more widespread from the higher ground within 15 – 20 km.

6.6 Predicted Impacts

- 6.6.1 The assessment of landscape and visual effects follows the methodology presented in this chapter and detailed in **Appendix A6.1** and is based upon the project description outlined in **Chapter 2: Proposed Development**. The LVIA reports on construction and operational effects separately.
- 6.6.2 Landscape and visual effects associated with decommissioning will be similar in nature to construction stage effects, although essentially in reverse. As such they are not reported on separately but should be assumed to be broadly the same as those at construction stage.

Construction Effects

Sources of Effects during Construction

- 6.6.3 During the proposed 21 month construction phase, there will be potential short-term landscape and visual effects arising from the presence of partially constructed infrastructure and undertaking of construction activities on the turbine area (as described in **Chapter 2: Proposed Development**). Effects occurring during the construction phase are considered to be reversible unless otherwise stated (e.g., creation of new landform which remains as a permanent feature beyond the lifespan of the operational phase (35 years) of the Proposed Development).
- 6.6.4 The changes arising from the construction of the Proposed Development will be primarily associated with the construction of:

- Up to 16 turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 200 m and associated infrastructure;
- 1 No. meteorological mast;
- 2 No. LIDAR compounds;
- Site entrance and access track (on existing track) from the A836, from the existing junction (the access area);
- Internal access road network and turbine hardstandings;
- Borrow pits;
- Transformers and underground cables;
- Onsite sub-station compound and an operations control building;
- Energy storage facility; and
- Temporary construction compounds.

6.6.5 The majority of the effects which will occur during the construction phase will be **short-term** and largely **reversible**, limited to the turbine area and the immediate surrounding vicinity from which construction activities may be perceptible. The main exception to this is construction of the proposed turbines. The landscape and visual effects arising from the presence of partially constructed turbines will be comparable to the operational effects (although arguably to a lesser degree as construction-related effects will be of a shorter duration and transient in nature). Therefore, effects arising from the introduction of partially constructed turbines are not anticipated to be greater than those associated with operational effects.

Landscape Effects during Construction

6.6.6 Potential effects on the landscape character and resources of the turbine area are considered in **Table 6.7** below.

Table 6.7: Landscape Effects on the Site during Construction

| Receptor | The Site (turbine area) Construction |
|----------------------|---|
| Baseline Description | <p>The main part of the site, in which the proposed turbines are located (the turbine area) is within the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT, while the northern fringes of the turbine area are located within the Rounded Hills LCT, as shown on Figure 6.1.4a. Access to the turbine area will be via the Dalnessie Estate track which links to the A836 to the west of the turbine area.</p> <p>The turbine area forms part of the lower lying foothills on the south-western edge of Ben Armine Forest. The landcover is predominantly open moorland. The turbine area is focused around the valley of the Allt nan Con-uisge with higher ground to the north, which rises to a high point of 392 m above ordnance datum (AOD) at Sron Leathad Chleansaid, at the northern edge of the turbine area. A small ridge crosses to the north of the turbine area, connecting the hills of Sron Leathad Chleansaid, Creag Dhubh and Creag Riabhach na Greighe. The River Brora forms the eastern boundary of the turbine area, and the Allt nan Con-uisge watercourse drains through the south of the turbine area, linking into this watercourse.</p> <p>Land to the immediate south and west of the turbine area is forested, with coniferous species. A small cluster of buildings at Dalnessie is located to the immediate south-east of the turbine area. A track links</p> |

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| | <p>this small property cluster to the A836, to the west, and this track continues to the north into Ben Armine Forest (which is largely characterised by open moorland). Human influences are apparent across the turbine area, through the presence of cultural heritage features (steading and sheep fold) and in the surrounding landscape through the presence of coniferous forest, areas of forest which are felled, estate tracks and moorland management.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is a large-scale landscape, with a simple landcover, which is typically better suited to wind farm development than one where landcover is complex. Human influence on landcover is apparent, to a degree, across the turbine area and in the wider surrounding landscape.</p> <p>The turbine area is not designated, which indicates a lower value, and moorland landcover is widespread throughout Scotland. However, the land to the immediate north of the turbine area is a Wild Land Area, which increases value.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium.</p> |
| Changes | <p>Construction activities will result in direct landscape effects on the turbine area. Changes primarily relate to excavations and track construction; the presence of tall cranes and partially built towers whilst turbines are being erected; and construction activity including the movement of construction vehicles and plant. There will therefore be large scale changes to the turbine area relating to construction activity including the removal/ clearance of features and disturbance to landcover (mainly heather moorland); introduction of new features (turbines and infrastructure); additional movement and activity through construction vehicles and plant; as well as a perceived change from an open moorland to a construction site.</p> <p>The geographic extent of these changes will be at the level of the turbine area (small) with areas of retained forestry to the south and west of the turbine area, and higher ground to the north of the turbine area including the ridge which runs from Sron Leathad Chleansaid to Creag Rhiabhach na Greighe, helping to reduce effects associated with lower level construction activity. The construction works are expected to last approximately 21 months, so will be temporary and short term. The level of reversibility will be varied, from fully reversible changes associated with ground disturbances (albeit that vegetation will take some time to recover) to longer lasting effects associated with infrastructure that forms part of the operational scheme.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: large; Geographical Extent: small; Duration: short term; Reversibility: fully reversible (in relation to the turbines) to irreversible (in relation to foundations and other low level features which may be left in situ); Magnitude of Change: high</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>Overall, the effects of construction on the turbine area are judged to be Significant (Major). These effects will be temporary and largely contained within the geographical extent of the turbine area.</p> |

Landscape and Visual Effects during Construction

- 6.6.7 In terms of wider landscape and visual effects during the construction phase, these will largely relate to views of tall cranes and turbine construction with associated effects on landscape character and views. These effects will be transient and change throughout

the construction period as wind turbines are gradually constructed in sections. As such, wider landscape and visual effects during the construction phase are unlikely to exceed the level of effect associated with operational visual effects.

Proposed Mitigation

- 6.6.8 Measures such as arrangements for vegetation and soil removal, storage and replacement and the restoration of disturbed areas after construction will be detailed in a Construction Environmental Management Plan, which will be agreed with the relevant statutory bodies including SEPA, NatureScot and THC prior to commencement of construction, as detailed in **Chapter 2: Proposed Development**. Appropriate soil handling will allow disturbed areas of ground to recover faster and reflect the surrounding undisturbed areas of ground.

Residual Construction Effects

- 6.6.9 Re-establishment of vegetation will take approximately three to five years, depending on the vegetation and soils, and levels of effect will decline over this period.
- 6.6.10 There will be no significant landscape or visual effects associated with temporary ground disturbance during the construction phase after restoration works are completed, and vegetation has regenerated.

Decommissioning

- 6.6.11 Decommissioning of the Development is expected to take approximately X months. Due to the similar activities involved in both the construction and dismantling of a wind farm site, a similar level of effect is predicted on the landscape and visual amenity of the turbine area and wider Study Area over a shorter period.

Operational Effects

Sources of Effects during Operation

- 6.6.12 The main effects of the Proposed Development on landscape and visual amenity once operational will arise from the presence of the wind turbines, met mast, turbine transformers and ancillary infrastructure including access tracks, on-site substation and battery storage compound, and access area as described in **Chapter 2: Proposed Development** and shown on **Figure 2.2**.

Landscape Assessment: Operational Effects

- 6.6.13 This section describes the operational effects resulting from the Proposed Development on the landscape fabric of the Site, and the LCTs and designated landscapes which were identified as requiring detailed consideration in **Table 6.2** and **Table 6.3** above. Further information on key characteristics of each LCT and relevant designated landscapes is provided in the tables below.
- 6.6.14 All operational effects are considered to be long-term, reversible and adverse unless stated otherwise.

Table 6.8: Operational Effects at the Site

| Receptor | The Site (turbine area) Operation |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Baseline Description | The turbine area is described in Table 6.7 above. |
| Sensitivity | Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium. |
| Changes | There will be large scale changes to the turbine area relating to the physical loss of features (moorland landcover) and introduction of new features (turbines and infrastructure including access tracks with associated water crossings), as well as a perceived change from an area of open moorland to an active energy generating site. Judgements: Scale: large; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: high |
| Effect and Significance | Overall, the effects of the wind farm on the turbine area will be Significant (Major) . |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | Cumulative landscape effects from the turbine area will be very limited during the operational phase of the Proposed Development. The rising landform to the north and south of the site limits the potential for wider visibility of other wind farms. Furthermore, visibility of consented and proposed wind farms will be very limited in outwards views from the site, as demonstrated by Viewpoint 1. As such, no significant 'additional' cumulative landscape effects are predicted on the turbine area, during operation. |
| Total Cumulative Effects | At the site level, total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant. |

Operational Effects on Landscape Character

6.6.15 LCTs within 45 km of the Development are illustrated on **Figure 6.1.4a**, with theoretical visibility from the LCTs indicated by the ZTV shown on **Figure 6.1.4b**. The assessment describes the potential effects on landscape character resulting from the operational phase of the Proposed Development. Cumulative interactions with operational and under construction wind farms are also considered in coming to overall judgements on landscape effects. The assessment is limited to those LCTs where potentially significant effects are considered possible, as detailed in **Table 6.2**.

Table 6.9: Operational Effects on 134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT

| Receptor | 134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT |
|----------------------|---|
| Baseline Description | The southern part of the turbine area is located within the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT. This LCT continues to the south and west, beyond 5 km from the turbine area. This LCT also covers extensive areas focused to the north, east and west of the Study Area, within 20 km (refer to Figure 6.1.4a). The unit of the LCT in which the turbine area is located extends over much of the lower lying ground to the west of the turbine area and north of Loch Shin; to the north of Strath Fleet and west of Strath Brora; and across a large area to the north and north-east of the Study Area within 20 km. Within 5 km of the turbine area large areas of the LCT (to the west and south of the |

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| | <p>turbine area) are characterised by coniferous forest cover and the landscape is somewhat degraded. There are also separate units of this LCT to the west and north. Approximately 13 of the proposed turbines are located/ on the edge of this LCT.</p> <p>Key characteristics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Gently sloping or undulating landform which lies generally below 350 metres.</i> • <i>Occasional isolated hills of limited height form local landmark features.</i> • <i>Lochs and mature, meandering rivers.</i> • <i>Very distinct flora, dominated by sphagnum mosses, produced by the wetness and infertility of the flows.</i> • <i>Areas of peat cuttings and haggings.</i> • <i>Pockets of improved grazing, mainly within the outer fringes of sweeping moorland.</i> • <i>Coniferous forest forming a dominant characteristic within some parts of this landscape character type.</i> • <i>Ribbons of broadleaf woodland occasionally run along the water courses and loch edges.</i> • <i>Very sparsely settled with dispersed crofts, farms and estate buildings largely found on the outer edges of this landscape or near a strath.</i> • <i>Vehicular tracks within parts of the landscape.</i> • <i>Wind farms, transmission lines, the A9 and a network of minor roads are key features within the more modified outer fringes within Caithness.</i> • <i>Long, low and largely uninterrupted skylines offering extensive views across this landscape and result in a feeling of huge space.</i> • <i>Consistent views to the distant Lone Mountains and Rugged Mountain Massif – Caithness & Sutherland.</i> • <i>Great sense of exposure on areas of flat peatland on upland plateau.</i> • <i>A strong sense of remoteness is associated within the largely uninhabited, inaccessible core flows and moorlands of this landscape.”⁴⁹</i> <p>Some of the turbines within the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will be located in this LCT, over 10km to the north-west of the outermost turbines. Operational turbines within this LCT include Gordonbush, Gordonbush Extension, Kilbraur, Kilbraur Extension and Strathy North Wind Farms, as shown on Figure 6.1.6.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This LCT includes parts of a number of landscape designations, including Ben Criam and Loch nan Clar SLA, The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast SLA and Assynt – Coigach NSA. There are also a number of WLAs across this LCT, including Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest, Foinaven – Ben Hee, Ben Hope – Ben Loyal and Causeymire – Knockfin Flows.</p> <p>Parts of this LCT displays strong qualities of remoteness. However, this is a large-scale simple landscape, large areas are degraded by</p> |

⁴⁹ SNH (2019) SNH National Landscape Character Assessment: Landscape Character Type 134, Sweeping Moorland and Flows – Caithness & Sutherland. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20134%20-%20Sweeping%20Moorland%20and%20Flows%20-%20Caithness%20&%20Sutherland%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/2021) (Accessed 14/04/2021)

| | |
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| | <p>coniferous forest cover and its associated management regimes, and the margins of this LCT are influenced by human activity including wind farm development.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium-high; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> |
| <p>Changes</p> | <p>Approximately 13 of the proposed turbines will be located within part of the LCT, on its northern fringes to the north of Lairg. The Proposed Development will be theoretically visible from much of this LCT within 5 km, to the west and south. However, coniferous forest to the east of the A836 and north of Lairg will reduce actual visibility. In wider parts of the LCT to the east and north of the Study Area (within 20 km) visibility will be less widespread due to screening by the intervening landform.</p> <p>Some of the turbines within the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will be located in this LCT, over 10km to the north-west of the site. Gordonbush and Gordonbush Extension Wind Farms are located approximately 20 – 25 km to the south-east of the turbine area, either partly or wholly within this LCT. These wind farms have already altered and influenced parts of this LCT, either directly or indirectly. The Proposed Development will introduce further turbines into a part of the LCT which is not currently subject to operational wind farm development. The Proposed Development will be in keeping with the broader strategic existing pattern of wind farm development across this LCT, situated on the edges of the LCT near lower hills within the Rounded Hills LCT. This will result in direct effects on the landscape character of the turbine area. The turbine area will change from an area of open moorland to an area of open moorland and wind turbines. Overall, this is judged to be a large scale of change to the turbine area, as identified in the assessment of landscape effects on the turbine area in Table 6.8. Figure 1 of Technical Appendix 8.5: Outline Habitat Management Principles, highlights areas of proposed riparian and native montane woodland planting in the turbine area, which as it matures will provide some landscape enhancement and intermittent screening of low-level features such as the proposed substation.</p> <p>Within approximately 5 km of the turbine area, the Proposed Development will be theoretically visible from much of the LCT, which is located mainly to the south and west of the turbine area. Coniferous forest across this part of the LCT will reduce actual visibility while this remains in place. When visible, the Proposed Development will be seen in closer proximity views than under construction and operational wind farms. The turbines will alter certain perceptual aspects including the long, low uninterrupted skylines and the sense of remoteness. However, given the extents of coniferous forest across this LCT within 5 km, which limits the potential for views, a medium to small scale of change is predicted for areas of the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT within 5 km.</p> <p>Beyond 5 km from the turbine area, the turbines will be visible from lower-lying parts of the LCT to the west, particularly Strath Tirry and Strath Duchally, within approximately 20 km. In such views, the Proposed Development will be seen as a distinct and more distant group of turbines. The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will be apparent in views north, from parts of Strath Tirry.</p> <p>From wider parts of the LCT to the east, there will be more intermittent visibility, with views of the Proposed Development largely restricted to lower-lying rounded hilltops to the east of Ben Armine Forest. Views of</p> |

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| | <p>wider operational wind farms will typically also be apparent, with closer views of Gordonbush and Kilbraur Wind Farms and their extensions. The scale of change is judged to be small for these areas. Parts of the LCT to the north will experience very limited views towards the Proposed Development.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: large to small; Geographical Extent: medium; Magnitude of Change: high for the turbine area (as identified in the assessment of landscape effects on the turbine area in Table 6.8), medium for areas within 5km where forest does not foreshorten views, medium-low elsewhere.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>Overall, the effect of the Proposed Development on this LCT is judged to be Significant (Major) for the turbine area (as identified in the assessment of landscape effects on the turbine area in Table 6.8); Significant (Moderate) for areas within approximately 5km where forest does not foreshorten views; and Not Significant (Minor) for the wider LCT.</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>The key cumulative change will be under scenario 2. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will introduce 4 turbines into/ on the edge of this LCT within 5km to the south-west of the Proposed Development. However, the gap between the relatively small Strath Tirry Wind Farm and the Proposed Development, is characterised by coniferous forest cover which provides a degree of separation and limits the potential for successive views of both wind farms in the area between, will help to limit the potential for cumulative landscape interactions between the two schemes. In wider views, where both are visible from areas outside coniferous forest, the increased viewing distance will limit the potential for significant cumulative landscape interactions.</p> <p>As such, no significant 'additional' cumulative landscape effects are predicted on this LCT.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>The gaps between individual wind farms and emerging clusters of wind farms in this LCT is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant.</p> |

Table 6.10: Operational Effects on 135 – Rounded Hills LCT

| Receptor | 135 – Rounded Hills LCT |
|----------------------|---|
| Baseline Description | <p>The northern part of the turbine area is located within the Rounded Hills LCT. This LCT also covers much of the central part of the Study Area to the north and south of Lairg. The LCT forms a number of distinct units within the Study Area, mainly separated by straths. The parcel in which the turbine area is located centres on higher ground within Ben Armine Forest. Approximately 5 of the proposed turbines are located in/ on the edge of this LCT.</p> <p>Key characteristics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Rolling hills forming broad, subtly rounded summits but with some more pronounced hills also occurring, these often featuring steeper slopes along the coast or where truncated by deep glens.</i> • <i>Hills cut by numerous narrow burns and small lochans lie within dips, corries and on plateau summits.</i> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Predominantly dense heather ground cover and moorland grasses, but also some areas of bog.</i> • <i>Fragments of broadleaf woodland in inaccessible locations.</i> • <i>Scarcely settled with a largely uninhabited interior and widely scattered crofts and farms on lower slopes adjoining straths and farmed landscapes.</i> • <i>Narrow glens and lower hill slopes often rich in archaeology with features such as standing stones, brochs and medieval townships.</i> • <i>Wind farms located in more accessible and generally lower rolling hills, either close to extensive forestry or the high voltage transmission line aligned broadly parallel to the south-east Sutherland coast.</i> • <i>Convex character of hill slopes limiting distant visibility and views of the hill tops when travelling through the landscape.</i> • <i>Views into the interior of the hills very restricted.</i> • <i>Strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape.</i>⁵⁰ <p>Some of the turbines within the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm are located in this LCT, over 10km to the north-west of the site. Operational turbines within Gordonbush, Gordonbush Extension, Rosehall, Achany, Lairg, Kilbraur and Kilbraur Extension Wind Farms are located in this LCT.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>Parts of this LCT display strong qualities of wildness, reflected by the WLA designations across the area, and the topography is complex in places. However, the overall landscape pattern is simple and the edges of the LCT are influenced by existing wind farms and coniferous forest.</p> <p>Parts of Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA, The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast SLA, Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA, Assynt – Coigach NSA, Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest WLA, Rhiddoroch – Bein Dearg – Ben Wyvis WLA, Reay – Cassley WLA and Foinaven – Ben Hee WLA are located across parts of this LCT.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium-high; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>Approximately 5 of the proposed turbines will be located within part of the LCT centred on Ben Armine Forest. Theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is mainly focussed to areas south-west of Ben Armine (to the north of the turbine area) and the eastern flank of the hill range to the west of Loch Shin (to the south-west of the turbine area). Theoretical visibility from other areas of the LCT across the wider study area is more intermittent.</p> <p>Some of the turbines within the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will be located in this LCT, over 10km to the north-west of the site. Turbines within Gordonbush, Gordonbush Extension, Kilbraur, Kilbraur Extension, Lairg, Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms are located in this LCT to the south-east and south-west, within approximately 15 – 25 km. These wind farms have already altered and influenced parts of this LCT, either directly or indirectly. The Proposed Development will introduce further turbines into a part of the LCT</p> |

⁵⁰ SNH (2019) SNH National Landscape Character Assessment: Landscape Character Type 135, Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20135%20-%20Rounded%20Hills%20-%20Caithness%20&%20Sutherland%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/2021)

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| | <p>which is not currently subject to operational wind farm development. The Proposed Development will be in keeping with the broader strategic existing pattern of wind farm development across this LCT, situated on lower rolling hills and avoiding designated landscapes.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will have direct effects on the landscape character of the turbine area. The turbine area will change from an area of open moorland to an area of open moorland and wind turbines. Overall, this judged to be a large scale of change to the turbine area.</p> <p>Theoretical visibility is widespread across this LCT within approximately 5 km, as indicated by Figure 6.1.4b. Actual visibility will also be widespread, given the open character of the landscape. The Proposed Development will be seen in closer proximity views than operational wind farms in other units of the LCT to the south-east and south-west. WLA Dusk Viewpoint 1 illustrates the view from part of the Ben Klibreck WLA within 5 km of the Proposed Development, within this LCT. The ridge of high ground to the north of the turbine area will help to screen lower lying infrastructure in views from the wider LCT within 5 km. It will also to a degree help to provide separation, with the Proposed Development appearing behind a ridge on the fringes of the LCT. These changes will alter certain perceptual aspects of the LCT including the sense of wildness and will result in a medium scale of change for areas of the Rounded Hills LCT within 5 km. Small areas of native montane woodland restoration are proposed for this area (refer to Figure 1 of Technical Appendix 8.5: Outline Habitat Management Principles) alongside an existing small area of native woodland restoration which the estate has undertaken which will provide some localised landscape enhancement.</p> <p>Beyond approximately 5 km, within the Ben Armine unit of the LCT, the topography to the north and east will play a role in screening views of the turbines from the lower hills, and visibility will be limited to the higher hilltops and hill flanks facing the turbine area. Viewpoint 9 illustrates the view from Ben Armine, within this unit of the LCT. There is widespread theoretical visibility from a unit of the LCT between Glen Cassley and Loch Shin, to the south-west of the turbine area, within approximately 10 – 15 km. Viewpoint 10 illustrates the view from Ben Sgeireach, within this part of the LCT. These areas will experience views of wider operational wind farms, as illustrated by Figure 6.2.9 and 6.2.10. Due to the increased viewing distance, and as wider views including operational wind farms are already characteristic, the scale of landscape change is judged to be small for these areas.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: large to small; Geographical Extent: medium; Magnitude of Change: high for the turbine area and locality, medium for areas of Rounded Hills within approximately 5 km and low for other areas.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>Overall, the effect of the Proposed Development on this LCT is judged to be Significant (Major) for the turbine area and locality, likely extending to the ridge of Sron Leathad Chleansaid and transitioning into Significant (Moderate) effects for areas of the LCT within 5 km, and Not Significant (Minor) for wider areas of the LCT.</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Under scenario 1 Braemore (consented) will extended the influence of wind farms in this LCT.</p> <p>Under scenario 2, wind farms including South Kilbraur, Lairg II, Garvary, Achany Extension and Sallachy will extend the influence of wind farms in this LCT.</p> |

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| | <p>These changes will generally extend the existing south-east and south-west wind farm groups. Sallachy Wind Farm will slightly break from these groupings, introducing a further wind farm further north-west of Loch Shin. These cumulative changes will all be focused beyond 12km from the Proposed Development. The distance between the Proposed Development and further wind farms in this LCT will limit the potential for significant cumulative landscape interactions on the Rounded Hills LCT.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>The intensity of wind farm development in this LCT is greater to the north-east of Glen Cassley, and to the south of Lairg. Across the wider LCT the gaps between individual wind farms and emerging clusters of wind farms in this LCT is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant.</p> |

Table 6.11: Operational Effects on 138 – Lone Mountains LCT

| Receptor | 138 – Lone Mountains |
|----------------------|---|
| Baseline Description | <p>This LCT covers a number of discrete mountains across the study area. The closest unit of the LCT to the turbine area covers Ben Klibreck, which is contained within 15 km to the north.</p> <p>Key characteristics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Individual mountains forming landmarks seen widely and at considerable distance across expansive lower-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows and Cnocan – Caithness & Sutherland.</i> • <i>Mountains possess a distinctive profile, usually comprising steep, sweeping, concave slopes, making them look quite elegant and graceful.</i> • <i>Height of mountains varies, but even the smaller mountains can appear high because of their isolation, steep-sided profiles and when seen in juxtaposition with lower-lying Sweeping Moorland and Flows.</i> • <i>Peaks generally topped by exposed rock and sparse dwarf vegetation which gradually merges into the moorland surrounds.</i> • <i>Ribbons of broadleaf scrub woodland associated with the many water courses that tumble down steep glens.</i> • <i>Largely uninhabited, creating a distinct sense of remoteness, although some of its peaks attract significant numbers of hill walkers, especially during the summer months.</i> • <i>Peaks offer extensive views of the surrounding area including the distinctive watery landscapes of the Flows.”⁵¹</i> <p>There are no wind farms located within this LCT; however, it offers long-distance views over the surrounding landscape, which includes views towards the under construction Creag Riabhach, located within 5km to the west of this LCT. Operational wind farms within other LCTs, including Gordonbush, Gordonbush Extension, Kilbraur and Kilbraur Extension to the south-east; and Lairg, Rosehall and Achany to the south-west will also be visible in longer distance views from this LCT.</p> |

⁵¹ SNH (2019). SNH National Landscape Character Assessment: Landscape Character Type 138 – Lone Mountains. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20138%20-%20Lone%20Mountains%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/2021)

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| Sensitivity | <p>This is a large-scale landscape with a simple landcover. However, the topography is complex, and the lone mountains often form notable landmarks. It displays strong qualities of remoteness and isolation, although this is somewhat reduced by the availability of long distance views towards human influence, including operational wind farms.</p> <p>The Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA and Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest WLA both cover parts of the Ben Klibreck unit of this LCT which indicates a high value. This LCT also has a high recreational value.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: high; Value: high; Sensitivity: high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>There will be no direct effects on the landscape features of this LCT. Within 20 km of the Proposed Development, there will be theoretical visibility from the higher south-facing slopes and hilltops within the Ben Klibreck range. Given the open nature of this landscape, actual visibility on the ground will be similar. Viewpoint 8 illustrates the view from this part of the LCT. From more elevated hill flanks and summits, the Proposed Development will be seen in the context of large-scale, panoramic views which include long-distance views towards operational wind farms in other LCTs. This will extend the influence of wind farm development and may alter the sense of remoteness, however, the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will remain the closest proximity wind farm to this LCT. Given that there will be no direct effects; the viewing distance (generally beyond 7 km); and context of views (large-scale and panoramic and including views of operational wind farms) this will result in an overall small scale of landscape change.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: small; Geographical Extent: medium; Magnitude of Change: low.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>Significant visual effects may be experienced from limited parts of the LCT. The ZTV, refer to Figure 6.1.4b, identifies some visibility for the higher south-facing slopes and hilltops within the Ben Klibreck range. The Proposed Development may alter perceptual qualities such as the sense of remoteness, when visible. However, and overall, the effect of the Proposed Development on this LCT is judged to be Not Significant (Minor).</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Cumulative effects will be indirect. The Proposed Development will be seen in large scale and longer distance combined and successive views with further (and more distant) wind farms under scenario 1 and 2. This is unlikely to result in significant ‘additional’ cumulative landscape effects.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>Wind farm development is focused outside of this LCT and total cumulative landscape effects are indirect and judged to be not significant.</p> |

Table 6.12: Operational Effects on 142 – Strath LCT

| Receptor | 142 - Strath |
|----------------------|---|
| Baseline Description | <p>This LCT covers a number of valleys throughout the Study Area, many of them linking the interior of the Rounded Hills LCT to the coast along the northern edge of the Dornoch Firth. The unit of the LCT nearest the turbine area is centred on Strath Tirry, to the north of Loch Shin, within 5 km of the turbine area at its closest point.</p> <p>Key characteristics include:</p> |

| Receptor | 142 - Strath |
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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Straths range from fairly straight deeply incised troughs to more winding valleys with a number of minor side glens.</i> • <i>River terraces and hummocky lower side slopes a common feature.</i> • <i>Water is a key characteristic with straths accommodating a central river meandering across the floodplain, often traced by clumps of birch and alder.</i> • <i>Lochs in some straths, where a string of small lochs add to the scenic richness of the lower strath.</i> • <i>Areas of wetland often present on the strath floors.</i> • <i>Smooth and fairly large pastures the predominant land cover on the floodplains of the straths, commonly enclosed by wire fences.</i> • <i>Semi-improved pastures, heather and grass moorland and coniferous plantations covering lower side slopes.</i> • <i>Increasing extent of moorland and woodland generally further up the straths, where the floodplain narrows and settlement is sparser.</i> • <i>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.</i> • <i>Some crofts within the Straths more randomly dispersed or staggered on lower hill slopes.</i> • <i>Occasional small farms located in the broader and more fertile parts of the straths.</i> • <i>Settlement generally denser within the lower reaches of many straths, especially at bridging points, on the coast and close to major roads.</i> • <i>Many areas rich in archaeology with cairns, roundhouses, brochs and old field systems, usually found on side slopes.</i> • <i>Abandoned crofts, particularly within the upper straths and in narrow side glens.</i> • <i>Focus in views from roads provided by a number of estate shooting lodges, and clustered, predominantly 19th Century, often estate style buildings.</i> • <i>Narrow roads, commonly aligned along the edge of the floodplain, from which views are strongly channelled by the side slopes.</i> • <i>Rounded Hills often forming prominent edges to the straths with shapely well-defined hills, providing a distinctive skyline and scenic backdrop.</i> • <i>Highly scenic backdrop of mountains often revealed in some of the upper reaches of these straths.”⁵²</i> <p>There are no wind farms located within this LCT. Views towards operational wind farms within neighbouring LCTs are available from parts of this LCT. From parts of Strath Tirry with an open outlook, turbines within Lairg Wind Farm are visible to the south-east, and Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms can be seen above the hills which</p> |

⁵² SNH (2019). SNH National Landscape Character Assessment: Landscape Character Type 142 – Strath. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20142%20-%20Strath%20-%20Caithness%20&%20Sutherland%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/2021)

| Receptor | 142 - Strath |
|-------------|---|
| | <p>form the enclosing horizon to the south-west. More distant views towards turbines within Beinn nan Oighrean, Beinn Tharsuinn and Coire na Cloiche Wind Farms are also available to the south.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is a smaller scale landscape with a more complex landscape pattern, with the landcover changing from pastoral fields on the lower slopes to moorland and forestry higher up. This increases susceptibility to wind farm development. Roads often follow the lower-lying topography within this LCT, and human influence is also present in the form of croft houses, estate buildings and coniferous forest cover.</p> <p>The Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA covers parts of a number of units of this LCT to the north of the Dornoch Firth, south-east of the turbine area which raises value.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium to high; Value: medium to low; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>There will be no direct effects on the landscape features of this LCT. The Proposed Development will be theoretically visible from parts of this LCT to the south-west of the turbine area, from the south-eastern extents of Strath Tirry. This part of the LCT is not designated, indicating a lower value. Viewpoints 2 and 4 illustrate the view from this part of the LCT and highlight that the rising forested landform to the north-east (between the turbine area and the LCT) provide a degree of separation and screen the lower components of the Proposed Development.</p> <p>Coniferous forest cover across eastern parts of the Strath Tirry unit of the LCT will reduce actual visibility from these areas and will screen parts of the Proposed Development while this forest cover remains in place. When the Proposed Development is visible, from eastern parts of the Strath LCT, it will be seen on the horizon beyond a modified landscape with associated coniferous forest management regimes. From western parts of the LCT, the Proposed Development will be seen beyond human influence associated with the A836 and electricity overhead lines to the south of the LCT, and in the context of existing views towards operational wind farms including Lairg, Achany and Rosehall to the south-east and south-west. It will introduce views of turbines to the north-east, seen at a distance of just over 5 km.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce large-scale elements outside this LCT, which will alter horizons and backdrops, when visible. This will also result in effects on the associated rural perceptual qualities, limited to within approximately 10 km. However, the south-eastern extent of Strath Tirry is already subject to human influence in the form of coniferous forest cover, electricity infrastructure (including the new overhead line connection for Creag Riabhach Wind Farm), settlement and roads including the A836. For parts of the LCT to the west with more open views towards the Proposed Development, where views of operational wind farms to the south-west are available, there will be a medium-small scale of change. For parts of the LCT under coniferous forest cover, changes associated with the Proposed Development will result in a small scale of landscape change.</p> <p>Visibility from other areas of Strath LCT across the Study Area is very limited.</p> |

| Receptor | 142 - Strath |
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| | Judgements: Scale: medium-small to small; Geographical Extent: small overall; Magnitude of Change: medium-low for areas of the Strath LCT with open views towards the Development, low for forested areas. |
| Effect and Significance | Overall, the effect of the Proposed Development on this LCT is judged to be Not Significant (Minor) . |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | The key change to the cumulative baseline will be under scenario 2. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will introduce 4 turbines into/ on the north-eastern edge of the Strath Tirry Unit of this LCT. When visible, the Proposed Development will be seen beyond this scheme and beyond forested areas to the north-east of this LCT. Whilst this will increase the influence of wind farms seen outside this LCT, this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects on landscape character. Turbines within the application stage Strath Tirry Wind Farm will play a larger role in terms of altering the key landscape characteristics of this LCT. |
| Total Cumulative Effects | Wind farm development in this LCT is very limited and total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant. |

Table 6.13: Operational Effects on 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting LCT

| Receptor | 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting |
|----------------------|--|
| Baseline Description | <p>This LCT covers a number of areas across the Study Area, located to the west and south of the turbine area. The nearest unit of the LCT is located within 10 km to the south of the turbine area at its closest extent and is centred around Lairg.</p> <p>Key characteristics include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Rolling hill slopes and ridges cut by a number of valleys which radiate down from the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland to the coast.</i> • <i>Elevated undulating basins lie at the foot of the Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland above Lairg and Bonar Bridge.</i> • <i>High proportion of woodland cover, with extensive conifer forest on ridges.</i> • <i>Particularly rough and coarse-textured landscape on upper hill slopes, comprising extensive mixed semi-natural woodland and fragments of heath and wetter moss.</i> • <i>Small farms and crofts located in the broader valleys in the east, commonly set above long strip pastures, fenced or occasionally enclosed by boulder walls.</i> • <i>Numerous prehistoric and historic environment features.</i> • <i>The pattern of crofts and access roads reflecting the grain of the landform of ridges and valleys with croft houses located on valley sides below the lower forest margin.</i> • <i>Pockets of pasture appear as if ‘carved out’ of woodlands in places.</i> • <i>Density of housing increasing close to the larger settlements.</i> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Semi-enclosed character of this well-wooded landscape with occasional views.</i> • <i>Attractive views from small roads high up the slopes, giving views to the Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland and glimpses of the Dornoch Firth.</i>⁵³ <p>There are no wind farms located within this LCT. From the higher ground within the LCT, around Lairg, turbines within Lairg Wind Farm are visible above the horizon to the south-east, and Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms can be seen above the rounded hills which form the horizon to the south-west. Longer distance views are available towards Beinn Tharsuinn, Bein nan Oighrean and Core na Cloiche Wind Farms, seen above the horizon formed by rounded hills to the south.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is a smaller scale landscape with a more complex pattern of landcover and topography. However, the influence of humans through transport corridors, settlement, and coniferous forest cover has lowered the susceptibility.</p> <p>The Dornoch Firth NSA covers part of a unit of this LCT to the south of the turbine area.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium.</p> |
| Changes | <p>There will be no direct effects on the landscape features of this LCT. Theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development is restricted to parts of the LCT to the south of the turbine area within approximately 15 km. Viewpoints 3, 5 and 6 illustrate the views from this part of the LCT and are all representative of views from the higher ground around the fringes of this unit, centred on Lairg.</p> <p>Theoretical visibility is intermittent across this area, influenced by the topography which is steep in places. Visibility is limited from lower areas around the settlement of Lairg, which are more densely populated. Actual visibility will be reduced further by areas of coniferous forest cover on higher ground to the north and south of Lairg. From areas with open views to the north, the Proposed Development will be seen beyond forested horizons to the south-west of the turbine area, at a distance of between 7 and 15 km approximately. Turbines within the Proposed Development will be seen upon the gently undulating horizon to the north and will introduce further human influences into outward views from this landscape. Views of operational wind farms including Lairg, Achany and Rosehall to the south-east and south-west are available from higher ground within the LCT around Lairg, seen above the rounded hills which form the horizon in outward views. Furthermore, this LCT is subject to human influence in the form of transport corridors, settlement and coniferous forest cover. Due to the limited ZTV coverage, viewing distance and changes seen in the context of existing human influence across this landscape, this will result in a small scale of landscape change.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: small; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: low.</p> |

⁵³ SNH (2019). SNH National Landscape Character Assessment: Landscape Character Type 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/LCA/LCT%20145%20-%20Farmed%20and%20Forested%20Slopes%20with%20Crofting%20-%20Final%20pdf.pdf> (Accessed 14/04/2021)

| | |
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| Effect and Significance | Overall, the effect of the Proposed Development on this LCT is judged to be Not Significant (Minor) . |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>There are no other wind farms located within this LCT. Under scenario 1 Braemore (consented) and under scenario 2 Lairg II and Garvary (application stage) will increase the influence of wind farms, generally viewed from the higher fringes of this LCT and in views to the south.</p> <p>From areas of higher ground on the fringes of this LCT, and when visible, the Proposed Development will be seen in longer distance views to the north, seen beyond the application stage Strath Tirry Wind Farm. Whilst this will increase the influence of wind farms seen outside this LCT, this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects on landscape character. Scenario 1 and 2 wind farms in the extended south-west wind farm group will play a larger role in terms of altering the key landscape characteristics of this LCT.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | Wind farm development in this LCT is very limited and total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant. |

Operational Effects on Designated Landscapes

- 6.6.16 The turbine area is not covered by any landscape designations. However, there are landscape designations within the 45 km Study Area, as shown on **Figure 6.1.5a**. This section describes the implications of the Proposed Development for designated areas in the Study Area, which are taken forward for detailed assessment, as outlined in **Table 6.3**.
- 6.6.17 Special Landscape Areas (SLA) are identified in the Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas report⁵⁴. For each SLA, the special qualities of the landscape designation are described.
- 6.6.18 Predicted effects on WLAs within the Study Area arising from the Proposed Development are described in **Appendix A6.3**.

Table 6.14: Operational Effect on Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA

| Receptor | Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA |
|----------------------|--|
| Baseline Description | <p>The Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA lies to the north of the turbine area, within approximately 5 km of the proposed turbines at its closest point. The designation covers a group of mountains, including Ben Klibreck and a number of smaller mountains within Ben Armine Forest to the south. It also covers the lower lying ground around Loch Choire, which runs south-east to north-west through a valley which separates Ben Klibreck to the north from Ben Armine Forest to the south.</p> <p>The key landscape and visual characteristics and special qualities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“A very large-scale, open and exposed landscape in which a prominent, high isolated mountains rise conspicuously from</i> |

⁵⁴ Horner and MacLennan on behalf of The Highland Council in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage (2011). Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas [Online] Available at: https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/2937/assessment_of_highland_special_landscape_areas (Accessed 14/04/2021)

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| | <p><i>the surrounding moorland with its very distinctive profile. The contrasting lower, hill massif is characterised by less distinctive landforms. Exceptional panoramic views are available from the high ridges and summits in clear conditions. Remote lochs occupy the trough between the mountains.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>At a broad level the landform is very simple. However at a more detailed level there is a diversity of upland habitats characterised by mosaics of heathland and grassland, with frequent rocky outcrops, screes and crags. Fragments of broadleaf woodland also occur on the lower ground that provides shelter.</i> • <i>Pockets of gently sloping improved pasture fringe the shores of the two main lochs scattered with mature trees and stone sheepfolds. Occasional coniferous plantations appear particularly incongruous, contrasting in shape, colour and texture. This incongruity is particularly prominent when viewing from the isolated hill tops and distracts from the open panoramas seen from these areas.</i> • <i>The isolated mountains, the lowland enclosed between them, the open moorland, and the extremely sparse settlement all contribute to a very strong sense of wildness within this area...</i> • <i>Exceptional panoramic views from high ridges and summits in clear conditions, extending to the northern coastline and beyond, taking in neighbouring peaks including Ben Hope and Ben Loyal and vast areas of surrounding moorland, the character of which is hard to discern from lower levels.</i>⁵⁵ |
| Sensitivity | <p>The SLA covers land within the Lone Mountains, Rounded Hills, and Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCTs. Human influence within the SLA is limited. There are no operational wind farms within the SLA, but a number are visible from elevated parts, including Gordonbush, Kilbraur and Kilbraur Extension to the south-east, Lairg, Beinn Tharsuinn, Beinn nan Oighrean and Coire na Cloiche to the south, and Achany and Rosehall to the south-west. The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is also visible from western hill flanks and the summit of Ben Klibreck and is within 5km to the west of the SLA. The overall sensitivity is judged to be high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>Views towards the Proposed Development will be available from hill slopes facing towards the turbine area, including the south-facing slopes of summits on the Ben Klibreck ridge, including Meall nan Con and Meall Ailein, as well as the south-west-facing slopes of Meall a Bhata and Ben Armine, to the south-east of Ben Klibreck. Visibility from lowland areas will be limited by the surrounding elevated landform. Overall ZTV coverage across the SLA is intermittent, as shown on Figure 6.1.5b.</p> <p>There will be no direct effects on key landscape features such as high isolated mountains and diverse upland habitats. In terms of effects on the perceptual special qualities and views outside this designated landscape, operational and under construction turbines have altered views from the highest summits within the SLA, including Ben Klibreck and Ben Armine. The turbines of the Proposed Development will be seen in the context of existing wind farm development to the south. This will result in associated effects on the “<i>strong sense of wildness</i>”</p> |

⁵⁵ Horner and MacLennan on behalf of The Highland Council in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage (2011). Assessment of Highland Special Landscape Areas, page 46.

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| | and “ <i>panoramic views from high ridges and summits</i> ” experienced from some hill summits within the designated area, but not those to the northern coastline and towards Ben Hope and Ben Loyal, which are highlighted as a special quality. |
| Effect and Significance | There will be no direct effects on the special qualities of the SLA, including the large scale, open and exposed landscape; diversity of upland habitats; pockets of pasture and fragments of broadleaf woodland. The Proposed Development will be visible from intermittent areas in views south and outwards from SLA. This will tend to be from higher hill flanks and summits beyond 5km, where large scale views have been altered by operational wind farm development. Significant visual effects are predicted from limited areas of the SLA, including areas with visibility on the southern fringes of this SLA and from the high sensitivity view from the summit of Ben Klibreck. However, this is not judged to translate into compromising the overall integrity of the SLA and the perceptual special qualities associated with ‘wildness’ and ‘exceptional panoramic views’. Operational wind farm development seen in outward and large, scale panoramic views from the SLA has already altered this sense of ‘wildness’. The areas with visibility of the Proposed Development across the SLA as a whole will be limited. Panoramic views towards Ben Hope and Ben Loyal to the north-west, will not be altered by views of the Proposed Development to the south. |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | Cumulative effects will be indirect. When visible the Proposed Development will be seen in large scale and longer distance combined and successive views with further (and more distant) wind farms under scenario 1 and 2. Further cumulative schemes will generally extend the existing south-east and south-west wind farm groups. Sallachy and Strath Tirry Wind Farms will slightly break with these groupings, introducing further wind farms to the north-west and east of Loch Shin. The Proposed Development will generally read as a distinct wind farm seen in long distance views in front of this new cumulative baseline. When visible, from the western flank and summit area of Ben Klibreck, Creag Riabhach will remain the closest proximity wind farm to the SLA. ‘Additional’ cumulative effects are not judged to compromise the reasons for designation. |
| Total Cumulative Effects | Wind farm development is focused outside of the SLA and cumulative landscape effects will be indirect. Total cumulative effects are not judged to compromise the reasons for designation. |

Operational Visual Effects

- 6.6.19 The assessment of visual effects from the 12 (daytime) viewpoints selected to represent views of the Proposed Development are set out below (as listed in **Table 6.4** above and shown on **Figure 6.1.2**. This assessment assumes that all effects are long-term, during the proposed 35-year operational lifespan of the Proposed Development, and reversible, unless stated otherwise.
- 6.6.20 Accompanying visualisations for each assessment viewpoint are contained in **Volume 2** of the EIA Report prepared in accordance with the methodology set out in **Appendix A6.1**.

Table 6.15: Viewpoint 1: Right of Way near Dalnessie

| Viewpoint 1: Right of Way near Dalnessie | | | | |
|--|--|--------|--|---------|
| Grid Reference | 263137 | 915279 | Figure Number | 6.2.1 |
| LCT | 134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows | | Landscape Designation or WLA | None |
| Direction of view | North-west | | Distance to nearest turbine | 1.53 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located on a track near a small cluster of buildings at Dalnessie, to the south-east of the turbine area. The track connects to the A836 to the south-west of the turbine area and passes north to the east of the turbine area. It is a Heritage Path and right of way, and receptors include walkers. Similar views will be experienced by residents at Dalnessie.</p> <p>Views towards the turbine area are orientated to the north-west across rough grassland and post and wire fences in the foreground, towards undulating moorland beyond. The hill of Sron Leathad Chleainsaid and lower-lying moorland hills form the horizon at a distance of approximately 3 km.</p> <p>To the east, undulating moorland hills rise up beyond an area of scrub to form the horizon. To the west and south, buildings and sheds at Dalnessie are visible at close proximity, with moorland and coniferous forest on the hills visible beyond.</p> <p>Wind turbines within the operational Kilbraur Wind Farm (and its extension) are visible approximately 17 km to the south-east on hills above the valley of the River Brora. Turbines within the operational Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms are also theoretically visible on the distant horizon to the south-west. However, coniferous forestry on the intervening horizon largely screens these wind farms.</p> | | | |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is a residential and recreational view, which indicates a high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is not located within any designated landscapes. The track is a right of way and Heritage Path and is frequented by walkers. Whilst this is a somewhat remote and rural view, the influence of human activity over the view is apparent through operational wind turbines, coniferous forestry and agricultural and estate equipment and buildings in the foreground.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: high; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> | | | |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce 16 turbine hubs and 16 turbine blades, visible in short distance views to the north-west. The Proposed Development will be seen above the undeveloped horizon formed by the surrounding undulating plateau moorland and rolling moorland hills. Ancillary infrastructure and tracks within the eastern part of the turbine area, and on the southern flank of Sron Leathad Chleainsaid, will be visible from this location.</p> <p>There will be some overlapping of turbine blades and towers. However, this is a closer view and proximity to a wind farm can often result in less balanced views of turbines. The layout composition will also change as recreational walkers move along the track.</p> | | | |

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| | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce additional wind turbines at closer proximity than the turbines within the operational Kilbraur Wind Farm. It will form a prominent feature in views to the north-west and will extend the influence of man-made development to the east of the coniferous forest which is visible from this location.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: large; Geographical Extent: medium; Magnitude of Change: high.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Significant (Major) . |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | Under scenario 2 there will be some limited additional theoretical visibility of the application stage Achany Extension and Meall Buidhe Wind Farms. Views of a small number of turbines in these schemes will be seen in the context of operational schemes in distant views (over 15km) to the south-west. Intervening coniferous forestry on the horizon will play a screening role, as will buildings and outbuilding in the immediate foreground context around Dalnessie. As such, no significant 'additional' cumulative effects are predicted. |
| Total Cumulative Effects | The limited nature of further visibility of wind farms; viewing distances to and gaps between wind farms is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this viewpoint. |

Table 6.16: Viewpoint 2: A836 near Rhian Bridge

| Viewpoint 2: A836 near Rhian Bridge | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------|--|---------|
| Grid Reference | 256312 | 916632 | Figure Number | 6.2.2 |
| LCT | 142 – Strath | | Landscape Designation or WLA | None |
| Direction of view | East | | Distance to nearest turbine | 4.43 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located on the A836 near Rhian Bridge, which crosses the Abhainn Sgeamhaidh watercourse near a small cluster of properties at Rhian, to the west of the turbine area. The view is representative of oblique views experienced by road users on the A836. Similar views will be experienced by residents at the property cluster at Rhian.</p> <p>The view to the east is over rough grassland and scrub towards coniferous forest cover to the east of the A836. The A836 crosses Abhainn Sgeamhaidh watercourse over Rhian Bridge to the south, and the watercourse can be seen to the east. Whilst not in place at time of photography, the wood pole overhead line connection for Creag Riabhach Wind Farm crosses the view to the east, and some wood poles may be visible in middle distance views from this location. The moorland hills of Sron Leathad Chleansaigh and Creag Riabhach contribute to the horizon beyond the coniferous forest cover.</p> <p>To the north and south the A836 passes through rough grassland, with blocks of woodland and coniferous forest cover on both sides of the</p> | | | |

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| | <p>road. To the south, buildings at Rhian are largely screened from view by surrounding woodland. A small single turbine associated with this property is visible. To the west, the land cover comprises undulating rough grassland. Hills to the west of Loch Shin can be seen beyond this to the south-west.</p> <p>In terms of operational wind farms, turbines within the south-west wind farm group, including Lairg, Beinn Tharsuinn, Coire na Cloiche, Achany and Rosehall are theoretically visible on the distant horizon, in views to the south-west. From this point in the road, woodland around Rhian plays a screening role, with a single turbine of Lairg Wind Farm visible to the east of this group. However, the level of visibility to this south-west wind farm group will change as road users move along the road.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This view is mainly experienced by road users on a fast moving A-road, which indicates a medium-low susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is not located within any designated landscapes. This is a rural view and the influence of human activity is apparent through operational wind turbines and coniferous forest management cycles.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium-low; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium.</p> |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce the hubs and blades of 16 turbines, seen above the horizon in views to the east. Coniferous forest between the viewpoint and the Proposed Development will play a screening role for the turbine towers to the north of the scheme, whilst this remains in place. There will be some overlapping of turbine blades. No low-level ancillary infrastructure will be visible due to screening by the intervening landform and forestry. Turbines to the south of the layout will be seen in front of, and above the horizon of Meallan Liath Mor.</p> <p>The change in the view will be limited to a short stretch of the road where intervening landform and coniferous forestry allow open views to the east. Views towards the Proposed Development will be oblique from this stretch of the road, and experienced when travelling in both directions. The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines of a larger scale at closer proximity than the operational turbine visible within Lairg Wind Farm, albeit seen in the context of a landscape which has been modified by coniferous forestry.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium; Geographical Extent: medium; Magnitude of Change: medium.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Significant (Moderate).</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>The key change under scenario 2 will be the application stage Strath Tirry, Lairg II, Garvary and Achany Extension Wind Farms.</p> <p>Strath Tirry Wind Farm will introduce views of 4 turbines seen in closer proximity above the forested horizon in views to the south-east. There will be clear separation between this smaller 4 turbine scheme and the Proposed Development, seen in longer distance views to the east.</p> <p>Lairg II, Garvary and Achany Extension Wind Farms will extend visibility of the south-west wind farm group, seen either side of foreground woodland around Rhian.</p> <p>Given that there will be clear separation between the Proposed Development and the application stage (and closer proximity) Strath Tirry Wind Farm with further visible application stage schemes</p> |

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| | extending an existing and distant wind farm group this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative visual effects. Furthermore, forest cover either side of the road will vary the level of visibility, as road users travel along this route. |
| Total Cumulative Effects | The limited nature of further visibility of wind farms; viewing distances to and gaps between wind farms is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this viewpoint. |

Table 6.17: Viewpoint 3: Saval, Lairg

| Viewpoint 3: Saval, Lairg | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------|--|---------|
| Grid Reference | 258773 | 908502 | Figure Number | 6.2.3 |
| LCT | 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting | | Landscape Designation or WLA | None |
| Direction of view | North | | Distance to nearest turbine | 7.96 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located on the minor road to a small cluster of properties at Saval, to the north of Lairg. It is representative of views experienced by residents in properties located on higher ground to the north of Lairg with more open views to the north.</p> <p>The foreground of views to the north is formed by fields of rough pasture, delineated by post and wire fences. The ground slopes down to the north, towards a low point in the middle distance, before rising up towards coniferous forest covered rolling hills. Mountains within the Ben Klibreck range are visible beyond lower-lying rolling moorland hills.</p> <p>To the north-west, Ben Hee and surrounding summits rise up beyond Loch Shin. Scattered residential development to the east of Loch Shin can be seen in the middle distance. To the far west, summits within the Ben More Assynt range can be seen beyond rising rough pasture in the foreground. To the east, rolling moorland hills featuring blocks of coniferous forest from the horizon.</p> <p>In terms of wind farms, the under construction Creag Riabhach is visible in long distance views to the north-west, on lower ground to the west of Ben Klibreck and above Strath Vaggastie. A belt of coniferous trees in the foreground to the immediate south screens views of operational schemes in the south-east and south-west wind farms groups. There is likely to be greater visibility of these wind farms from the properties to the south of this belt of coniferous trees. However, the forest belt will limit views to the north, when south of this feature.</p> | | | |
| Sensitivity | This represents a residential view, of high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is not within a designated landscape although it represents the rural outlook from a small cluster of properties. There are man-made elements in the view, including scattered residential development to the north-west. | | | |

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| | <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: high; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce the hubs and blades of 16 turbines in views to the north. The hubs and towers of 10 turbines will be back clothed by the rolling moorland hills beyond in views from this elevated location, with hubs of 6 turbines appearing just above/ on the horizon. Some limited visibility of access tracks and ancillary infrastructure within the turbine area will be available. There will be no overlapping of turbine towers in the composition of this view.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce further wind turbines in views to the north, seen in closer proximity, and well separated from, the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm. The proposed turbines will be seen beyond coniferous forestry to the south of the turbine area in views from this location. These changes in view will be experienced from a small geographical extent. A belt of coniferous trees to the immediate south of the viewpoint will help to partially screen views from properties located to the south of the minor road. Wider views from the lower lying core of the settlement of Lairg will be limited by the rising topography north of the settlement.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: medium.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Significant (Moderate).</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>The key change to the cumulative baseline will be under scenario 2. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will introduce further turbines in views to the north. This smaller scheme will be seen in slightly closer proximity views, with clear separation between it and the Proposed Development. Turbines within Strath Tirry Wind Farm will also largely be contained under the distant horizon of the southern flanks of Ben Klibreck.</p> <p>In wider views to the south, the belt of coniferous forest cover in the foreground will largely screen distant views of changes to the south-east and south-west wind farm groups. Some limited visibility of turbine blades in the application stage Achany Extension Wind Farm will be apparent above the horizon, in distant views to the west. The application stage Sallachy Wind Farm will also be visible in long distance views to the north-west, on the hills west of Loch Shin.</p> <p>With the exception of Strath Tirry Wind Farm, views of scenario 2 wind farms will be limited, successive and longer distance. Strath Tirry Wind Farm and the Proposed Development will be seen in combined views to the north, along with the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm. As there will be clear separation between these schemes, with Strath Tirry being the closest wind farm, this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative visual effects.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>The limited nature of further visibility of wind farms; viewing distances to and gaps between wind farms is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this viewpoint.</p> |

Table 6.18: Viewpoint 4: Dalchork Bird Hide

Viewpoint 4: Dalchork Bird Hide

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| Grid Reference | 256832 | 909373 | Figure Number | 6.2.4 |
| LCT | 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting | | Landscape Designation or WLA | None |
| Direction of view | North-east | | Distance to nearest turbine | 8.15 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 15 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located on the track to a bird hide at Dalchork, off the A838 to the north-west of Lairg. It is representative of views experienced by recreational receptors accessing the bird hide. Views towards the turbine area from the bird hide itself are limited and orientated west over Loch Shin, in the opposite direction from site. Similar, slightly longer distance, views will be experienced from the shore line to the west of Loch Shin.</p> <p>Views towards the turbine area are to the north-east. The foreground of views is formed by a flatter area of rough grassland/marsh. The River Tirry joins Loch Shin to the north, and the A838 crosses the river on a bridge in the middle distance. Built development within Dalchork can be seen to the north-east. The A836 passes to the east of the viewpoint, and an overhead line supported on steel lattice towers follows the route from south to north to the east, before passing to the north-west between the A838 and Dalchork. The steel lattice towers can be seen above the horizon in views to the north-east. Whilst not in place at time of photography, the wood pole overhead line connection for Creag Riabhach Wind Farm crosses the view to the north-east linking into Dalchork Substation. Some wood poles may be visible in middle distance views from this location. The turbine area is located beyond gently undulating forested hills, which form the horizon to the north-east. To the west of the turbine area, higher summits including Ben Klibreck are visible.</p> <p>To the north-west, eastern parts of Loch Shin are visible beyond the rough grassland/marsh which forms the foreground. Built development at Colaboll can be seen beyond the A838 to the north of Loch Shin. Small hills rise up to form the horizon beyond. Longer distance views to the west are contained by plateau moorland to the west of Loch Shin, seen in filtered views beyond close-proximity vegetation surrounding the bird hide. This vegetation screens views to the south. To the east, views are available over rough grassland towards moorland hills which contain longer distance views in this direction. At the time of assessment, coniferous forestry on these hills had recently been clear felled.</p> <p>There is theoretical visibility of turbines within the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, in long distance views to the north. However, intervening coniferous forest cover will largely screen views of this scheme. Vegetation around the bird hide largely screens views of operational wind farms to the south.</p> | | | |
| Sensitivity | <p>This view is representative of a view experienced by recreational receptors, on the way to the bird hide. This indicates a medium-high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is not located within any designated landscapes. The influence of human activity can be seen</p> | | | |

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| | <p>in the form of coniferous forestry, built development and steel lattice towers.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium-high; Value: medium-low; Sensitivity: medium.</p> |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce actual visibility of the hubs of 4 turbines (coniferous forest cover on the horizon will play a screening role for other hubs (15 No.) theoretically visible) and the blades of 16 turbines, seen in views to the north-east at a distance of approximately 8.2 km. The turbines will be seen beyond the ridge formed by the forested Cnoc na Fuaralachd, which along with forest cover on the horizon, will largely screen the towers of the majority of turbines (with the exception of turbine T10). The turbine hubs and blades will be seen above this simple forested horizon. No low-level ancillary infrastructure will be visible from this viewpoint. There will be some overlapping of turbine blades in the composition of this view. However, the Proposed Development will read as one group of turbines, beyond the middle-distance horizon.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce visibility of operational wind turbines into this view. The turbines will be seen in the context of a view which has been altered by human influences, including road and electricity infrastructure, and coniferous forestry.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium-small; Geographical Extent: medium; Magnitude of Change: medium.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Not Significant (Minor).</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>The key change to the cumulative baseline will be under scenario 2. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will introduce further turbines in views to the north. This smaller scheme will be seen in slightly closer proximity views, with separation between it and the Proposed Development.</p> <p>In wider views to the north-west the application stage Sallachy Wind Farm will also be visible in long distance successive views, on the hills west of Loch Shin. Vegetation around the bird hide will largely screen further changes to the south-east and south-west wind farm groups, under scenario 1 and 2.</p> <p>With the exception of Strath Tirry Wind Farm, views of scenario 2 wind farms will be limited, successive and longer distance. Strath Tirry Wind Farm and the Proposed Development will be seen in combined views to the north. As there will be separation between these schemes, with Strath Tirry being the closest wind farm, this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative visual effects. This sequential view will change due to local vegetation cover, as people make their way to the bird hide.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>The limited nature of further visibility of wind farms; viewing distances to and gaps between wind farms is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this viewpoint.</p> |

Table 6.19: Viewpoint 5: The Ord above Ferrycroft Visitor Centre

| Viewpoint 5: The Ord above Ferrycroft Visitors Centre | | | | |
|---|--------|--------|---------------|-------|
| Grid Reference | 257400 | 905563 | Figure Number | 6.2.5 |

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|--------------------------------------|--|--|---------|
| LCT | 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting | Landscape Designation or WLA | None |
| Direction of view | North-east | Distance to nearest turbine | 11.2 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located at the Ord, an archaeological site situated on a small hill to the south-west of Lairg. It is representative of views experienced by recreational receptors including visitors to the chambered cairns and hut circles at the Ord, as well as hillwalkers.</p> <p>Views towards the turbine area are to the north-east. The foreground of views is formed by rough grassland and heather moorland. Infrastructure associated with Shin hydroelectric scheme can be seen in the middle distance beyond woodland on the southern edge of Loch Shin. Coniferous forestry to the south of the turbine area can be seen beyond rough pasture and scattered settlement within Lairg, and the horizon is formed by undulating moorland hills.</p> <p>In views to the north, a large telecommunications mast at the summit of the hill is visible at close proximity, surrounded by heather moorland. Beyond this, Loch Shin can be seen in the middle distance, with hills in the Reay Forest forming the horizon beyond. Ben Klibreck can be seen on the horizon to the north. To the west, undulating moorland hills with blocks of coniferous forest form the horizon at closer proximity. To the south, an open moorland plateau extends into the middle distance, beyond which undulating forested hills rise up. Longer distance views are available towards hills to the south of the Dornoch Firth. To the east, long distance views are contained by rising landform to the east of Lairg and settlement within Lairg can be seen on lower ground in the middle distance.</p> <p>The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is visible on the distant horizon to the north. Lairg Wind Farm is visible in middle distance views to the east, situated on moorland hills above Lairg. Long-distance views towards turbines within Beinn Tharsuinn, Beinn nan Oighrean and Coire na Cloiche Wind Farms are available to the south. The blades of two turbines within Achany Wind Farm can be seen above the rising ground to the south-west.</p> | | |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is a view which is mainly experienced by recreational receptors in Lairg and is of medium-high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint represents a rural outlook. The viewpoint is not located within any designations and human influence over the landscape is apparent through operational wind turbines, areas of coniferous forest cover, the large telecommunications mast at the summit of the hill, and infrastructure associated with Shin Hydroelectric scheme.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium-high; Value: medium-low; Sensitivity: medium.</p> | | |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce the hubs and blades of 16 turbines, seen in views to the north-east. The hubs and towers of the majority of the proposed turbines will be back clothed against the undulating moorland hills beyond, with the blades of all turbines appearing above the horizon. At this distance, ancillary infrastructure</p> | | |

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| | <p>and access tracks will be harder to discern. The turbine layout appears well composed, with no overlapping of turbine towers. The Proposed Development will appear as a well composed single group of turbines.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines in closer proximity views to the north. The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is visible in the longer distance, in views north. The Proposed development is further from the viewpoint than operational turbines within Lairg Wind Farm, seen in successive views. The Proposed Development will be seen in the context of being set above coniferous forestry, with the hubs contained below a simple undulating moorland horizon. In the wider view, the Proposed Development is also seen in the context of the telecommunications mast at the summit of the hill, settlement in Lairg and infrastructure associated with the Shin hydroelectric scheme from a localised accessible high point to the north of Lairg.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: medium.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Significant (Moderate) . This judgement is considered to be just above the threshold where significant visual effects may be experienced. |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Under scenario 1 Braemore will introduce middle distance views of wind turbines, in successive views to the south-west.</p> <p>Under scenario 2, Lairg and Garvary Wind Farms will notably extend the influence of wind turbines, in successive middle distance views to the south-east.</p> <p>Under scenario 2, the Proposed Development will be seen in combined views north with the application stage Strath Tirry Wind Farm. This smaller scheme will be seen in slightly closer proximity views, with separation between it and the Proposed Development. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will be contained below the distant horizon of Ben Klibreck.</p> <p>In terms of 'additional' cumulative effects, the Proposed Development will be seen distinct from (and beyond proposed) wind farms in combined views to the north. This is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | It is recognised that under scenario 2 significant 'total' cumulative effects are likely , due to the number of wind farms seen in middle to longer distance views in multiple viewing directions. However, this would likely be the case even without the Proposed Development in the cumulative picture. |

Table 6.20: Viewpoint 6: Torroble (A836 south of Lairg)

| Viewpoint 6: Torroble (A836 south of Lairg) | | | | |
|---|--|--------|------------------------------|-------|
| Grid Reference | 258725 | 903925 | Figure Number | 6.2.6 |
| LCT | 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting | | Landscape Designation or WLA | None |

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|--------------------------------------|---|--|----------|
| Direction of view | North-east | Distance to nearest turbine | 12.34 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 14 | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located on a minor road at Torroble, east of the A836 to the south of the settlement of Lairg. It is representative of glimpsed views experienced by road users on the A836, on the southern approach to Lairg. Roadside vegetation along the A836 limits the opportunity for open views from the A836. As such, this is a more open and elevated view than will be experienced from the A836 (with similar glimpsed views available from the railway line to the west of the road). Similar views will be experienced by residential receptors at Torroble.</p> <p>Views towards the turbine area are to the north-east. In the foreground of views north-east, housing and outbuildings at Torroble are visible, with a steel lattice tower associated with electricity transmission also visible in close proximity. Middle distance views are over pastoral land and scattered farmsteads to undulating hills which feature coniferous forest cover. Beyond this, longer-distance views are available towards Ben Klibreck and surrounding summits, seen on the distant horizon.</p> <p>To the north-west, views over pastoral land, forest cover and moorland towards Loch Shin are available. Settlement within Lairg is visible around southern extents of Loch Shin. Beyond Loch Shin, hill summits including Ben More Assynt contribute to the distant horizon. Outward views in other directions are limited by roadside woodland.</p> <p>The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is visible in long distance views to the north, to the west of Ben Klibreck. Foreground woodland partially filters and screens views of operational turbines from Lairg, in middle distance views to the south-east.</p> | | |
| Sensitivity | <p>This view has been selected to represent views from the A836, on the southern approach to Lairg and is of medium susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is not located within any designated landscapes. The influence of human activity is apparent through coniferous forest cover and electricity transmission infrastructure.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium.</p> | | |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce actual visibility of the hubs of 6 turbines and the blades of approximately 14 turbines (coniferous forest cover on the horizon will play a screening role for other hubs and blades which are theoretically visible), seen in views to the north-east. There will be some overlapping of turbine blades and towers from this viewpoint. However, intervening coniferous forestry on the horizon will help to mask this. No low-level ancillary infrastructure will be visible. The turbines will be seen above coniferous forestry to the south of the turbine area.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines into a different direction of view than those within Lairg Wind Farm. The turbines will be seen further from the viewpoint than those within Lairg Wind Farm, albeit in a more open direction of view. The Proposed Development will be seen in the context of steel lattice towers associated with electricity transmission infrastructure, which can be</p> | | |

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| | <p>seen above the horizon in views to the north-east. These changes in view will be visible in slightly oblique views when travelling north along the road (A836) for short and glimpsed sections of the route, where breaks in roadside vegetation allow. Similar views will be available from the scattered properties at Torroble.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium-small; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: medium-low.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this viewpoint will be Not Significant (Minor) . |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Under Scenario 1, the consented Braemore Wind Farm will be apparent through gaps in foreground woodland, in successive middle distance views to the south-west.</p> <p>The key change will be under scenario 2. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will introduce further turbines in combined views to the north. This smaller scheme will be seen in slightly closer proximity, with separation between it and the Proposed Development.</p> <p>With the exception of Strath Tirry Wind Farm, views of scenario 1 and 2 wind farms will be limited, successive and longer distance. Strath Tirry Wind Farm and the Proposed Development will be seen in combined views to the north. As there will be separation between these schemes, with Strath Tirry being the closest wind farm, this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative visual effects. This sequential view will change due to local vegetation cover, particularly as people move along A836, which is on lower ground to the west of this location.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | The limited nature of further visibility of wind farms; viewing distances to and gaps between wind farms is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this viewpoint. |

Table 6.21: Viewpoint 7: Rhilochan

| Viewpoint 7: Rhilochan | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------|--|----------|
| Grid Reference | 279920 | 908934 | Figure Number | 6.2.7 |
| LCT | 134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows | | Landscape Designation or WLA | None |
| Direction of view | North-west | | Distance to nearest turbine | 13.05 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 8 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 11 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located on the minor road to the west of the settlement of Rhilochan. It is mainly experienced by road users travelling north-west along Strath Brora. It is also representative of views experienced by residential receptors on the western edge of the settlement with open views to the west, albeit these will be slightly longer distance.</p> <p>Views towards the turbine area are to the north-west along Strath Brora. The foreground of views in this direction is formed by the minor road, which runs through open moorland on lower ground to the south</p> | | | |

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| | <p>of Strath Brora. The River Brora can be seen in the middle distance running through the strath, while rolling moorland hills rise up on either side. Wood poles associated with electricity distribution infrastructure are visible above the skyline, situated on higher ground above the road and dropping down into the valley floor.</p> <p>Views to the north and south are contained by the rolling hills above the strath floor. The River Brora can be seen running through the floor of the strath from west to east, to the north of the viewpoint. Longer-distance views are available to the east, towards scattered settlement within Rhilochan and its associated surrounding pastoral land. Kilbraur Wind Farm and its extension are visible situated on elevated plateau moorland above the settlement. These turbines are seen in front of higher ground including Ben Horn which forms the horizon to the east, with turbines seen above the horizon.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This view is mainly experienced by road users however, it is also representative of slightly longer distance views from scattered properties in Strath Brora. This indicates a medium-high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint represents a rural outlook. The viewpoint is not located within any designations and human influence over the landscape is apparent through operational wind turbines, scattered settlement and the presence of a wood pole overhead line.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium-high; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium.</p> |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce the hubs of 8 turbines and the blades of 11 turbines, seen framed between hills at the head of Strath Brora to the north-west. There will be some overlapping of turbine blades and towers from this viewpoint. No low-level ancillary infrastructure will be visible. The turbines will be seen in front of longer-distance views towards Ben Hee.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines into a different direction of view to those within Kilbraur Wind Farm and its extension. The turbines will be seen further from the viewpoint than those within Kilbraur Wind Farm and be contained within a narrower horizontal field of view. The Proposed Development will be seen in the context of wooden poles associated with electricity distribution infrastructure, which can be seen above the horizon in views to the north-west. These changes in view will be available in direct views when travelling north-west along the road, for a short stretch of the route.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: medium-low.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this viewpoint will be Not Significant (Minor).</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Under scenario 2 the application stage Kintradwell Wind Farm will introduce some longer distance and limited visibility of turbines on the horizon in views to the west. This will be seen in successive views from the Proposed Development. Views of other consented and proposed wind farms will be limited by the valley landform. As such, this is not predicted to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects.</p> |

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| Total Cumulative Effects | The successive nature of views of wind farms, to the north-west and south-east of the strath; and separation and viewing distance between schemes is such that total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this viewpoint. |
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Table 6.22: Viewpoint 8: Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con

| Viewpoint 8: Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con | | | | |
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| Grid Reference | 258524 | 929910 | Figure Number | 6.2.8 |
| LCT | 138 – Lone Mountains | | Landscape Designation or WLA | Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (35) WLA |
| Direction of view | South | | Distance to nearest turbine | 11.16 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located on Meall nan Con, the highest summit of the Ben Klibreck massif. It is representative of views experienced by recreational receptors including hillwalkers. This mountain is generally ascended from the west, with a walk along the ridge to reach Meall nan Con.</p> <p>From the summit of the hill, long-distance panoramic views are available. Views towards the turbine area are to the south. In the foreground, smaller summits in the Ben Klibreck range are visible. The ground drops steeply down towards Loch a' Bhealaich before rising up again towards undulating moorland hills beyond. The hills of Creag Riabhach na Greighe and Creag Dhubh are visible in front of the turbine area. Beyond, blocks of coniferous forest are visible on lower-lying ground. Long distance views towards hills within the Ben Wyvis and Ben Dearg ranges are available, as well as hills to the south of the Moray Firth.</p> <p>Long distance views are also available in other directions, including towards Ben More Assynt to the south-west; Ben Hee to the west; Ben Hope and Ben Loyal to the north; the Forsinard Flows to the north-east; Loch Choire and Morven to the east; and the Moray Firth to the south-east.</p> <p>Due to the long-distance panoramic views available from this viewpoint, a number of operational and under construction wind farms are visible in multiple viewing directions. This includes the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, which is the closest proximity scheme seen in views to the west. Longer distance views of operational wind farms including Gordonbush and Kilbraur and its extension to the south-east; Lairg, Beinn nan Oighrean, Beinn Tharsuinn and Coire na Cloiche to the south; and Rosehall and Achany to the south-west are also available.</p> | | | |
| Sensitivity | This is representative of a recreational viewpoint at a Munro summit, and of high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is within the | | | |

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| | <p>Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA and Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (35) WLA. It will predominantly be experienced by hillwalkers. The influence of human activity can be seen in the form of coniferous forestry and operational wind farms, although these tend to be seen in longer distance views and form small components of the panoramic view available from this viewpoint.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: high; Value: high; Sensitivity: high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>Views towards the Proposed Development will largely be screened during ascent, from the western side of the mountain. Visibility will be available from smaller summits on the western shoulder of Ben Klibreck on approach, and from the summit of Meall nan Con. The Proposed Development will introduce the hubs and blades of 16 turbines, seen back clothed against the undulating moorland and coniferous forest in views to the south. Some of the lower towers will be screened from view by the rounded hills of Creag Dhubh and Sron Leathad Chleansaid. The Proposed Development will be largely contained behind the ridge formed by these two hills. Ancillary infrastructure will be largely screened from this viewpoint. Whilst there will be some limited overlapping of turbine towers, to the right (west) of the scheme, the Proposed Development will read as a coherent single group of turbines set behind the ridge of Creag Dhubh and Sron Leathad Chleansaid.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines at closer proximity than the existing operational schemes in views to the south. However, the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will represent the closest wind farm in the baseline view, seen in successive views to the west. The turbines will be contained below the horizon and backclothed against the hills beyond seen in very large scale and panoramic views, which are altered already by wind farm development. The geographical extent from where the viewpoint will be limited to the summit area, given most walker generally climb the mountain from the west.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: medium.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Significant (Moderate). This judgement is just above the threshold where significant visual effects may be experienced, due to the high sensitivity of the viewpoint. Furthermore, views in the directions specifically highlighted in the special qualities of the SLA (<i>“extending to the northern coastline and beyond, taking in neighbouring peaks including Ben Hope and Ben Loyal”</i>) will not be altered.</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Due to the elevated nature of the viewpoint, consented and proposed wind farms will increase the influence of wind farms, in long distance views in various viewing directions.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will be seen in combined views to the south with the expanded south-east and south-west wind farm groups. The application stage Strath Tirry Wind Farm will be seen in front of the larger south-west wind farm group, with the Proposed Development seen in front of these larger groups and single wind farms, and reading as a distinct scheme.</p> <p>Due to the panoramic and large scale nature of views; as the Proposed Development is not the closest wind farm to the viewpoint; and as the Proposed Development is contained below the horizon and</p> |

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| | reads as a distinct scheme, this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects, under either scenario. |
| Total Cumulative Effects | It is recognised that, due to the elevated nature of this viewpoint, there are a number of wind farms visible in multiple viewing directions. However, and due to the very large scale nature of views; typically longer distances to wind farms; and gaps between schemes in the view, this is not judged to result in significant total cumulative effects, from this viewpoint. |

Table 6.23: Viewpoint 9: Ben Armine

| Viewpoint 9: Ben Armine | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------|--|--|
| Grid Reference | 269518 | 927236 | Figure Number | 6.2.9 |
| LCT | 135 – Rounded Hills | | Landscape Designation or WLA | Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest WLA |
| Direction of view | South-west | | Distance to nearest turbine | 12.07 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 13 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben Armine. It is representative of views experienced by recreational receptors including hillwalkers. At 705 m AOD the hill is classified as a 'Graham', and not as well frequented as higher Munros in the area. The hill is often accessed via a long walk in from the east.</p> <p>From the summit of the hill, long-distance panoramic views are available. Views towards the turbine area are to the south-west. In this direction of view the landform falls away from the summit, with long distance views looking over rolling peatland cut with watercourses. Areas of coniferous forest either side of Loch Shin are apparent in longer distance views, with operational turbines in Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms visible to the west of Loch Shin. Mountains to the south-west form the distant horizon.</p> <p>Long distance views are also available in other directions, including towards Ben More Assynt to the west; Ben Klibreck to the north-west; the Forsinard Flows to the north-east; Morven to the east; and the Moray Firth to the south-east.</p> <p>Due to the long-distance panoramic views available from this viewpoint, a number of operational wind farm developments are visible, including Achany and Rosehall beyond the turbine area to the south-west; Lairg, Beinn nan Oighrean, Beinn Tharsuinn and Coire na Cloiche to the south; and Kilbraur and Gordonbush (and extensions) to the south-east.</p> | | | |
| Sensitivity | This is representative of a recreational viewpoint at a hill summit, and of high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is within the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA and Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (35) | | | |

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| | <p>WLA. It will predominantly be experienced by hillwalkers. The influence of human activity can be seen in the form of coniferous forestry and operational wind farms, although these tend to be seen in longer distance views and form small components of the panoramic view available from this viewpoint.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium-high; Value: high; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce 13 hubs and 16 turbine blades, seen back clothed against the undulating moorland and coniferous forest in views to the south. Some of the lower parts of the turbine towers to the centre and right (west) of the turbine area will be screened from view by the rounded hills of Creag Dhubh and Sron Leathad Chleansaid. Ancillary infrastructure will be largely screened from this viewpoint and difficult to discern at this viewing distance where visible to the east of the turbine area. Whilst there will be some limited overlapping of turbine towers, to the right (west) of the scheme, the Proposed Development will read as a coherent single group of turbines largely set behind the ridge of Creag Dhubh and Sron Leathad Chleansaid.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines at closer proximity than the existing operational schemes in views to the south. It will read as a distinct group seen in front of Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms. The turbines will be contained below the horizon and back clothed against the hills beyond seen in very large scale and panoramic views, which are altered already by wind farm development.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: medium-low.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Not Significant (Minor). This judgement is just below the threshold where significant visual effects may be experienced. This judgement is considered to be below the threshold due to the viewing distance; panoramic and large scale nature of views; less frequented nature of the hill (the hill is not a Munro); and as the hill is often accessed via a long walk in from the east, which limits visibility to summit area/ as the Proposed Development is seen in a direction of views already altered by operational wind farms.</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Due to the elevated nature of the viewpoint, consented and proposed wind farms will increase the influence of wind farms, in long distance views in various viewing directions.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will be seen in combined views to the south-west with the expanded south-east and south-west wind farm groups. The application stage Strath Tirry Wind Farm will largely be screened from view, from this location, by the ridge of Creag Dhubh and Sron Leathad Chleansaid.</p> <p>Due to the panoramic and large scale nature of views; and as the Proposed Development is contained below the horizon and reads as a distinct scheme in front of the expanded south-west wind farm group, this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects, under either scenario.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>It is recognised that, due to the elevated nature of this viewpoint, there are a number of wind farms visible in multiple viewing directions. However, and due to the very large scale nature of views; typically longer distances to wind farms; and gaps between schemes in the</p> |

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| | view, this is not judged to result in significant total cumulative effects, from this viewpoint. |
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Table 6.24: Viewpoint 10: Reay-Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach

| Viewpoint 10: Reay – Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach | | | | |
|--|--|--------|--|-------------------------|
| Grid Reference | 245356 | 911822 | Figure Number | 6.2.10 |
| LCT | 135 – Rounded Hills | | Landscape Designation or WLA | Reay – Cassley (34) WLA |
| Direction of view | North-east | | Distance to nearest turbine | 16.36 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben Sgeireach, a cairned summit above Loch Sgeireach to the west of Loch Shin. It is representative of views experienced hillwalkers and is typically access via a shorter climb from the west via Glen Cassely.</p> <p>Views towards the turbine area are to the north-east. The foreground of views is formed by rough grassland, heather moorland and rocky outcrops. The landform falls away to Loch Shin. East of the loch scattered housing and crofts, to the north of Lairg, are set on a hill side characterised by pasture. As the landform rises above the loch the landcover transitions to moorland and coniferous forestry. The turbine area is visible beyond the coniferous forestry, set in rolling moorland which rises towards the distant rolling horizon.</p> <p>Views in other directions are also long distance, with series of hill ridges contributing to middle and longer distance horizons. The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is visible just below the distant horizon to the north, to the west of Ben Klibreck. Gordonbush, Kilbraur Wind Farms and their extensions are visible in distant views to the east. Long-distance views towards turbines within Beinn Tharsuinn, Beinn nan Oighrean and Coire na Cloiche Wind Farms, seen in front of Lairg, Achancy and Rosehall Wind Farms are available to the south.</p> | | | |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is a view which is mainly experienced by hill walkers and is of medium-high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint represents a rural outlook. The viewpoint is located within the Reay – Cassley (34) WLA. Human influence over the landscape is apparent through operational wind turbines and areas of coniferous forest cover.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium-high; Value: high; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> | | | |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce the hubs and blades of 16 turbines, seen in views to the east. The hubs and towers of the turbines will be back clothed against the undulating moorland hills beyond, with the blades of 4 turbines just tipping over the skyline. At this distance, ancillary infrastructure and access tracks will be harder to discern. There is some overlapping of turbine towers to the east (right) of the layout. However, the Proposed Development will appear as a well composed single group of turbines.</p> | | | |

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| | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce further wind turbines into long distance and large scale views to the west. The Proposed Development will be seen in the context of the settled and farm shoreline above Loch Shin and set above a band of coniferous forestry.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: medium-low.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this location will be Not Significant (Minor) . |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Under scenario 1 Braemore Wind Farm will introduce some limited and long distance visibility of wind turbines, in successive views to the south.</p> <p>Under scenario 2, application stage wind farms including Achany Extension, Lairg II and Garvary Wind Farms will notably extend the influence of wind turbines, in successive close proximity to longer distance views to the south-west.</p> <p>Under scenario 2, the Proposed Development will be seen in combined views west with the application stage Strath Tirry Wind Farm and longer distance views of the application stage Kintradwell and appeal stage South Kilbraur Wind Farms. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will be seen in slightly closer proximity views, with some slight separation between it and the Proposed Development. Strath Tirry Wind Farm will be contained below the distant horizon.</p> <p>In terms of 'additional' cumulative effects, the Proposed Development will be seen distinct from (and beyond proposed) wind farms in combined views to the west. This is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | It is recognised that under scenario 2 significant 'total' cumulative effects are likely , due to the number of wind farms seen in close proximity to longer distance views, in multiple viewing directions. However, this would likely be the case even without the Proposed Development in the cumulative picture. |

Table 6.25: Viewpoint 11: Ben Hee

| Viewpoint 11: Ben Hee | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|--------|--|-----------------------------|
| Grid Reference | 242654 | 933940 | Figure Number | 6.2.11 |
| LCT | 139 – Rugged Mountain Massif | | Landscape Designation or WLA | Foinaven – Ben Hee (37) WLA |
| Direction of view | South-east | | Distance to nearest turbine | 23.35 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben Hee. It is representative of views experienced by recreational receptors including hillwalkers. The summit is generally approached from the west. | | | |

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| | <p>From the summit of the hill, long-distance panoramic views are available. Views towards the turbine area are to the south-east. The foreground looks over Loch Fiag, and the lower lying rolling peatlands and lochans to the north of Loch Shins. Ben Klibreck is visible in the middle distance, with the lower lying turbine area visible to the south of the mountain range. The views extend into the long distance looking over Loch Shin and distant hills to the south-west.</p> <p>In other directions Ben Loyal is visible to the north and Assynt to the south-west. Due to the long-distance panoramic views available from this viewpoint, a number of operational and under construction wind farm developments are visible. These are largely focussed to the south-east and include the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, which forms the closest proximity scheme. Other operational schemes including Kilbraur and Kilbraur Extension are seen in views beyond the turbine area and Lairg, Rosehall, Achany, Beinn nan Oighrean, Coire na Cloiche and Beinn Tharsuinn Wind Farms are seen in distant views further west.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is representative of a recreational viewpoint at a hill summit, and of high susceptibility. In terms of value, the viewpoint is within the Foinaven – Ben Hee (37) WLA. It will predominantly be experienced by hillwalkers. The influence of human activity can be seen in the form of coniferous forestry and operational wind farms, although these tend to be seen in longer distance views and form small components of the panoramic view available from this viewpoint.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: high; Value: high; Sensitivity: high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>Views towards the Proposed Development will be screened on ascent from the west. From the summit, the Proposed Development will introduce the hubs and blades of 16 turbines, seen back clothed against moorland hills to the south of the Ben Klibreck mountain range. The turbines will be seen in front of distant turbines within Kilbraur Wind Farm and its extension, and beyond the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm. It will read as a distinct wind farm between these schemes. Due to the viewing distance, low-level ancillary infrastructure will be difficult to perceive. There will be some overlapping of turbine blades and towers from this viewpoint. However, the Proposed Development will read as a distinct single group of turbines in large scale, panoramic views to the south-east.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines at comparable distances to other existing under construction and operational schemes, in wider panoramic views. The Proposed Development will not be the closest wind farm to the viewpoint, with Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, under construction, seen at a distance of approximately 10 km to the south-east. The Proposed Development will introduce notable man-made development into this expansive, remote view. The turbines will be contained below the horizon and back clothed against the hills beyond. These changes in view will be contained to the higher ground around the summit of Ben Hee, with the Proposed Development screened from view during ascent.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: small; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: low.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>The visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this viewpoint will be Not Significant (Minor).</p> |

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| <p>Additional Cumulative Effects</p> | <p>Due to the elevated nature of the viewpoint, consented and proposed wind farms will increase the influence of wind farms, in long distance views in various viewing directions.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will be seen in views to the south-east, in front of the appeal stage South Kilbraur Wind Farm, and in combined views with the expanded south-west wind farm group. The application stage Strath Tirry Wind Farm will be seen in front of the larger south-west wind farm group, with the Proposed Development seen in front of these wind farms, and read as a distinct scheme. The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will continue to be the closest wind farm to the viewpoint, in views to the south-east.</p> <p>Due to the panoramic and large scale nature of views; as the Proposed Development is not the closest wind farm to the viewpoint; and as the Proposed Development is contained below the horizon and reads as a distinct scheme (seen in front of the appeal stage South Kilbraur Wind Farm), this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects, under either scenario.</p> |
| <p>Total Cumulative Effects</p> | <p>It is recognised that, due to the elevated nature of this viewpoint, there are a number of wind farms visible in multiple viewing directions. However, and due to the very large scale nature of views; typically longer distances to wind farms; and gaps between schemes in the view, this is not judged to result in significant total cumulative effects, from this viewpoint.</p> |

Table 6.26: Viewpoint 12: Ben More Assynt

| Viewpoint 12: Ben More Assynt | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------|--|---|
| Grid Reference | 231815 | 920123 | Figure Number | 6.2.12 |
| LCT | 139 – Rugged Mountain Massif | | Landscape Designation or WLA | Assynt – Coigach NSA Reay – Cassley (34) WLA |
| Direction of view | East | | Distance to nearest turbine | 28.75 km |
| Number of hubs theoretically visible | 16 | | Number of turbines with blades theoretically visible | 16 |
| Baseline Description | <p>This viewpoint is located at the summit of Ben More Assynt. It is representative of views experienced by recreational receptors including hillwalkers. The summit is generally approached from the west.</p> <p>From the summit of the hill, long-distance panoramic views are available. Views towards the turbine area are to the east. Views in this direction are over Glen Cassley towards Loch Shin and rolling moorland hills beyond. Ben Klibreck can be seen in longer-distance views in this direction. The turbine area is visible beyond Loch Shin. Turbines within Gordonbush Wind Farm and its extension can be seen backclothed against hills beyond the turbine area in the distance. The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is the closest wind farm in the view, to the east.</p> | | | |

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| | <p>Long distance views are also available in other directions, including towards summits within the Reay Forest to the north-east; scattered lochs and bodies of water within gullies between hills to the north; hills to the north-west including Glas Bheinn and Quinag; Loch Assynt to the west; and smaller summits within Benmore Forest to the south. More extensive views over Assynt to the west are screened by the summit of Conival, directly west of Ben More Assynt.</p> <p>Due to the long-distance panoramic views available from this viewpoint, a number of further operational wind farm developments are visible, including Kilbraur, Kilbraur Extension, Lairg, Rosehall, Achany, Beinn nan Oighrean and Beinn Tharsuinn to the south-east; and Strathy North in very long distance views to the north-east.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>This represents a high susceptibility view experienced by hillwalkers from the summit of a Munro. In terms of value, the viewpoint is within the Assynt – Coigach NSA and Reay - Cassley (34) WLA. This is a remote view with a wild character. The influence of human activity can be seen in the form of coniferous forestry and operational wind farms, although these tend to be seen in longer distance views and form small components of the overall panoramic view available from this viewpoint.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: high; Value: high; Sensitivity: high.</p> |
| Changes | <p>Views towards the Proposed Development will be screened on ascent. From the summit, the Proposed Development will introduce the hubs and blades of 16 turbines, seen backclothed against moorland hills to the south of the Strath of Kildonan to the east. The proposed turbines will be seen in front of turbines within Gordonbush Wind Farm and its extension with a wider horizontal field of view occupied by turbines. It will read as a distinct wind farm in front of this longer distance operational scheme. Due to the viewing distance, low-level ancillary infrastructure will be difficult to perceive. There will be some overlapping of turbine blades and towers from this viewpoint. However, the Proposed Development will read as a distinct single group of turbines in large scale, panoramic views to the east.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will introduce wind turbines at comparable distances to other existing operational schemes, including Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms. The under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will continue to be the closest proximity wind farm to the viewpoint. The Proposed Development will introduce notable man-made development into this expansive, remote view. The turbines will be contained below the horizon and backclothed against the hills beyond. These changes will be limited to higher ground to the east of the summit of Ben More Assynt, and the Proposed Development will be screened from view during ascent.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: small; Geographical Extent: small; Magnitude of Change: low.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>Overall, the visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this viewpoint will be Not Significant (Minor).</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>Due to the elevated nature of the viewpoint, consented and proposed wind farms will increase the influence of wind farms, in long distance views in various viewing directions.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will be seen in combined views to the east, in front of Gordonbush Wind Farm and its extension, with the application stage Kintradwell Wind Farm extending the influence of turbines in this distant group. The application stage Strath Tirry Wind</p> |

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| | <p>Farm will be seen in front of the larger south-east wind farm group. The south-west wind farm group will also have expanded due to consented (Braemore) and application stage schemes (Lairg II, Garvary and Achany Extension) in views further west. The Proposed Development will be seen between Gordonbush and its extension and the closer proximity, application stage, Sallachy Wind Farm.</p> <p>Due to the panoramic and large scale nature of views; as the Proposed Development is not the closest wind farm to the viewpoint; and as the Proposed Development is contained below the horizon and reads as a distinct scheme (beyond longer distance views of an application stage wind farm), this is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative effects, under either scenario.</p> |
| <p>Total Cumulative Effects</p> | <p>It is recognised that, due to the elevated nature of this viewpoint, there are a number of wind farms visible in multiple viewing directions. However, and due to the very large scale nature of views; typically longer distances to wind farms; and gaps between schemes in the view, this is not judged to result in significant total cumulative effects, from this viewpoint.</p> |

Pattern of Cumulative Development

- 6.6.21 **Figure 6.1.6** highlights the pattern of operational, consented and proposed wind farms across the LVIA study area.
- 6.6.22 Within 20 km there is a larger emerging group, including the operational Kilbraur and its extension and the appeal stage South Kilbraur (the south-east group). These wind farms are contained in two units of the Rounded Hills LCT, either side of the Allt nan Sgeith.
- 6.6.23 To the south and south-west there is a larger emerging group including Lairg (operational), Lairg II and Garvary (application stage), Braemore (consented), Achany and Rosehall (operational) and Achany Extension (application stage). This south-western group is located in the Rounded Hills LCT to the south of Lairg and south-west of Loch Shin.
- 6.6.24 Creag Riabhach (under construction), Strath Tirry and Sallachy (application stage) are located to the west and north-west of the site. These wind farms will read as distinct schemes within the Rounded Hills LCT and Sweeping Moorland Flows LCT.
- 6.6.25 Gordonbush and its extension (operational) and the application stage Kintradwell are located beyond 20 km to the east. Meall Buidhe (application stage) is located beyond 20 km to the south-west. In the wider context, beyond 30 km from the site, there are looser clusters of wind farms to the north-east (including Strathy North) and south (including Beinn nan Oighrean).
- 6.6.26 The Proposed Development is not out of keeping with the existing pattern of wind energy development, which tends to be located in the Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCTs, outside of designated landscapes.
- 6.6.27 The Proposed Development will generally read as a distinct and well composed single cluster of turbines which reflects the pattern of distinct schemes to the north-west and west of the site.
- 6.6.28 The turbines will be larger in scale than operational schemes in the landscape (the largest currently being Gordonbush Extension at 149.9m to tip height). However, the turbines are proposed in a large scale landscape with a simple land pattern, which is able to

accommodate turbines of this scale. Furthermore, there is offset between the Proposed Development and schemes with smaller scale turbines, which helps to mask the difference in turbine scale.

Effects on Residential Visual Amenity

- 6.6.29 In 2019 the Landscape Institute published the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) Technical Guidance Note 2/19. Paragraph 2.1 onwards of this guidance states: “The purpose of RVAA is to provide an informed, well-reasoned answer to the question: ‘is the effect of the development on Residential Visual Amenity of such nature and / or magnitude that it potentially affects ‘living conditions’ or ‘Residential Amenity?’” In this guidance this is referred to as the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold.
- 6.6.30 It is not uncommon to identify significant visual effects (in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) terms) on views and visual amenity from local residential properties as a result of introducing a commercial scale wind energy development into any landscape. Findings of significant effects on views or visual amenity from a property do not automatically imply the need for further assessment. However, for properties likely to experience a high magnitude of visual change and which are in close proximity to a development, undertaking an RVAA may be appropriate.
- 6.6.31 Effects on residential visual amenity have been considered for all properties within 2 km of the Proposed Development, refer to **Figure 6.1.12**. This extends to a small property cluster at Dalnessie, which has also been included as an assessment viewpoint (VP1).
- 6.6.32 There are two residential properties at Dalnessie, the estate manager’s house to the west (see **Plate 1** below) and the lodge to the east (see **Plate 2** below). **Plate 3**, below, highlights the site facing rear façade of both properties.
- 6.6.33 Beyond this there are no other properties upon which effects on Residential Visual Amenity are likely to be a concern.

Plate 1 – southern (primary façade) of estate managers house



Plate 2 – view north-east from access track towards Dalnessie Lodge (southern façade)



Plate 3 – view looking south towards rear façade of both properties



- 6.6.34 From the estate manager's house primary views are orientated to the south. From the lodge house primary views are orientated to the south and east, looking down the valley of the River Brora.
- 6.6.35 Views towards the turbine area are to the north-west. In this direction, farm outbuildings are visible in the foreground of views.
- 6.6.36 The Proposed Development will be visible in views to the north-west at a distance of just over 1.5 km (the location of VP1 is just north of the residential properties at Dalnessie, refer to **Figure 6.1.12**). The proposed turbines will be visible in views from the surroundings of the properties and on approach along the access track. Views from the properties themselves will be secondary, with outbuildings in close proximity providing a level of screening. This will be more so from ground floor windows in the lodge house.
- 6.6.37 Whilst the Proposed Development will result in significant visual effects as reported from the VP1 assessment (refer to **Table 6.15**), the viewing distance; secondary nature of views towards the Proposed Development; level of screening provided by outbuildings to the north-west; orientation of primary views (south-east along River Brora) which will remain unaltered, is such that effects are not judged to breach the residential visual amenity threshold, as described in Landscape Institute guidance.

Operational Effects on Views from Routes

- 6.6.38 Sequential visual effects are assessed through considering the likely effects of the Development both in isolation, and in the context of other existing, consented and proposed wind energy developments on key routes through the Study Area. The routes to be assessed were identified through analysis of the ZTV shown on **Figure 6.1.2a and 6.1.2b**, as listed in **Table 6.5** above. The assessment of likely effects on sequential views from these routes is detailed below.

Table 6.27: A836

| A836 | | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Representative Viewpoint | VP 2: A836 Rhian Bridge VP4: Dalchork Bird Hide VP 6: A836 south of Lairg (Torroble) | Distance to nearest turbine | Passes within 5 km to the west of the turbine area, at its closest point |
| Baseline Description | <p>The A836 runs broadly north to south through the centre of the Study Area between Bettyhill and Tain, passing within 5 km to the west of the turbine area. National Cycle Route 1 follows the same route as the A836 through the Study Area. This route will be experienced by road users, including cyclists, travelling in both directions.</p> <p>Largely oblique views towards the turbine area are available within 10 km of the site, when travelling in both directions along a stretch of the route between Dalchork and Rhian Bridge. However, large areas of coniferous forest cover (whist this remains in place) limit views to the east from localised sections of this part of the route.</p> <p>More direct views are available when travelling north from short stretches of the route to the south of Lairg, within 15 km. However, roadside vegetation can limit visibility and views tend to be glimpsed. Visibility from this route, as it passes through lower lying ground in Lairg, is very limited.</p> <p>Visibility of the turbine area from this route beyond approximately 15 km is very limited.</p> <p>This route is experienced by road users often travelling at speed with the key focus of views being the road ahead. It is also experienced by cyclists who will be travelling at a slower pace.</p> <p>Turbines within Beinn nan Oighrean, Beinn Tharsuinn and Coire na Cloiche Wind Farms are located on hills to the south of Bonar Bridge and are visible from open parts of the route to the south of Lairg. Lairg Wind Farm is visible in fleeting views on the southern approach to the settlement. Turbines within Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms are also visible in views to the west from parts of the route with open views over Loch Shin. Close proximity views of the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm will be experienced from open sections of the road to the north of the Crask Inn, as the route passes to the east of this scheme.</p> | | |
| Sensitivity | <p>This is a key transport route linking Dornoch Firth to the north Highlands. Road users and cyclists on this route are considered to be of medium susceptibility. Short stretches of the A836 pass through the Kyle of Tongue NSA and Dornoch Firth NSA to the north and south of the turbine area respectively. However, these are along parts of the route from which there is limited visibility of the turbine area. The route is designated as part of the National Cycle Network and as part of the Moray Firth Tourist Route, which indicates a higher value. Man-made influence is apparent in views from parts of the route, including extensive and close proximity views of coniferous forest cover, existing wind farm developments and scattered settlements.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium-high; Sensitivity: medium-high.</p> | | |

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| <p>Changes</p> | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce varying visibility of 16 turbine hubs and blades seen in sequential views when travelling in both directions along this route.</p> <p>From sections of the route nearest the turbine area, between Dalchork and Rhian Bridge, views will typically be oblique. Forest cover to the east of the road will also play a role in filtering and screening views from this section of the route.</p> <p>As road users travel south-east along a stretch of the route to the south of Crask Inn, views towards the Proposed Development will become available where coniferous forest cover allows open views to the east. These views will become increasingly oblique as road users travel further south. The turbines will be seen above the horizon in the context of coniferous forest cover, with the lower towers largely screened by intervening landform. Viewpoint 2 is indicative of such views and indicates a medium scale of change.</p> <p>More direct views will be available when travelling north from a stretch of the route between Dalchork and the access track to Dalnessie. The turbines will be seen above the horizon beyond intervening landform to the south of the turbine area which will largely screen the lower towers. The turbines will be seen in the context of coniferous forest cover on the horizon. Viewpoint 4 is indicative of views from this stretch of the route and indicates a medium-small scale of change. As road users travel further north, views will become increasingly oblique and coniferous forest cover will play more of a role in screening views towards the Proposed Development.</p> <p>Longer distance direct views will also be available from short stretches of the route to the south of Lairg when travelling north, and where breaks in roadside vegetation allow, noting the opportunity for these types of views is limited. From these sections of the route, the Proposed Development will be seen largely backclothed against the moorland hills beyond, with turbine tips on the horizon, and seen in the context of coniferous forest cover to the south of the turbine area, which will play a role in screening the lower sections of turbine towers. Intervening landform to the south of the turbine area will also screen the hubs of a number of turbines to the eastern part of the turbine area. Viewpoint 6 is indicative of these views and indicates a medium-small scale of change. As road users travel further north, built form and intervening landform around Lairg will increasingly screen views towards the Proposed Development.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: medium to small; Geographical Extent: small within the overall context of the 45 km study area; Magnitude of Change: medium-low.</p> |
| <p>Effect and Significance</p> | <p>Overall, the visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from the A836 and NCN Route 1 is judged to be Significant (Moderate) within approximately 5 km of the turbine area, reducing to Not Significant (Minor) beyond. Significant effects will only likely be experienced from a short section of the route (approximately 5 km in length) and where breaks in coniferous forest cover offer oblique views towards the Proposed Development, similar to those experienced at Viewpoint 2.</p> |
| <p>Additional Cumulative Effects</p> | <p>The key changes to the cumulative baseline, experienced in sequential views from this route, will be Braemore under scenario 1, and Lairg II, Garvary and Strath Tirry Wind Farms under scenario 2.</p> <p>Braemore, Lairg II and Garvary will increase the influence of wind farms, seen in closer proximity successive views either side of the</p> |

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| | <p>road, on the southern approach to Lairg. The level of visibility (including visibility of the Proposed Development, seen in successive and more direct views to the north) will depend on roadside vegetation.</p> <p>Strath Tirry Wind Farm will be visible in combined and successive views as the road passes to the west of these schemes. This scheme will generally read as a smaller wind farm development set in closer proximity to the road, with the Proposed Development set further back and beyond forested areas. Roadside coniferous forest cover will also dictate the level of visibility.</p> <p>As such, the Proposed Development is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative sequential effects from this route. It will increase visibility of wind farms from limited sections of the route, and will generally read as a distinct scheme set further back from other operational, under construction, consented and proposed wind farms seen when travelling along the route.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>There will be sections of the route with notably closer proximity views of wind farms, as the route passes Creag Riabhach and Strath Tirry Wind Farms, and between wind farms from a section of the route to the south of Lairg. However, the landform and local screening through coniferous forest cover will also result in sections of the route where visibility of wind farms across the landscape will be limited. There will also be long sections of the route where any visibility of wind farms is well set back. On balance, total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this route.</p> |

Table 6.28: Right of Way HS29, Hill Track and Heritage Path to east of turbine area

| Right of Way HS29, Hill Track and Heritage Path to east of turbine area | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Representative Viewpoint | <p>VP1: Right of Way near Dalnessie</p> <p>WLA Dusk VP1: Ben Klibreck WLA track to Loch Choire</p> | Distance to nearest turbine | Within 2 km at its closest point |
| Baseline Description | <p>This route passes from the A836 to the south-west of the turbine area, from west to east through the valley of the Feith Os dail. It then routes to the north at Dalnessie and continues to the east of the turbine area through the valley of the Allt Gobhlach and Allt Coire na Fearná watercourses to reach to the southern shore of Loch Choire. It is designated as Right of Way HS29, Scottish Hill Track number 341 Lairg to Crask Inn by Loch Choire and Heritage Path 308 Strath Tirry to Badenloch Tracks. Receptors include recreational users including walkers.</p> <p>Close proximity views towards the turbine area are available from the track, particularly from a stretch to the east of the turbine area, north of Dalnessie. From the section of the route between the A836 and Dalnessie, coniferous forest cover and intervening landform to the north limits views towards the turbine area. From northerly parts of the route to the south of Loch Choire, higher ground to the north of the turbine area limits views to the south. From higher ground along the route to the north of the turbine area, views towards existing operational wind farms including Lairg, Beinn Tharsuinn, Beinn nan Oighrean and Coire na Cloiche are available to the south, beyond the turbine area. Turbines within Rosehall and Achany Wind Farms are</p> | | |

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| | <p>visible to the south-west. Kilbraur Wind Farm and its extension and Gordonbush Wind Farm and its extension are also visible in distant views to the south-east.</p> |
| Sensitivity | <p>The route is designated as a right of way, hill track and heritage path, and parts of the route are located within the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest (35) WLA and Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA, which indicate a higher value. However, visibility of the turbine area from parts of the route within the WLA is limited by the rising landform to the north of the site. The route will predominantly be experienced by recreational users including walkers. Parts of the track in the WLA to the north of the site are very rough, overgrown and can be difficult to follow. Outward views are over a landscape of moorland hills, although man-made influence is apparent, including in the form of coniferous forest cover and operational wind turbines.</p> <p>Judgements: Susceptibility: medium; Value: medium; Sensitivity: medium.</p> |
| Changes | <p>The Proposed Development will introduce visibility of up to 16 turbine hubs and 16 turbine blades seen in sequential views when travelling in both directions along this route.</p> <p>The turbines will be seen in close proximity direct to oblique views from a stretch of the route to the north and east of the turbine area. Closest proximity views will be largely oblique, with the turbines seen above the skyline to the west. More direct views will be available when travelling south along the route to the north of the turbine area, particularly from higher ground to the east of Meall an Fhuarain (refer to WLA Dusk Viewpoint 1). In such views, the proposed turbines will be largely back clothed against the forested land beyond, and contained behind the ridge formed by Sron Leathad Chleansaid and Creag Riabhach na Greighe, which will provide a degree of visual separation.</p> <p>From parts of the route to the south, coniferous forest cover will limit views towards the Proposed Development.</p> <p>When visible, the proposed turbines will be seen in the context of existing human influence in the form of coniferous forest cover. From some parts of the route they will be seen in the context of turbines within existing operational schemes in the wider landscape. The Proposed Development will be experienced by recreational receptors travelling at slow speeds along this route, and as such will be visible form an extended period of time.</p> <p>Judgements: Scale: large; Geographical Extent: medium; Magnitude of Change: high.</p> |
| Effect and Significance | <p>Overall, the visual effect of the Proposed Development on views from this route is judged to be Significant (Major) within 5km of the site, and from the more open landscape to the north of the site. For other sections of the route the level of effect will fall below the significance threshold.</p> |
| Additional Cumulative Effects | <p>The key change to the cumulative baseline will be under scenario 2. When travelling east Strath Tirry Wind Farm will introduce close proximity views of a four turbine wind farm, from the section of track near the junction with the A836. The level of visibility of this scheme will be dependent on coniferous forest cover to the north of the track. Sequential views of the Proposed Development will increasingly open up as track users travel north-east, into the more open landscape as the track passes the site.</p> |

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| | <p>North of the site (and within 5km) the landform and ridge north of Sron Leathad Chleansaid and minor summit of Cnoc na Fuaralachd will typically screen views of Strath Tirry, when travelling south. Longer distance views of consented (Braemore) and proposed wind farms (including Garvary and Lairg II) will be visible beyond the Proposed Development, from the higher ground as the track crosses the ridge east of Meall an Fhuarain. This will be quite fleeting, as the track drops in elevation on approach to the site the rising landform north of the site will increasingly screen longer distance views of cumulative schemes.</p> <p>As such, the Proposed Development is not judged to result in significant 'additional' cumulative sequential effects from this route. It will increase visibility of wind farms from notable sections of the route, but will generally not be seen in combined views with Strath Tirry Wind Farm due to screening by landform or coniferous forest cover. Views of other wind farms will be fleeting and long distance.</p> |
| Total Cumulative Effects | <p>Total cumulative effects are judged to be not significant, for this route. There will be closer proximity views of Strath Tirry Wind Farm (where breaks in forest cover allow) and the Proposed Development, as the route passes these schemes. From upland and open sections of the track, wider visibility of wind farms will be longer distance with the gaps between wind farms and emerging clusters apparent.</p> |

6.7 Mitigation

6.7.1 As set out in the methodology (**Appendix A6.1**), mitigation of landscape and visual effects has been undertaken through design modifications and input to the design process. The design evolution is set out in **Chapter 3: Site Selection and Design** of the EIA Report. As all mitigation for landscape and visual effects is embedded within the final design for the Proposed Development, all effects identified in the LVIA are residual effects.

6.8 Summary of effects

6.8.1 **Table 6.29** provides a summary of the effects detailed within the LVIA.

Table 6.29 Summary of Landscape and Visual Effects

| Receptor | Sensitivity of Receptor | 'Primary' Effects | Cumulative Effects |
|--|-------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Construction Effects | | | |
| The turbine area | Medium | Significant (Major) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Operational Effects on Landscape Character | | | |
| The turbine area | Medium | Significant (Major) | No significant cumulative effects |
| 134 – Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT | Medium-high | Significant (Major) for the turbine area; | No significant cumulative effects |

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| | | Significant (Moderate) for areas within approximately 5km where forest does not foreshorten views; and Not Significant (Minor) for the wider LCT. | |
| 135 – Rounded Hills LCT | Medium-high | Significant (Major) for the turbine area and locality, likely extending to the ridge of Sron Leathad Chleansaid and transitioning into Significant (Moderate) effects for areas of the LCT within 5 km, and Not Significant (Minor) for wider areas of the LCT. | No significant cumulative effects |
| 138 – Lone Mountains LCT | High | Not Significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| 142 – Strath LCT | Medium-high | Not Significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| 145 – Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting LCT | Medium | Not Significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Operational Effects on Designated Landscapes | | | |
| Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA | High | Not judged to compromise reasons for designation | No significant cumulative effects |
| Operational Visual Effects | | | |
| Viewpoint 1: Right of Way near Dalnessie | Medium-high | Significant (Major) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 2: A836 near Rhian Bridge | Medium | Significant (Moderate) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 3: Saval, Lairg | Medium-high | Significant (Moderate) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 4: Dalchork Bird Hide | Medium | Not significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 5: The Ord above Ferrycroft Visitor Centre | Medium | Significant (Moderate) | No significant 'additional' cumulative effects Significant 'total' cumulative effects |

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| Viewpoint 6: A836 south of Lairg (Torroble) | Medium | Not significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 7: Rhilochan | Medium | Not significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 8: Ben Klibreck, Meall nan Con | High | Significant (Moderate) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 9: Ben Armine | Medium-high | Not significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 10: Reay – Cassley WLA Ben Sgeireach | Medium-high | Not significant (Minor) | No significant 'additional' cumulative effects Significant 'total' cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 11: Ben Hee | High | Not significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Viewpoint 12: Ben More Assynt | High | Not significant (Minor) | No significant cumulative effects |
| Operational Effects on Views from Routes | | | |
| A836 and NCN 1 | Medium-high | Significant (Moderate) within approximately 5 km where breaks in coniferous forest cover offer oblique views towards the Proposed Development | No significant cumulative effects |
| Right of Way HS29, Hill Track and Heritage Path to east of turbine area | Medium | Significant (Major) within 5km of the site, and from the more open landscape to the north of the site | No significant cumulative effects |

6.9 Appraisal of Proposed Development against THC SG Landscape and Visual Criteria

6.9.1 THC Onshore Wind Energy SG sets out ten landscape and visual criteria that the Council will use as a framework for assessing proposals. The criteria do not set absolute requirements but seek to ensure that developers are aware of key constraints to development, which should be taken account of when progressing assessment and design of wind energy proposals. An assessment of the Proposed Development against the ten criteria is set out in **Table 6.30** below.

Table 6.30: Appraisal of Proposed Development against THC SG Landscape and Visual Criteria

| Criterion | Measure | Evaluation |
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| Criterion 1 | | |
| Relationship between Settlements/Key locations and wider landscape respected | The extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development. | There will be no significant visual effects on settlements, as defined in the Highland LDP. Visibility from the core of the settlement of Lairg is very limited, with rising ground to the north of the settlement screening views north to the Proposed Development. Visibility from key routes into Lairg is discussed further below. |
| Development should seek to achieve a threshold where: | Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/Key Locations or from the majority of its access routes. | |
| Criterion 2 | | |
| Key Gateway locations and routes are respected | The extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes. | There will be some limited sequential effects from the A836 (which also forms part of National Cycle Route 1), within 5km of the site, including from the area north of the road's junction with the A838 where the route becomes the main route north to Tongue. However, this will be from an area where existing wind farm development and other human influences, such as electricity infrastructure, have altered the landscape. Furthermore, roadside coniferous forest cover will result in views being glimpsed between breaks in forest cover. No other key gateways and transport routes will be significantly affected. |
| Development should seek to achieve a threshold where: | Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes. | |
| Criterion 3 | | |
| Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected | The extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks. | No significant visual effects are anticipated from valued natural and cultural landmarks including Dalchork Bird Hide, Ben |

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| <p>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</p> | <p>The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.</p> | <p>Armine, Ben Hee or Ben More Assynt. Significant visual effects are predicted from The Ord (and its associated stone rings) and the summit of Ben Klibreck. Effects from here are considered to be just above the threshold of significance, and will be experienced from a very geographically localised area. Furthermore, the Proposed Development is not considered to, by its presence, diminish the prominence of these landmarks or disrupt their relationship to setting. From lower level viewpoints and in general terms, the Proposed Development tends to be seen in the context of a simple moorland rolling horizon, and often above coniferous forest cover. From high summits views tend to be large scale and panoramic, have already been altered by wind farm development and with the Proposed Development contained below distant horizons.</p> |
| <p>Criterion 4</p> | | |
| <p>The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected</p> | <p>The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and Corbett's, Long Distance Routes etc.).</p> | <p>As noted above, no significant visual effects are anticipated from the key Munro summits of Ben Hee or Ben More Assynt. Effects just above the threshold of significance are anticipated from the summit of Ben Klibreck. However, views on the ascent/ decent from the summit, which is generally accessed from the west, will not be altered.</p> |
| <p>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</p> | <p>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.</p> | <p>Localised effects are anticipated from Right of Way HS29, the hill track and Heritage Path which passes to the immediate east of the site. Given its</p> |

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| | | proximity, this is unavoidable. Forest cover to the south-west of the site helps to limit the extent of sequential effects from this route, which are limited to within 5km and form the open landscape to the north of the Proposed Development. |
| Criterion 5 | | |
| The amenity of transport routes is respected | The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access) | Beyond some very localised sequential effects identified from the A836, with views tending to be limited and glimpsed between breaks in roadside coniferous forest cover, no significant sequential effects are predicted on key transport routes. |
| Development should seek to achieve a threshold where: | Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes | |
| Criterion 6 | | |
| The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected | The degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development, considerations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turbine height and proportions, • Density and spacing of turbines within developments, • Density and spacing of developments, • Typical relationship of development to the landscape. • Previously instituted mitigation measures Planning Authority stated aims for development of area | The Proposed Development is not out of keeping with the existing pattern of wind energy development, which tends to be located in the Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCTs, outside of designated landscapes. The Proposed Development generally reads as a distinct and well composed single cluster of turbines. The turbines are larger in scale than operational schemes in the landscape (the largest currently being Gordonbush Extension at 149.9m to tip height). However, the turbines are located in a large scale landscape which is able to accommodate turbines of this scale. |
| Development should seek to achieve a threshold where: | The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area. | |
| Criterion 7 | | |

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| <p>The need for separation between developments and/ or clusters is respected</p> | <p>The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and/ or clusters.</p> | <p>No significant 'additional' cumulative effects are predicted from any of the assessment viewpoints. As noted above, the Proposed Development is well offset from existing operational and under construction wind farms and generally reads as a distinct and well composed single cluster of turbines. The nearest schemes in the baseline are the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and operational Lairg Wind Farm, both beyond 10 km from the Proposed Development.</p> |
| <p>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</p> | <p>The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters.</p> | <p>The nearest schemes in the baseline are the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and operational Lairg Wind Farm, both beyond 10 km from the Proposed Development.</p> |
| <p>Criterion 8</p> | | |
| <p>The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected</p> | <p>The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance.</p> | <p>Effects on landscape character are very localised, with coniferous forest cover to the south-west of the Proposed Development limiting effects on landscape character in this direction. The Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCTs are both open and larger scale landscapes (outside areas of coniferous forest cover) better suited to wind farm development as is evident by the number of operational schemes in these LCT.</p> |
| <p>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</p> | <p>The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception.</p> | <p>The Rounded Hills and Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCTs are both open and larger scale landscapes (outside areas of coniferous forest cover) better suited to wind farm development as is evident by the number of operational schemes in these LCT.</p> |
| <p>Criterion 9</p> | | |
| <p>Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected</p> | <p>The extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal.</p> | <p>As noted previously, there is good offset between the Proposed Development and existing operational and under construction schemes. No significant 'additional' cumulative effects on landscape character are anticipated. The nearest schemes in the baseline are the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and operational Lairg Wind</p> |
| <p>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</p> | <p>Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.</p> | <p>The nearest schemes in the baseline are the under construction Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and operational Lairg Wind</p> |

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| | | Farm, both beyond 10 km from the Proposed Development. |
| Criterion 10 | | |
| Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected | The extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape. | Localised effects on landscape character are not unusual for commercial scale wind energy developments. Effects on landscape character associated with the Proposed Development are very localised, limited to within 5 km from open landscapes around the site. |
| Development should seek to achieve a threshold where: | Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained. | The Proposed Development is located on the transition between two LCT. However, coniferous forest cover to the west and south of the site limits the extent of effects on the Sweeping Moorland and Flows LCT to the south-west. No landscape designations will be compromised by the Proposed Development. |

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