

BALBLAIR WIND FARM

PLANNING STATEMENT

Force 9 Energy Ltd.

February 2025



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Document history

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1 The proposed Development is to generate electricity from renewable energy sources and directly responds to national and local planning and energy policy objectives and emissions reduction law which seek to achieve net zero by 2045. The Scottish Government's Onshore Wind Policy Statement (2022) seeks to deploy 20 GW of onshore wind capacity by 2030. Importantly, this target is not a cap; Scottish Ministers acknowledge that renewable energy generation will be necessary beyond 2030 to meet increasing energy demands. The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (January 2023) also outlines a way to achieve a flourishing net-zero energy system to 2030 and beyond, identifying the clear benefits of onshore wind projects, recognising that the generation of surplus electricity will enable the export of electricity and production of renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe and provide energy security through the development of Scotland's own energy resources and storage. Significant weight requires to be given to these contributions in the planning balance.
- 1.1.2 The need for national renewable energy developments over 50MW has been established by NPF4. The Proposed Development proposes an approximate combined 66 Megawatts (MW) installed capacity.
- 1.1.3 The proposed Development will make a significant contribution to meeting the net zero emissions target resulting in significant beneficial effects enabling total emissions savings of 49,505.6 tCO₂e, or 1,485,168 tCO₂e over its 30-year operational lifetime against a fossil fuel mix electricity generation, and 823,617 tCO₂e against grid mix electricity generation.
- 1.1.4 The proposed Development is anticipated to produce approximately 112.2 gigawatt hours (GWh) of electricity annually. This equates to the annual power consumed by approximately 34,661¹ average households in Scotland per year.
- 1.1.5 It is anticipated that the carbon emissions of the proposed Development will be offset 0.6 years after the proposed Development becomes operational against a fossil fuel mix of electricity, or 1.1 years against a grid-mix of electricity.
- 1.1.6 The proposed Development is a S.36 application and whilst not a licence holder, the Applicant has had due regard to the requirements of S.36 of the Electricity Act 1989, Schedule 9, in acknowledgement of the requirement for Scottish Ministers to consider their determination.
- 1.1.7 Due consideration has been given to relevant considerations including climate change, energy and planning policy. The proposed Development is considered to comply with the requirement of NPF4 and the Highland wide Local Development Plan.
- 1.1.8 The Applicant is committed to maximising the socio-economic benefits including measures such as local procurement, developing supplier networks and skills in the local area are

¹ This figure is based on 8 turbines with an installed capacity of 36 MW at a site derived capacity factor of 35.6% and assuming 3,239 is the average UK household electricity consumption in kW hours (based on most recent statistics from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Jan 2024 (DESNZ)).

being put in place. Vestas is an existing local employer with a service centre in Inverness employing 20 technicians, with 3 apprentices currently being trained.

- 1.1.9 In terms of investment, the proposed Development is anticipated to generate up to £13.2 million GVA and 205 job years across Scotland, with approximately £4.1 million and 69 job years' worth of this total directly benefitting the Highlands and £0.7 million GVA and 11 job years being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.
- 1.1.10 Over the course of the proposed Development's 30-year operational lifetime, the operations and maintenance costs could generate up to £39.4 million GVA and 580 job years across Scotland, with approximately £35.3 million GVA and 487 job years worth of this total directly benefitting the Highland economy and £12.9 million GVA and 177 job years being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.
- 1.1.11 The proposed Development is expected to support the provision of local services and investment priorities of local communities, generating approximately £388,420 in non-domestic rates yearly.
- 1.1.12 In addition to habitat reinstatement following the completion of construction works, the proposed Development also provides an opportunity to deliver long-term beneficial habitat enhancement measures for habitats and species, including specific management for upland habitat restoration and enhancement (including priority peatlands) and creation/enhancement of a riparian corridor. These proposals form the basis of an Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (OBEMP), which will deliver significant biodiversity enhancement at the Site.
- 1.1.13 The Site is located outwith National Parks and National Scenic Areas and no significant effects on the special qualities or integrity of the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area, located to the south of the site, are predicted from the proposed Development. NPF4 and the Onshore Wind Policy Statement both recognise that the need to address the climate crisis will result in the need for large and more efficient technology and that this will change the landscape, furthermore that localised effects will generally be considered acceptable. Whilst some significant landscape and visual effects are predicted, these have been limited through a detailed process of embedded design mitigation whereby the proposed Development is considered to comply with the requirements of NPF4 in terms of landscape and visual impacts.
- 1.1.14 No other residual adverse significant effects are predicted for the proposed Development, however beneficial significant effects are predicted following the implementation of the OBEMP.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Stephenson Halliday Ltd has prepared this Planning Statement to accompany an application for consent under Section 36 (S.36) of the Electricity Act 1989 (Electricity Act) and deemed planning permission under Section 57 (S.57) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (TCP SA) by Wind Power North Two Limited (hereafter ‘the Applicant’), to the Scottish Ministers via the Energy Consents Unit (ECU).

2.1.2 The proposed Development includes up to 8 turbines, with six having a maximum blade tip height of up to 180 m and two having a blade tip height of up to 200 m and battery energy storage, together with associated infrastructure and ancillary development, including biodiversity enhancements. This provides a combined installed capacity of around 66 megawatts (MW). S.36 Consent and deemed planning permission is sought for an operational period of 30 years, after which the proposed Development will be decommissioned.

2.1.3 This Planning Statement provides an overview of the planning, climate change and energy policy background and takes account of the findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA Report), Design and Access Statement (DAS), Pre-application Consultation Report (PAC Report) and Socio-economic Assessment, which accompany the S.36 application.

2.1.4 This Planning Statement is set out as follows:

- **Chapter 3** provides the background to the proposed Development, outlining the Site and surrounding area and sets out the relevant Planning History of the Site.
- **Chapter 4** describes the proposed Development for which S.36 consent and deemed planning permission is sought.
- **Chapter 5** outlines the key benefits of the proposed Development.
- **Chapter 6** provides a summary of International and National Climate Change and Energy legislation, policy and guidance which are relevant considerations to the determination of the proposed Development.
- **Chapter 7** provides the planning policy context, including the Development Plan and relevant guidance.
- **Chapter 8** provides an assessment of the proposed Development, summary and conclusions.

2.2 The Applicant

2.2.1 The Application will be made by Wind Power North Two Limited (the ‘Applicant’), a wholly owned subsidiary of Vestas Development A/S (‘Vestas’) and developed under the terms of an agreement between Force 9 Energy Limited (Force 9) and Vestas. Through this agreement Force 9 leads on the development process of wind farm proposals up to consent. Force 9 is supported during this period by Vestas both financially and with staff resources

requested by Force 9 on issues such as access, engineering design, turbine selection, wind flow and optimisation of energy capture.

2.2.2 Force 9 is a dedicated wind farm development company with a focus on the UK market. To date, and at the time of writing, Force 9 has taken 16 developments through the planning/consenting process, ten of which have been consented. Six of these sites are in operation and three are in pre-construction.

2.2.3 Vestas is, by many measures, the leading global manufacturer and supplier of wind turbines. Vestas has installed over 85,000 turbines with an installed capacity of over 171,000 MW in 88 countries, worldwide. In addition, Vestas has a broad range of experience of project development issues including turbine siting and optimisation, grid connection and construction management. They maintain and service over 85,000 turbines worldwide amounting to 146,000 MW.

2.3 Statutory Framework

2.3.1 The application is to be determined under S.36 of the Electricity Act because the installed capacity of the proposed Development exceeds 50MW. S.57(2) of the TCPSEA allows Scottish Ministers to direct that planning permission shall be deemed to be granted upon granting consent under S.36 of the Electricity Act.

2.3.2 The duties referred to in Schedule 9 sub-paragraph 3 (1) (a) and (b) of the Electricity Act do not apply to the Applicant as they are not a licenced generator, however they have had due regard to the Schedule in preparing the proposed Development. Notwithstanding this, the Scottish Ministers must have regard to the matters set out in subparagraph 3(1)(a) to when determining the S.36 application:

"... the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest"

2.3.3 There is a further obligation under sub-paragraph 3(3) to:

"avoid, so far as possible, causing injury to fisheries or to the stock of fish in any waters."

2.3.4 The requirements set out under Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act have been fully considered and accounted for throughout the design and EIA assessment processes.

3 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This chapter of the Planning Statement sets out the key characteristics of the Site and the surrounding area before providing a summary of the physical elements of the proposed Development; further information can be found in the EIA Report **Chapter 2**.

3.2 Site Description

- 3.2.1 This section considers designations within the red line boundary (the 'Site'). The Site is located on the Balblair Estate, which lies approximately 2 km to the north-west of Bonar Bridge, within the jurisdiction of The Highland Council ('THC') (**Figure 1.1** of the EIA Report provides the Site location plan). The centre point of the Site is at National Grid Reference E 260883, N 896426. Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) owns the forests which adjoin the estate to the northwest and south.
- 3.2.2 The Site is currently crofted and used for rough grazing. It primarily consists of raised and blanket bogs, seasonally wet and wet grassland, temperate shrub heathland, dry grasslands, and mesic grassland. Within the Site there are minor patches of mixed deciduous and coniferous woodland, as well as various wetlands and scrub types. Additionally, Scots pine woodland, broad-leaved deciduous woodland, and commercial coniferous plantations are found along the western border.
- 3.2.3 The proposed Development layout is provided in **Figure 2.1** of the EIA Report. **Figure 6.11** of the EIA Report shows the landscape designations within 20 km of the Site. The Site is located within the Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland Landscape Character Type (LCT 135) and is not located within a nationally or locally designated landscape.
- 3.2.4 There are no areas designated for their ornithological features or interest which cover the Site, and no ecological statutory designated sites within the Site. The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) shows one stand of ancient woodland, Balblair Wood, which overlaps the southeastern tip of the Site. Ancient woodland is defined as land that has maintained continuous woodland habitat since at least 1750.

- 3.3 **Annex 1 of Technical Appendix 10.1** identifies 49 features of potential heritage interest within the Site. Of these, nine were discounted from further assessment as they are of ‘Negligible’ importance.
- 3.4 There is one designated heritage asset within the Site: Lydsurach Crofthouse (Cat B LB52528) a mid-19th century, single storey with attic crofthouse.
- 3.5 The Highland Council HER records 31 non-designated heritage assets on the Site.
- 3.6 A further 11 features have been identified within the Site from the study of late 19th century – modern OS mapping, three features from a study of LIDAR data², and three features were added to the gazetteer following field survey of the Site.

3.7 Surrounding Area

- 3.7.1 The area surrounding the Site contains various crofts and scattered residential properties which lie to the east within the moorland of the Balblair Estate. The moorland to the north of Balblair Estate is subject to a current consent application for the proposed Garvary Wind Farm, with the Lairg Wind Farm and its extension further north. Access to the proposed Development is from the west off the A836 at Invershin and is expected to be shared with the proposed access for the Garvary Wind Farm (see **Figure 2.5** of the EIA Report which shows the Indicative Site Access).
- 3.7.2 Within the surrounding area, commercial forests adjoin the estate to the north-west and south. As noted in 3.2.4 to the southeast the commercial forest is also defined as a stand of ancient woodland, Balblair Wood. As noted previously, ancient woodland is defined as land that has maintained continuous woodland habitat since at least 1750.
- 3.7.3 With regard to ecological statutory designations, the proposed Development is within 20 km of six Special Protection Areas (SPA), seven Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and two Ramsar sites. Five areas which are designated for ecological (non-avian) qualifying features are located within 5 km of the Site.
- 3.7.4 The six designated sites within 5 km of the application boundary with ecological, ornithological or geological qualifying features are shown in **Tables 7.4 and 8.6** of the EIA Report and summarised in **Table 3.1** below.

Table 3.1 Summary of designated sites within 5 km of the application boundary with ecological, ornithological or geological qualifying features

Type of Designated Site	Name	Distance from Site
Special Protection Area (SPA)	Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA/SSSI	Located approximately 1 km to the east.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)		
Ornithological		

² open-access lidar data available from the National Library of Scotland Maps website

Type of Designated Site	Name	Distance from Site
Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Ecological	River Oykel SAC	Located approximately 0.12 km southwest, from the access point off the public road.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Ecological	Kyle of Sutherland Marshes SSSI	Located approximately 0.12 km southwest, from the access point off the public road.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Ecological	Migdale Rock SSSI	Located approximately 3.56 km to the southeast
Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Ecological	River Evelix SAC	Located approximately 3.75 km to the east
Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Ecological	Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC	Located approximately 2.27 km to the south

3.7.5 **Table 3.2** below summarises landscape designations within 45 km of the turbine area, assessed as part of the EIA. The nearest nationally designated landscape is the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area (NSA) located approximately 4.8 km to the south of the proposed Development and extends eastwards from Ardgay and Bonar Bridge across the firth and its mouth, as shown on **Figures 6.10** and **6.11** of the EIA Report, along with other landscape designations. The nearest Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) is Skibo Castle GDL located approximately 11.4 km to the southeast of the Site.

3.7.6 Note that although there are seven landscape designations within the initial 45 km study area, only Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth Local Landscape Area (LLA) and the Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencavie LLA overlap the 20 km detailed LVIA study area.

Table 3.2 Summary of Landscape Designations within 45 km of the turbine area and identified within the EIA Report.

Type of Designated Site	Name	Distance from Site
National Scenic Area (NSA)	Dornoch Firth NSA	Located approximately 4.8 km to the south.
National Scenic Area (NSA)	Assynt-Coigach	Located approximately 29.3 km to the northwest.
Local Landscape Area (LLA)	Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth LLA	Located approximately 13 km to the east.
Gardens and Designated Landscapes (GDL)	Skibo Castle	Located approximately 11 km to the southeast.
LLA	Fannichs, Beinn Dearg and Glencavie LLA	Located approximately 14.8 km to the southwest.

Type of Designated Site	Name	Distance from Site
LLA	Ben Kilbreck and Loch Choire	Located approximately 25 km to the north.
LLA	Bens Griam and Loch nan Clar	Located approximately 37.5 km to the north northeast.
LLA	The Flow Country and Berriedale Coast	Located approximately 40.8 km to the northeast.
LLA	Sutors of Cromarty, Rosemarkie and Fort George	Located approximately 32 km to the southeast.
LLA	Ben Wyvis	Located approximately 25.7 km to the south southwest.

- 3.7.7 The closest area of Wild Land Rhiddoroch Beinn Dearg Ben Wyvis WLA is located approximately 9.6km to the south west.
- 3.7.8 In terms of heritage features **Annex 1 of Technical Appendix 10.1** provides detailed consideration of heritage assets within the outer study area.
- 3.7.9 Within the 2 km Outer Study Area (OSA) (from proposed turbines) there are two Scheduled Monuments, one Category B Listed Building and 69 non-designated heritage assets recorded on the Highland Council HER.
- 3.7.10 Within the 5 km OSA (from proposed turbines) there is one Inventory Battlefield, nine Scheduled Monuments, one Category A Listed Building and 11 Category B Listed Buildings.
- 3.7.11 Within the 10 km OSA (from proposed turbines) there are 18 Scheduled Monuments.
- 3.7.12 Within the 20 km OSA (from proposed turbines) there is one Inventory Garden and Designed Landscape, 76 Scheduled Monuments and 13 Category A Listed Buildings.

3.8 Planning History

- 3.8.1 Using THC's online planning application search function, a number of planning application history records for the Site and surrounding area have been established. These predominantly relate to the development of and alterations to residential and agricultural buildings.
- 3.8.2 On 11 April 2024, the Applicant submitted a scoping request for the proposed Development (App Ref:24/01500/SCOP). A scoping opinion was received on 27 May 2024.

Table 3.3: Planning history of applications on the Site within the past 5 years

Reference	Description	Location	Decision / Status
24/04588/SCOP	Construct and operate a 400 kilovolt (kV) overhead transmission line (OHL) supported by steel lattice towers over a distance of approximately 167 km, between proposed substations at Spittal	Land 2430M SW Of Loch Buidhe Bonar Bridge	Scoping Opinion Issued on 18 Dec 2024

Reference	Description	Location	Decision / Status
	(Banniskirk), Loch Buidhe (Carnaig) and Beaully (Fanellan), rationalisation and crossing of existing transmission infrastructure.		
ECU00003251 21/01921/S36 WIN-270-20	Garvary Wind Farm – S.36 application for the Erection and operation of wind farm for a period of 30 years, comprising of 25 (as amended) wind turbines with maximum blade tip height of up to 180m, access tracks, up to 6 borrow pits, substation, battery storage compound, control building, 4 meteorological masts, and ancillary infrastructure. DPEA ref. WIN-270-20	Land 4600M NE Of Invershin Community Hall Invershin	Consent granted 13 February 2025.
20/04766/PNO	Erection of agricultural building	Loanboadich Bonar Bridge Ardgay IV24 3AS	Prior Approval Granted 07/09/2021

Table 3.4 Planning History of Notable Applications in the wider area surrounding the Site over the past 5 years

Reference	Description	Location	Decision / Status
24/04326/SCOP	Inveroykel Wind Farm - Scoping request for the erection and operation of a wind farm comprising 29 turbines with a maximum blade tip height of 230m, battery energy storage system (BESS) facility and associated infrastructure.	Land 1.5KM South Of 2 Easter Kilmachalmack Strathkyle Ardgay (c.420m south of the Site)	Scoping Opinion Issued 12/11/2024
ECU00003246	Strath Oykel Wind Farm	Land 1700M SW Of Oape Ardgay (c. 14.9 km west of the Site)	Consented 08/01/2025
23/00319/FUL	Erection of house and siting of holiday letting unit	Land 65M NE Of Inveran Quarry Invershin (c.500m southeast of the access point for the wind farm)	Granted 22/03/2023
21/05644/PNO	Peatland restoration	Land 1670M East Of Bobtail Cottage Invershin (c.50m northwest of the Site)	Prior Approval Not Required 04/01/2022

4 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1.1 The proposed Development is a renewable energy development that intends to make best use of the available renewable resource and provides a flexible energy storage solution to allow for grid management services, through the promotion of a design which takes careful consideration and mitigating the effects on the receiving environment.
- 4.1.2 The proposed Development has undergone a robust design iteration process as evidenced in **Chapter 3** of the EIA Report and the separate Design and Access Statement. Assessment of the design mitigation from inception to submission against relevant policy is contained in **Chapter 8** of this Planning Statement.
- 4.1.3 A full description of the proposed Development is contained in **Chapter 2 Proposed Development** of the EIA Report. A summary of the proposed Development, as shown in **Figure 2.1** of the EIA Report, can be described as: up to eight wind three-bladed horizontal axis turbines with six having a maximum 180 m blade tip height and two having a maximum tip height of 200 m and battery energy storage, together with associated infrastructure and ancillary development, including biodiversity enhancements.
- 4.1.4 The proposed Development is expected to have a total rated output of around 66 MW which comprises 36 MW relating to the wind turbines and a further 30 MW for the BESS, producing approximately 112.2 gigawatt hours (GWh) of electricity annually. This equates to the annual power consumed by approximately 34,661³ average households in Scotland per year.
- 4.1.5 Only a small portion of land within the Site will be developed for access and energy production purposes, with the majority of the land within the red line boundary of the Site remaining undeveloped or subject to habitat enhancement or peatland restoration and retained for grazing.
- 4.1.6 The associated infrastructure and ancillary development will include:
- a means of access from the public road to the Site;
 - turbine foundations;
 - crane hard standings;
 - transformer/switchgear housings located adjacent to turbines;
 - new internal access tracks and upgrade of a segment of existing track with associated drainage, and new watercourse crossings;
 - underground electrical cables connecting the turbines to the on-site substation;

³ This figure is based on 8 turbines with an installed capacity of 36 MW at a site derived capacity factor of 35.6% and assuming 3,239 is the average UK household electricity consumption in kW hours (based on most recent statistics from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Jan 2024 (DESNZ)).

- temporary wind farm construction compound areas, laydown areas and car parking;
 - a substation compound with a control building with closed-circuit television mast(s) and communication mast(s);
 - battery energy storage;
 - borrow pit search areas; and
 - habitat enhancements.
- 4.1.7 The location of the turbines is as set out within **Table 2.1, Chapter 2** of the EIA Report which provides the relevant grid co-ordinates. The location of the proposed turbines and ancillary infrastructure has been assessed on the basis of a maximum micro-siting allowance of 50m in any direction, except where there are environment constraints. These circumstances are detailed within **Technical Chapters 6 – 14** of the EIA Report, and in these circumstances the allowance would be less than 50m and managed by an Ecological Clerk of Works.
- 4.1.8 As the turbines are of a height greater than 150 m to blade tip, they require aviation lighting to comply with Civil Aviation Authority ('CAA') requirements. The Applicant proposes a reduced lighting scheme that fulfils the requirements for flight safety whilst minimising environmental effects and has obtained approval from the CAA (**Technical Appendix 14.2, Annex A** of the EIA Report).
- 4.1.9 **Table 2.2, Chapter 2** of the EIA Report confirms that the indicative construction period is anticipated to take place over a period of 24 months, which includes Site establishment and reinstatement.
- 4.1.10 The proposed Development is expected to operate for 30 years, after which it will be decommissioned and its components dismantled, removed and recycled where possible. Any alternatives to this process would require separate approval from the Energy Consent Unit and does not form part of the S.36 Application, its EIA or planning assessment.

5 BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 This section confirms that the proposed Development would result in a number of key benefits which will have a positive impact locally, regionally and nationally.

5.2 Contribution to Renewable Energy targets

5.2.1 The proposed Development would have a total rated output of around 66 MW, comprising 36 MW from the Turbines and 30 MW from the BESS, which equates to 112.2 GWh of renewable energy each year.

5.3 Reduction in Carbon Emissions

5.3.1 The proposed Development is predicted to deliver total emissions savings of 49,505.6 tonnes of carbon each year. The proposed Development is predicted to deliver total emissions savings of 1,485,168 tCO₂e over its 30-year operational lifetime against a fossil fuel mix electricity generation, and 823,617 tCO₂e against grid mix electricity generation.

5.3.2 It is anticipated that the carbon emissions of the proposed Development will be offset 0.6 years after the proposed Development becomes operational against a fossil fuel mix of electricity, or 1.1 years against a grid-mix of electricity.

5.4 Economic Benefits/Supporting Employment

5.4.1 The socio-economic assessment confirms in **Section 5.1** that during the construction phase it is estimated that the proposed Development could generate up to £13.2 million GVA and 205 job years across Scotland, with approximately £4.1 million and 69 job years' worth of this total directly benefitting the Highlands and £0.7 million GVA and 11 job years being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.

5.4.2 Over the course of the operational phase of the proposed Development, the socio-economics statement confirms in **Section 5.2**, that it is estimated that over the proposed Development's 30-year operational lifetime, the operations and maintenance costs could generate up to £39.4 million GVA and 580 job years across Scotland, with approximately £35.3 million GVA and 487 job years worth of this total directly benefitting the Highland economy and £12.9 million GVA and 177 job years being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.

5.4.3 The proposed Development is expected to support the provision of local services and investment priorities of local communities. During its operation, it is expected to generate approximately £388,420 in non-domestic rates yearly.

5.4.4 The Applicant is committed to maximising the socio-economic benefits as outlined in Section 7 of the socio-economics assessment. This ensures maximising direct effects whilst enabling the maximisation of indirect effects. Measures such as local procurement, developing supplier networks and skills in the local area are being put in place. Vestas is an existing local employer with a service centre in Inverness employing 20 technicians, with 3 apprentices currently being trained.

5.5 Community Benefit and Investment

- 5.5.1 Whilst not a relevant planning consideration, the Applicant is committed to offering £5,000 per MW of installed capacity in a community benefit fund, resulting in an annual fund of around £180,000 to be used to finance the aspirations and needs of the wider region, as well as the communities located close to the proposed Development.
- 5.5.2 It is anticipated that any potential income generated from the community benefit fund could be utilised to support local community projects. The local community would have the freedom to determine how the funds are allocated and prioritise the initiatives that are most important to them.

5.6 Habitat Management and Biodiversity Enhancements

- 5.6.1 The proposed Development provides an opportunity to deliver long-term beneficial habitat enhancement measures for habitats and species, including specific management for upland habitat restoration and enhancement (including priority peatlands) and creation/enhancement of a riparian corridor. These proposals form the basis of the Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (OBEMP) (**Technical Appendix 8.6** of the EIA Report) which will deliver significant biodiversity enhancement at the Site.
- 5.6.2 The OBEMP is based on two main land parcels or areas for each respective habitat management and biodiversity enhancement proposal. OBEMP Unit A, which covers 494.64 ha and the majority of the application boundary (see **Figure 8.11** of the EIA Report) includes:
- Removal of self-seeded non-native conifers to enhance the existing and degraded bog and heathland habitat. These high density invading and encroaching conifers are currently adversely affecting habitat extent and quality.
 - Opportunities to enhance the peatland/heathland further will be explored where there is scope to do so, for example if there are drains suitable for blocking, peat erosion restoration, or the creation of depressions/scrapes to increase habitat diversity for the benefit of breeding waders and black grouse.
 - The improvement of these habitats will also be of benefit to local flora and fauna, including the upland bird assemblage.
 - Moorland and peatland restoration and enhancement measures that will be applied to priority peatland habitats within Unit A cover up to approximately 254.1ha. These same measures will also benefit up to a further 155.1 ha of wet heath and 4.8 ha of dry heath habitats.
- 5.6.3 Using NatureScot guidance, the compensation and enhancement requirements for priority peatland at the proposed Development were identified as being in the region of 168.63 ha. Therefore, the measures represent a significant enhancement over and above the requirements for mitigation and enhancement.
- 5.6.4 Unit B – Riparian Corridor Creation/Enhancement relates to a further unit of 2.58 ha which would seek, where possible, to achieve:

- Create and maintain an enhanced riparian corridor, supporting semi-natural appearing broadleaved planting.
- planting and establishment of a range of small-seeding broadleaved species in non-uniform patterns and densities within suitable habitats.
- creating structure and new breeding, shelter and foraging habitats for a range of species, from terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates to birds, bats and fish. Secondary benefits of woodland creation, such as natural flood attenuation, shade, carbon sequestration and helping to mitigate the effects of climate change.

5.6.5 As such, the HMP is expected to provide significant beneficial effects associated with the proposed Development in the long term, particularly when contrasted with a future baseline.

6 CLIMATE CHANGE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY CONTEXT

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 This Chapter identifies the key international, UK and Scottish climate change and renewable energy policy and guidance relevant to the proposed Development. This provides an overall framework for the need for the proposed Development in respect of climate change and renewable energy generation.

6.2 International Context

The Paris Agreement

6.2.1 The Paris Agreement was adopted at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21), which was held in Paris in 2015. It is a legally binding international treaty on climate change, and its goal is to hold:

"the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels" and to pursue efforts "to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels."

The United Nations Gap Emissions Report 2024

6.2.2 The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) prepare a yearly report on the progress in meeting the Paris Agreement. The October 2024 Key Messages reports:

"...nations must use COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, as a launchpad to increase ambition and ensure the new NDCs collectively promise to almost halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. They must then follow up with rapid delivery of the commitments, building on actions taken now. If they do not do so, the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C will be gone within a few years and the 2°C target will be in danger."

It remains technically possible to get on a 1.5°C pathway, with solar, wind and forests holding real promise for sweeping and fast emissions cuts. To deliver on this potential, sufficiently strong NDCs would need to be backed urgently by a whole-of-government approach, measures that maximize socioeconomic and environmental co-benefits, enhanced international collaboration that includes reform of the global financial architecture, strong private sector action and a minimum six-fold increase in mitigation investment. G20 nations, particularly the largest-emitting members, would need to do the heavy lifting."

The IPCC's AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023

6.2.3 The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) prepares comprehensive Assessment Reports relating to the gathering of knowledge on climate change, including its impacts, further risks and possible mitigation measures. The IPCC's recent Sixth Assessment Report consists of three Working Group contributions and a Synthesis Report.

6.2.4 Released in March 2023, the AR6 Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023 integrates the main findings from the working groups and outlines the impacts of global warming and recognises that human activity, principally through the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG),

has unequivocally caused global warming. The report finds that limiting human-caused global warming required Net Zero CO2 emissions.

- 6.2.5 The report emphasises that the severity of future climate change and its impacts are dependent on the level of future emissions. It also notes that not only have carbon dioxide concentrations increased, but the rate of increase has also accelerated. Over the next 20 years, global temperatures are expected to exceed or reach 1.5°C of warming. It is evident that without large-scale, sustained reductions in GHG emissions like carbon dioxide and methane, limiting global warming to 1.5°C is an improbable goal.

Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) Report: Global Climate Highlights

- 6.2.6 On 10 January 2025, C3S issued the 'Global Climate Highlights' prepared for the European Union and implemented by the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) confirmed the urgency of challenge. It notes that 2024 is the warmest year on record globally, and the first calendar year that the average global temperature exceeds 1.5°C above its pre-industrial level. Samantha Burgess, Strategic Lead for Climate at ECMWF commented on the report advising:

"Each year in the last decade is one of the ten warmest on record. We are now teetering on the edge of passing the 1.5°C level defined in the Paris Agreement and the average of the last two years is already above this level."

- 6.2.7 This emphasises the urgency of the requirement to address global warming and increasing evidence that we are approaching a position of exceeding the lower limit agreed in the Paris Agreement.

6.3 United Kingdom Government Context

- 6.3.1 This section provides an overview of the United Kingdom (UK) Government's climate change legislation, the climate emergency and the policies and reports which followed this.

Climate Change

The Climate Change Act 2008

- 6.3.2 The Climate Change Act 2008 which was amended by The Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019 provides the basis for the UK's approach to adapting to and tackling climate change. The Act requires carbon dioxide and other GHG emissions to be reduced by 100% of 1990 levels by 2050 and for the UK Government to set legally binding carbon budgets to achieve Net Zero.
- 6.3.3 Under the Act, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) was established as an independent advisor to advise the UK and devolved Governments on emission targets and progress towards the reduction of GHG emissions and adapting to climate change.

The Climate Emergency

- 6.3.4 On 09 of May 2019, the UK Government and Opposition parties unilaterally agreed to pass a motion to declare an environmental and climate emergency.

6.3.5 The UK Government reinforced the need to tackle the climate crisis at COP29 when, on 12 November 2024, Prime Minister Keir Starmer remarked that the:

“government recognises that the world stands at a critical juncture in the climate crisis. and the United Kingdom not only has a critical role to play but also, an opportunity to grasp the chance to maximise opportunities for Britain and make us more secure in the here and now.”

The Sixth Carbon Budget: The UK's Path to Net Zero

6.3.6 On 09 December 2020 the CCC released the Sixth Carbon Budget which updates intermediary targets for the UK’s progress to Net Zero to a reduction of 78% by 2035 and outlines that action is required across all sectors or the UK will not deliver Net Zero by 2050.

Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener

6.3.7 On 19 October 2021, the previous UK Government published the Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener, which sets out the UK Government's policies and proposals for decarbonising the UK economy to meet Net Zero targets by 2050.

6.3.8 The strategy states that:

“the Net Zero economy will be underpinned by cheap clean electricity, made in Britain. A clean, reliable power system is the foundation of a productive Net Zero economy as we electrify other sectors – so we will fully decarbonise our power system by 2035, subject to security of supply. Our power system will consist of abundant, cheap British renewables, cutting edge new nuclear power stations, and be underpinned by flexibility including storage, gas with CCS, hydrogen and ensure reliable power is always there at the flick of a switch.”

Progress in reducing emissions 2024 Report to Parliament Climate Change Committee

6.3.9 The CCC’s latest progress report, published in July 2024, outlines the country is not on track to meet the 68% reduction by 2030 target and that action is needed across all sectors of the economy. Setting out that in order to meet these targets:

“Annual offshore wind installations must increase by at least three times, onshore wind installations will need to double and solar installations must increase by five times.”

6.4 UK Energy Context

6.4.1 The following section provides a summary of the UK Government’s key energy policies and strategies. A number of these documents were published under the previous Conservative UK Government.

6.4.2 The Right Honourable Ed Miliband, Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero set out his priorities for the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero on 08 July 2024 following the election of the Labour UK Government on 05 July 2024. His priorities included:

“• delivering our mission to boost energy independence and cutting bills through clean power by 2030;

•taking back control of our energy with Great British Energy;...

•leading on international climate action, based on our domestic achievements.”

- 6.4.3 The UK Government published the Great British Energy Founding Statement on 25 July 2024. The Secretary of State Foreword outlines:

"The new government is taking immediate action on our mission. We lifted the ban on onshore wind within our first 72 hours in government and have set up a new 2030 Mission Control at the heart of government."

The Energy White Paper

- 6.4.4 On 13 December 2020, the UK Government published the Energy White Paper: Powering Our Net Zero Future.

- 6.4.5 The Energy White Paper states to meet the electricity needs from retiring capacity and increased demand would require four times more clean electricity generation.

- 6.4.6 Page 45 of the Energy White Paper recognises the importance of onshore wind and states:

"Onshore wind and solar will be key building blocks of the future generation mix, along with offshore wind. We will need sustained growth in the capacity of these sectors in the next decade to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet Net Zero emissions in all demand scenarios."

British Energy Security Strategy

- 6.4.7 The previous Conservative UK Government published the British Energy Security Strategy in April 2022. The UK Government acknowledged that onshore wind is one of the cheapest forms of renewable energy and they are:

"...serious about delivering cheaper, cleaner, more secure power, so we need to consider all options. That is why we included onshore wind in the latest Contracts for Difference auction round and will include it in future rounds."

Powering up Britain: Energy Security Plan

- 6.4.8 The previous Conservative UK Government published the Updated Energy Security Plan on 04 April 2023.

- 6.4.9 The Plan outlines the UK's ambitions to ensure a smooth transition to abundant, low-carbon British energy. It states:

"Our strategy to increase supply of low-carbon energy is dependent on enhancing our strengths on wind, solar and nuclear power generation alongside hydrogen production and carbon capture, usage and storage. This includes the infrastructure to produce, store and transport low-carbon energy around the country and to capture, transport and store carbon dioxide. We aim to remove barriers and address blockages, whilst developing new options."

- 6.4.10 The Plan is supported by the Net Zero Growth Plan published on 04 April 2023.

6.5 Scottish Climate Context

6.5.1 The following section provides an overview of the climate change legislation, relevant climate change and energy policy and the progress towards meeting targets.

Climate Change

6.5.2 The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 amended the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to set a target date of 2045 for reaching Net Zero emissions which Scottish Ministers are legally bound by.

6.5.3 On 18 April 2024, the Net Zero Secretary Mairi McAllan confirmed the Scottish Government's commitment to Net Zero by 2045. In response to the CCC's Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland – 2023 Report to Parliament the Net Zero Secretary confirmed "that the 2030 target for emissions reduction is not achievable, this will no longer be a statutory target." The Net Zero Secretary stated that

"new legislation will be brought forward to introduce multi-year 'Carbon budgets' replacing the current, annual targets."

6.5.4 The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) Scotland Bill was published on 05 September 2024 and passed by the Scottish Parliament on 05 November 2024. The Act will replace annual emissions targets, with five-year carbon budgets from 2026-2045 and will change the current deadline for finalising the next Climate Change Plan for Scotland to align with the time scale for carbon budgets.

The Climate Emergency

6.5.5 On 14 May 2019, Climate Change Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, declared a climate emergency in her statement to the Scottish Parliament.

The Highland Council Climate Emergency

6.5.6 On 19 May 2019, the Highland Council (THC) declared a climate emergency and committed to achieving a net zero carbon emissions at latest by 2045. The council stated that:

"Highland Council recognises the serious and accelerating changes to the world caused by climate change and therefore declares a climate and ecological emergency."

6.5.7 The Council published the Net Zero Strategy on 05 October 2023, which provides direction and identifies key actions to address the Climate Emergency and achieve Net Zero by 2045. On page 1 of the Plan, it states that:

"The journey to net zero will be challenging, but we know climate action can deliver more comprehensive economic, environmental, social and health benefits. We must embrace the potential of the 'green economy' and nurture the development of new industries that create jobs and wealth."

Securing a Green Recovery on to Path to Net Zero: Climate Change Plan Update

- 6.5.8 The Climate Change Plan was adopted on 16 December 2020 and sets out the Scottish Government's pathway to achieving the targets set out in the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.

6.6 Scottish Energy Context

- 6.6.1 The section below highlights the Scottish Government's commitment to renewable energy and the policy context for the energy sector in Scotland.

The Scottish Energy Strategy

- 6.6.2 Published in December 2017, the Scottish Energy Strategy (SES) sets the target of the equivalent of 50% of the energy for Scotland's heat, transport and electricity consumption to be supplied from renewable sources.

Onshore Wind Policy Statement

- 6.6.3 On 21 December 2022, Scottish Ministers published The Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS). The OWPS sets out the Scottish Government's ambition to deploy 20 GW of onshore wind by 2030.

- 6.6.4 The Ministerial Foreword states that the world is facing a climate emergency and, in addition:

"Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and the resulting extraordinary rise in the price of fossil fuels, in particular gas, demonstrates that continuing to rely on commodities that are subject to global price shocks is no longer an option.

That is why we must accelerate our transition towards a Net Zero society. Scotland already has some of the most ambitious targets in the world to meet Net Zero but we must go further and faster to protect future generations from the spectre of irreversible climate damage."

- 6.6.5 Renewable energy has the ability to generate significant benefits for the Scottish public, particularly in the case of onshore wind, which "has the ability to be deployed quickly, is good value for consumers and is widely supported by the public."

- 6.6.6 The OWPS recognises that the deployment of wind energy projects must be delivered quickly. In paragraph 1.1.2 the OWPS states:

"We must now go further and faster than before. We expect the next decade to see a substantial increase in demand for electricity to support Net Zero delivery across all sectors, including heat, transport and industrial processes."

- 6.6.7 This ambition has been set to allow:

"the rapid decarbonisation of our energy system, and the sectors which depend upon it, as well as aligning with a just transition to Net Zero whilst other technologies reach maturity."

- 6.6.8 Paragraph 3.6.1 states:

"Meeting our climate targets will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society. This means ensuring the right development happens in the right place.

Meeting the ambition of a minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 will require taller and more efficient turbines. This will change the landscape."

6.6.9 Chapter 5: Onshore Wind and Benefits to Scotland of the OWPS outlines, that onshore wind developments already provide significant socio-economic benefits through investment, innovation and the creation of jobs. The Scottish Government anticipate that all onshore wind development will support the national and local supply chains.

6.6.10 The conclusion of the OWPS states that:

"Deployment of onshore wind is mission-critical for meeting our climate targets. As an affordable and reliable source of electricity generation, we must continue to maximise our natural resource and deliver Net Zero in a way that is fully aligned with, and continues to protect, our natural heritage and native flora and fauna."

Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan

6.6.11 The Scottish Government Published the Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (DESJTP) on 10 January 2023 for consultation. The Ministerial Foreword clearly states that we are entering a decade that will be critical in determining the future of Scotland's energy system and that:

"we must deliver an energy system that meets the challenge of becoming a Net Zero nation by 2045, supplies safe and secure energy for all, generates economic opportunities, and builds a just transition."

6.6.12 The draft Strategy sets out key ambitions for Scotland's energy transition and those considered to be of particular relevance to the proposed Development are:

- More than 20 GW of additional renewable electricity on- and offshore by 2030.*
- Accelerated decarbonisation of domestic industry, transport and heat.*
- Generation of surplus electricity, enabling export of electricity and renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe.*
- Energy security through development of our own resources and additional energy storage.*
- A just transition by maintaining or increasing employment in Scotland's energy production sector against a decline in North Sea production."*

6.6.13 Chapter 3: Energy Supply outlines that Scotland will be a renewable powerhouse and refers to scaling up renewable energy and section 3.1 states:

"We will continue to build a diverse renewable energy mix, with significant offshore and onshore wind deployment supported by technologies such as hydro and solar."

Onshore Wind Sector Deal

6.6.14 The Onshore Wind Sector Deal was published by the Scottish Government on 23 September 2023 and looks at collaborative ways in which the onshore wind industry and Scottish Government can work together to deliver the 20GW ambition. It also looks beyond the narrowness of the benefits which can be delivered by individual developments and seeks to identify how collectively onshore wind developers can maximise the benefits to Scotland as a whole, on an industry-wide scale.

Green Industrial Strategy

6.6.15 The Green Industrial Strategy was published in September 2024 by the Scottish Government on 11 September 2024 and identifies areas of competitive global growth and opportunity for Scotland to realise the maximum possible economic benefit in the transition to Net Zero.

6.6.16 Under Part Two: Opportunity Areas on page 20, the Strategy outlines the significant opportunities for attracting onshore and offshore wind. Page 21 continues by stating:

“Onshore wind is the biggest single technology in Scotland’s current mix of renewable electricity generation, comprising 62% of installed capacity. A thriving onshore wind sector is therefore critical to the decarbonisation in Scotland and the UK.”

6.7 Progress Towards Energy and Emissions Targets

6.7.1 It is considered that the key targets for Scotland are:

- to reach Net Zero GHG emissions by 2045;
- to generate the equivalent of 50% of the energy for Scotland's heat, transport and electricity consumption to be supplied from renewable sources by 2030; and
- A minimum installed capacity of 20GW of onshore wind by 2030 and recognition that this target is not a cap. Scottish Ministers acknowledge that renewable energy generation will be necessary beyond 2030 to meet increasing energy demands. The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (January 2023) outlines a way to achieve a flourishing net-zero energy system to 2030 and beyond, identifying the clear benefits of onshore wind projects, recognising that the generation of surplus electricity will enable the export of electricity and production of renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe and provide energy security through the development of Scotland’s own energy resources and storage.

6.7.2 **Table 6.1** presents the current position based on these key targets.

Table 6:1 – Energy Targets

Target	Timescale	Source	Current Position
Annual and Domestic Effort Targets 53.8% reduction from 1990 baseline (2022 target)	Annual 2022	The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009	Emissions reduced by 50% of 1990 emissions in 2022; therefore, the target was not met.
50% of the energy for Scotland's heat, transport and electricity consumption to be supplied from renewable sources	2030	Scottish Energy Strategy: The future of energy in Scotland (2017)	The Q2 2024 Energy Statistics for Scotland outline that Scotland now generates the equivalent of nearly 29.5% of total final energy consumption from renewable sources.
Minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030	2030	Onshore Wind Policy Statement (2022)	9.756 GW grid-connected in June 2024

- 6.7.3 The Scottish Government has confirmed that the 75% reduction in GHG emissions is now 'out of reach'. However, the Net Zero target by 2045 still remains. It is also understood that the interim target of a 90% reduction by 2040 is still in place.

Energy Statistics for Scotland Q3 2024

- 6.7.4 The Energy Statistics for Scotland – Q3 2024, published in December 2024, outlined that:

"Scotland's renewable electricity generation in 2024 quarter 3 was 7,483 GWh. This is an increase of 8.5% from Q3 2023."

"Scotland has generated 26.6 TWh [of renewable electricity] in the first three quarters of 2024. This is an increase of 16.8% over the same period in 2023."

"Renewable electricity capacity in Scotland has risen over the last 12 months, from 15.1 GW in September 2023 to 16.0 GW in September 2024. This is largely due to increases in wind capacity."

- 6.7.5 In relation to grid connected onshore wind capacity, there is 9.756 GW as of June 2024.

- 6.7.6 In relation to grid connected onshore wind capacity, there is 10,176 GW as of September 2024. As of the same date, there is 14.5 GW in the pipeline (7.670 GW in planning, 5.354 GW awaiting construction, 1.458 GW under construction). The largest part of the pipeline forms applications in planning and there is no certainty all of these applications will receive consent and be constructed.

- 6.7.7 The BVG Associates, Scotland onshore wind pipeline analysis 2024-2030 December 2024 update, outlines that based on the Scenario 1 (low) dataset it is predicted there will be 15.7 GW of operational wind by 2030 which falls short of the 20 GW target. They do note that using Scenario 2 (medium) and Scenario 3 (high) datasets that 20 GW is achievable but "may be restricted by its current ability to resource these key services."

- 6.7.8 The scenarios outlined demonstrate that it is going to be very challenging to meet the 2030 targets. It should also be recognised that the 2030 target is a minimum target and not a cap. There will be a continued need for onshore wind development post 2030 to meet the Net Zero target by 2045.

- 6.7.9 BVG's analysis predicts:

"The number of current consent decisions in the ECU will at least need to double for at least three of the next five years."

- *If future projects are to use the CfD framework as their route to market, allocation for onshore wind in the next three ARs (AR 7 to AR 9), compared to AR 6's actual allocation of 0.9 GW, will need to:*
 - *More than double to at least 2.4 GW per year on average to achieve the Scenario 2, and*
 - *Almost quadruple to at least 3.5 GW per year on average to achieve Scenario 3."*

Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022

6.7.10 The Scottish Government, Scottish Greenhouse Gas Statistics 2022, was published on 18 June 2024 and confirmed the GHG emissions reduced by 50% between the baseline period and 2022. Therefore, the target of 53.8% was not met.

6.8 Summary and Conclusion

6.8.1 In summary, it is clear that international, UK, national and local climate change legislation recognises that this is a decisive decade where rapid action is required to address the climate emergency and that the efforts to date are not on track to limit global warming by 1.5°C. Indeed evidence from C3S indicates that “we are teetering on the edge of passing” this limit. This will make it harder to reach the higher 2°C target. Further, that despite Scotland having some of the most ambitious climate change targets in the world, the international message is clear and is has been translated into UK and Scottish policy - there is a need to go further and faster to protect from irreversible climate damage. Both the UK and Scottish Governments now have in place legal requirements to meet Net Zero.

6.8.2 The solution recognises the need to secure a move away from fossil fuels and the requirement for increased renewable energy to address climate change and meet the Net Zero targets. The contribution of onshore wind is recognised across international, UK and Scottish policy and guidance as a reliable, easily deployed, cheap and a widely supported solution to support this transition.

6.8.3 The move away from fossil fuels, is resulting in an increased demand for further electrification, at the same time that fossil fuel sources are being shut down and not replaced. Affordability and security of supply add further impetus for the need for renewable energy. Both UK and Scottish Policy therefore recognises the importance of the deployment of onshore wind.

6.8.4 It has been shown that Scotland is not meeting the GHG emissions reduction targets and therefore more onshore wind development is needed to meet Net Zero by 2045.

6.8.5 The OWPS and DESJTP clearly support quick deployment of new renewable energy developments is required to meet the GHG emissions reduction targets and to create a more secure, fair and affordable energy system. A summary of some of the key points are:

- OWPS sets a target of 20GW of installed onshore wind by 2030, but importantly notes this is not a cap and that further generation is required beyond 2030. The OWPS recognises that not all of the projects in planning/consented will be constructed.
- The war in Ukraine and the subsequent rise in the price of fossil fuels provides additional policy imperatives why Scotland must accelerate towards a Net Zero society. Security of supply and low-cost generation is key.
- Onshore wind can be deployed quickly, is good value for consumers and widely supported by the public.
- Recognition in policy that the developments needed to contribute to a Low Carbon economy will change the landscape.
- Recognition of the benefits of energy in relation to energy security and resilience and that the capacity needs to be significantly increased.

- Recognition that the combined national imperative to deploy additional onshore wind provides significant economic opportunities.
- The OWPS states that the deployment of onshore wind is mission-critical for meeting our climate targets.

7 PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 This Chapter provides an overview of the Development Plan and other relevant planning considerations.

7.2 Development Plan

7.2.1 The Development Plan for the Site comprises:

- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) adopted 2023;
- Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) adopted 2012 and the Highland Council Supplementary Planning Guidance which of relevance to the Site includes the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) (2016) and its Addendum (2017); and
- Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) adopted 2018.

7.2.2 The Chief Planner letter published on 08 February 2023 outlined that in the event of any incompatibility between the provisions of NPF4 and the Local Development Plan, whichever of them is later in date is to prevail (TCPSA, Section 24 (3)). Provisions that are contradictory or in conflict would be likely to be considered incompatible.

7.2.3 Therefore, at present, in the event of incompatibility between a provision of the NPF4 or the LDP, the NPF4 is to prevail.

7.3 Development Plan

NPF4

7.3.1 Annex A of NPF4 explains that the policies are to be read as a whole. The weight to be attached to policies is for the decision-maker to determine. It explains that:

The National Spatial Strategy

Delivery of Sustainable Places

7.3.2 Part 1 – A National Spatial Strategy for Scotland 2045 states:

“The world is facing unprecedented challenges. The global climate emergency means that we will need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the future impacts of climate change. We will need to respond to a growing nature crisis, and to work together to enable development that addresses the social and economic legacy of the coronavirus pandemic, the cost crisis and longstanding inequality.”

7.3.3 'Sustainable places' are described under the National Spatial Strategy as:

“Scotland's future places will be Net Zero, nature-positive places that are designed to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change, whilst protecting, recovering and restoring our environment.

Meeting our climate ambition will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society. This means ensuring the right development happens in the right place.

Every decision on our future development must contribute to making Scotland a more sustainable place. We will encourage low and zero carbon design and energy efficiency, development that is accessible by sustainable travel, and expansion of renewable energy generation."

7.3.4 Page 6 of NPF4 concerns the impact of climate change on Scotland and the delivery of sustainable places. It states:

"Scotland's Climate Change Plan, backed by legislation, has set our approach to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2045, and we must make significant progress towards this by 2030... Scotland's Energy Strategy will set a new agenda for the energy sector in anticipation of continuing innovation and investment."

7.3.5 Paragraph 3 of page 7 details that the Scottish Government will encourage the:

"expansion of renewable energy generation".

7.3.6 Cross-cutting Outcome and Policy Links' are outlined on page 8 of NPF4 which concerns the reduction of GHG emissions:

"The global climate emergency and the nature crisis have formed the foundations for the spatial strategy as a whole. The regional priorities share opportunities and challenges for reducing emissions and adapting to the long-term impacts of climate change, in a way which protects and enhances our natural environment."

National Developments

7.3.7 NPF4 has identified eighteen national developments, which are defined within Annex A as:

"...significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy. National development status does not grant planning permission for the development and all relevant consents are required. Their designation means that the principle of the development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes, providing more certainty for communities, business and investors."

7.3.8 Therefore, whilst national developments will need to apply for consent, the principle of the development has been accepted and the national need for such developments has been explicitly recognised.

7.3.9 As a development over 50 MW, the proposed Development is designated as a national development in NPF4 under National Development 3 Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure (ND3).

7.3.10 Page 103 describes ND3:

"This national development supports renewable electricity generation, repowering, and expansion of the electricity grid.

A large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its Net Zero emissions targets. Certain types of renewable electricity generation will also be required, which will include energy storage technology and capacity, to provide the vital services, including flexible response, that a zero carbon network will require. Generation is for domestic consumption as well as for export to the UK and beyond, with new

capacity helping to decarbonise heat, transport and industrial energy demand. This has the potential to support jobs and business investment, with wider economic benefits.

The electricity transmission grid will need substantial reinforcement including the addition of new infrastructure to connect and transmit the output from new on and offshore capacity to consumers in Scotland, the rest of the UK and beyond. Delivery of this national development will be informed by market, policy and regulatory developments and decisions."

7.3.11 NPF4 outlines that the need for ND3 is:

"Additional electricity generation from renewables and electricity transmission capacity of scale is fundamental to achieving a Net Zero economy and supports improved network resilience in rural and island areas."

National Planning Policy

7.3.12 It is considered Policy 11 Energy is the lead policy for the proposed Development.

7.3.13 Policy 11 Energy's stated intent is:

"To encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low-carbon and zero emissions technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisations and storage (CCUS)".

7.3.14 The policy outcome is for:

"Expansion of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies."

7.3.15 Policy 11 is supportive of all forms of renewable energy developments (as detailed in criteria a) and includes (i) wind farms and (iii) battery storage) and provides detailed criteria for the assessment of renewable energy proposals.

7.3.16 Criteria b) of Policy 11 states the only areas wind farms will not be supported are within National Parks and National Scenic Areas (NSAs).

7.3.17 Criteria c) outlines that development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities.

7.3.18 Criteria d) outlines that development proposals which impact on international or national designations will be assessed in relation to Policy 4.

7.3.19 Criteria e) includes project design and mitigation to demonstrate how impacts are addressed.

7.3.20 A key difference from paragraph 169 of SPP which NPF4 supersedes is the recognition that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy and a new focus on ensuring that design and mitigation has been applied, to ensure that impacts are addressed as far as possible. For landscape effects it confirms that where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design migration has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable. The full list to consider includes:

- impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise and shadow flicker;

- significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable;
- public access, including impact on long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes;
- impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording;
- impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised;
- impacts on road traffic and on adjacent trunk roads, including during construction;
- impacts on historic environment;
- effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk;
- biodiversity including impacts on birds;
- impacts on trees, woods and forests;
- proposals for the decommissioning of developments, including ancillary infrastructure, and Site restoration;
- the quality of Site restoration plans including the measures in place to safeguard or guarantee availability of finances to effectively implement those plans; and
- cumulative impacts.

7.3.21 When decision makers are considering the impacts detailed in part e) of Policy 11 they need to give significant weight to the contribution of the proposed Development to renewable energy generation targets and on GHG emissions reduction targets. The OWPS sets a minimum target of 20GW of deployed onshore wind by 2030.

7.3.22 Based on the requirement set out in paragraph 7.3.18 (under Policy 11 d)) consideration of the impact on international and national designations is required to be assessed in relation to Policy 4. Policy 4 has a policy intent to protect, restore and enhance natural assets, making best use of nature based solutions. The relevant section of Policy 4 is criterion c) which states that:

Development proposals that will affect a National Park, National Scenic Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest or a National Nature Reserve will only be supported where:

i. The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or

ii. Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance.

All Ramsar sites are also European sites and/or Sites of Special Scientific Interest and are extended protection under the relevant statutory regimes.

7.3.23 It is considered that in addition to the above, the following NPF4 policies are also relevant to the proposed Development.

- Policy 1 Tackling the Climate and Nature Crisis;
- Policy 3 Biodiversity;
- Policy 5 Soils;
- Policy 6 Forestry, Woodland and Trees; and
- Policy 7 Historic Assets and Places.

Highland Council Local Development Plan

7.3.24 The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) was adopted in April 2012, and the CaSPlan was adopted in August 2018. The LDPs outline the Council's Aims and provide guidance for all future development and land use within the Highlands. The CaSPlan sets out specific Objectives for the regional and settlement strategies for the Caithness and Sutherland area. The Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (November 2016) also form part of the LDP and is a relevant consideration for the proposed Development.

7.3.25 The key HwLDP policy for the proposed Development is Policy 67 – Renewable Energy Developments, which states that:

“Renewable energy development proposals should be well related to the source of the primary renewable resources that are needed for their operation. The Council will also consider:

- the contribution of the proposed development towards meeting renewable energy generation targets; and
- any positive or negative effects it is likely to have on the local and national economy;”

7.3.26 The Policy goes on to state:

“the Council will support proposals where it is satisfied that they are located, sited and designed such that they will not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments (see Glossary), having regard in particular to any significant effects on the following:

- natural, built and cultural heritage features;
- species and habitats;
- visual impact and impact on the landscape character of the surrounding area (the design and location of the proposal should reflect the scale and character of the landscape and seek to minimise landscape and visual impact, subject to any other considerations);
- amenity at sensitive locations, including residential properties, work places and recognised visitor sites (in or outwith a settlement boundary);
- the safety and amenity of any regularly occupied buildings and the grounds that they occupy- having regard to visual intrusion or the likely effect of noise generation and, in

the case of wind energy proposals, ice throw in winter conditions, shadow flicker or shadow throw;

- ground water, surface water (including water supply), aquatic ecosystems and fisheries;
- the safe use of airport, defence or emergency service operations, including flight activity, navigation and surveillance systems and associated infrastructure, or on aircraft flight paths or MoD low-flying areas;
- other communications installations or the quality of radio or TV reception;
- the amenity of users of any Core Path or other established public access for walking, cycling or horse riding;
- tourism and recreation interests;
- land and water based traffic and transport interests.”

7.3.27 It is considered that the following HwLDP policies are also relevant to the proposed Development:

- Policy 28 - Sustainable Design;
- Policy 30 - Physical Constraints;
- Policy 31 - Developer Contributions;
- Policy 51 - Trees and Development;
- Policy 55 - Peat and Soils;
- Policy 57 - Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage;
- Policy 58 - Protected Species;
- Policy 59 - Other Important Species;
- Policy 60 - Other Important Habitats and Article 10 Features;
- Policy 61 – Landscape;
- Policy 63 - Water Environment;
- Policy 64 - Flood Risk;
- Policy 69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure; and
- Policy 72 – Pollution.

7.3.28 The CaSPlan refers to the importance of renewable energy in achieving a strong and diverse economy:

“Investment in renewable energy generation in North Highland is not only helping to meet Council and national climate change targets but it has also delivered economic benefits for the area. Onshore wind energy has grown significantly over recent years, particularly in the south and north-east of the Plan area.

Supplementary Guidance

Statutory Planning Guidance

- 7.3.29 The relevant Supplementary Guidance pertaining to the proposed Development is the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (amended 2017) (OWESG). The OWESG was adopted in November 2016. The OWESG sets out a range of matters that THC will consider when determining wind farm applications including landscape, aviation interests, roads, peat, and tourism. The OWESG contains a spatial framework for onshore wind energy development that applies to all wind energy development proposals.

Non-Statutory Planning Guidance

- 7.3.30 The Highland Council adopted the Biodiversity Planning Guidance on 02 May 2024. The Guidance is a non-statutory planning guidance that provides clarity regarding the necessary supporting information to demonstrate the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of biodiversity as required under NPF4. The revised guidance requires a minimum 10% biodiversity enhancement.

7.4 Emerging Policy

- 7.4.1 Following the publication of NPF4, the Highland Council has started the process of replacing the current HwLDP and three individual ‘area’ LDPs with a new Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP) that will cover the whole of the Highland Council area. The New HLDP is anticipated to be adopted by Q3 of 2027. Due to its emerging status, it is not considered to be a relevant consideration in the determination of the S.36 Application.

7.5 Planning Guidance

- 7.5.1 The Scottish Government has published a number of Planning Advice Notes (PANs) and planning guidance which provide good practice advice and other relevant information to be considered. Relevant guidance applicable to the proposed Development is detailed below:

- PAN 50 Planning Advice Note 50: controlling the environmental effects of surface mineral workings (1996);
- PAN 60 Planning for Natural Heritage (2000);
- PAN 61 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (2001);
- PAN 75 Planning for Transport (2005);
- PAN 51 Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation (Revised 2006);
- PAN 79 Water and Drainage (2006);
- PAN 3/2010: Community Engagement (2010);

- PAN 1/2011 Planning and Noise (2011);
- PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology (2011);
- PAN 1/2013 Environmental Impact Assessment (as amended) (2013);
- Onshore Wind Turbines: Planning Advice (2014);
- Flood Risk: Planning Advice (2015); and
- Biodiversity: Draft Planning Guidance (2023).

7.6 Other Relevant National Guidance

- 7.6.1 This section of the Chapter includes reference to other national guidance which is relevant to the proposed Development.
- 7.6.2 The Scottish Government published Tackling the Nature Emergency – Scottish biodiversity strategy to 2045 in September 2023. The strategy sets out the Scottish Government ambition *“for Scotland to be Nature Positive by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity across the country by 2045”*.

7.7 Summary and Conclusion

- 7.7.1 This Chapter demonstrates that planning policy is very supportive of onshore wind development.
- 7.7.2 The proposed Development is a national development and NPF4 recognises that *“a large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets.”*
- 7.7.3 NPF4 is clear that onshore wind development is required in order to meet the GHG emission reduction targets and renewable energy targets.
- 7.7.4 Planning policy includes a number of impacts which are to be considered as part of a proposed Development and in considering the impacts, significant weight is to be given to the contribution of the development to the GHG emission reduction and renewable energy targets.
- 7.7.5 NPF4 recognises that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected for some types of renewable energy developments and where the impacts are localised and/or appropriate design has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable.
- 7.7.6 Support for renewable energy is also provided within the HwLDP under Policy 67.
- 7.7.7 A detailed assessment of the proposed Development against the policy position set out above is provided in **Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment** of this Planning Statement and a summary of the assessment provided in **Chapter 8**.

8 ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Introduction

8.1.1 This Chapter assesses the Proposed Development against the development plan and other relevant considerations and should be read in conjunction with **Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment**.

8.2 Schedule 9 of the Electricity Act

8.2.1 Whilst not a licence holder, the Applicant has taken account of the requirements of Schedule 9, in particular, the desirability of preserving natural beauty of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest. They have also had regard to the requirement to avoid, as far as possible, causing injuries to fisheries or to the stock of fish in any waters as confirmed in **Chapter 5, paragraphs 5.4.4 – 5.4.8** of the EIA Report.

8.3 Principle of the proposed Development

8.3.1 The proposed Development is categorised a National Development and therefore the principle of development does not need to be demonstrated.

8.3.2 The proposed Development would make a significant beneficial contribution to meeting current GHG emissions reduction targets as set out in **Chapter 5**. The proposed Development is predicted to deliver total emissions savings of 1,485,168 tCO₂e over a modelled 30-year operational lifetime, against a fossil fuel mix electricity generation.

8.3.3 The proposed Development is estimated to generate approximately 112.2 GWh of renewable electricity annually, which could meet the energy needs of approximately 34,661⁴ houses.

8.3.4 The proposed Development would help meet the objectives of NPF4 National Development 3 (ND3) which “*supports renewable electricity generation, repowering, and expansion of the electricity grid.*”

8.3.5 The proposed Development would have a combined capacity of up to 66 MW which is a considerable contribution towards the need statement of ND3 and as discussed below in terms of helping to tackle the climate crises, renewable energy generation, GHG reduction and the Net Zero target.

⁴ This figure is based on 8 turbines with an installed capacity of 36 MW at a site derived capacity factor of 35.6% and assuming 3,239 is the average UK household electricity consumption in kW hours (based on most recent statistics from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Jan 2024 (DESNZ)).

8.4 Assessment against the Energy and Climate Change Legislation, Policy and Guidance

Energy Policy

- 8.4.1 To address the climate crisis and to ensure security and affordability of supply, both UK and Scottish Governments are aligned in the requirement for the quick deployment of low-cost renewable energy. Onshore wind and solar are recognised as the key technology to deliver this deployment as established and low-cost solutions. 2030 is the critical window for climate change. This is reflected in the renewable energy targets and derives from the UK White Paper where it confirms that onshore wind has a crucial role. Indeed, onshore wind was put in with solar in the Contracts for Difference (CfD) auction Round 4. There were no offshore bids in CfD Round 5 and this emphasises the critical role that onshore wind contributions will make in terms of delivery. The British Energy Strategy recognises the increased importance of onshore wind. Subsequent UK policy reviews confirm that they have the right policy, where onshore is required to play a significant part, there is no suggestion that this strategy needs to change, on the contrary the focus is now on delivering the renewable energy capacity through the CfD process.
- 8.4.2 Scottish Government's Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero: Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018 – 2032 Annex 1 (December 2020) called on the UK Government to reform the CfD process to support onshore wind and solar technologies. Post the changes made by the UK Government to the CfD the Scottish Government published their revised policy position setting out a new ambition through the Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS) outlining support for onshore wind and considers the requirements and confirms how this can be met by 2030.
- 8.4.3 The OWPS confirms the requirement of 20GW of onshore wind capacity in Scotland by 2030, and recognises that this is not a cap with a requirement to meet net zero beyond 2030. Scottish Ministers acknowledge that renewable energy generation will be necessary beyond 2030 to meet increasing energy demands. The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan (January 2023) also outlines a way to achieve a flourishing net-zero energy system to 2030 and beyond, identifying the clear benefits of onshore wind projects, recognising that the generation of surplus electricity will enable the export of electricity and production of renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe and provide energy security through the development of Scotland's own energy resources and storage. Significant weight requires to be given to the energy generation and greenhouse gas reductions where the proposed Development could make a meaningful contribution and provide additional flexibility to the grid through the co-location of a battery energy storage system (BESS).
- 8.4.4 Furthermore, grid connection reform is underway, it will remain unclear until a consent is in place, whether schemes consented and "ready for connection" will be prioritised and given early connections to help meet the initial 2030 targets, as the targets approach.

8.5 Assessment against the Development Plan

- 8.5.1 Whilst the Development Plan does not have primacy in S.36 applications, it is a relevant consideration. The assessment against NPF4 in **Tables 1.1** and **Table 1.2** and the HwLDP in **Table 1.3** in **Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment** (and as summarised below) demonstrates compliance with the Development Plan.
- 8.5.2 The proposed Development has been designed to ensure appropriate embedded design mitigation with landscape and visual impact as a key driver. As confirmed in **Chapter 6, paragraph 6.9.5** of the EIA Report, the design of the proposed Development is the result of a considered iterative process which has sought to minimise landscape and visual effects whilst achieving the technical and commercial requirements to ensure project viability without public subsidy.
- 8.5.3 **Chapter 6, paragraph 6.96** confirms that appropriate offsets from all properties and settlements have been maintained to ensure that no property would experience an overbearing visual impact. Mitigation has been designed into the proposed aviation lighting to reduce the intensity of the 2000 candela steady state lights in certain atmospheric conditions by reducing their intensity and attenuating the amount of vertical downwards lighting in order to reduce the visual impact experienced by receptors below the lights.
- 8.5.4 In addition, design has carefully considered constraints and constructability to minimise site based environmental effects and is demonstrated in detail in both the Design and Access Statement and **Chapter 3** of the EIA Report. Turbines have been positioned carefully on Site so that the development footprint, through foundations, crane pads, access roads and other infrastructure is minimised. Careful attention has been taken in reducing the need for cut and fill across the site to further reduce the footprint of the project. These design principles limit impacts on peat, important habitats and cultural heritage features on the Site so that no significant effects are recorded after mitigation (including design) is taken into account. Turbines have been located with careful consideration to avoid impacts on telecommunications and aviation and to protect residential amenity. Turbines have been spaced carefully to operate efficiently and capture the wind resource on site whilst balancing the other issues set out above.
- 8.5.5 The proposed construction route will be shared by other wind farms in the area. The access to the Site itself will also be shared with the Garvary Wind Farm. These measures are in the spirit of the onshore wind sector deal to limit and share infrastructure.
- 8.5.6 Through embedded and secondary mitigation, the only residual effects following Environmental Impact Assessment are landscape and visual effects. The conclusions of the LVIA for the proposed Development is adopted for the purposes of this planning assessment, as outlined below.
- 8.5.7 Whilst the landscape and visual assessment records some temporary significant effects during construction, this assessment focuses on operational effects which are considered to be long term temporary in nature and of most relevance to determination of acceptability of the proposed Development.
- 8.5.8 As outlined in **Chapter 6 paragraph 6.9.9** of the EIA Report, during operation, the proposed Development would result in significant effects within the Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland landscape character type (LCT 135 – South of Strath Fleet unit) extending to approximately 5 km to the north east, 2.3 km to the east and 5 km to the south east. Effects on other LCTs brought forward into detailed assessment would not be considered significant.

- 8.5.9 In relation to visual effects, **Chapter 6, paragraph 6.9.10** of the EIA Report accepts that the proposed Development would be visible from nearby properties, some settlements as well as parts of the surrounding road network and footpath network. This is consistent with Policy and advice which recognises there will be landscape change as a consequence of onshore wind development. The effects, expressed below are consistent with other developments of a similar scale and nature.
- 8.5.10 **Chapter 6, Paragraph 6.9.11** of the EIA Report confirms that it has been assessed that there would be a significant visual effect at seven of the 16 representative viewpoints during daylight hours. No significant effects were identified at the representative viewpoints during the hours of darkness.
- 8.5.11 The assessment of effects on residential properties detailed in **Chapter 6, Paragraph 6.9.12** of the EIA Report found that of the properties assessed in detail as part of the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (see **Technical Appendix 6.6**) all would experience some significant visual effects, but it is not the case that any of the effects would be of such a scale so as to become dominant or overbearing.
- 8.5.12 The assessment of effects on settlements detailed in **Chapter 6, paragraph 6.9.13** of the EIA Report found that Ardgay would experience a significant visual effect during daylight hours. However, none of the settlements brought forward into detailed assessment would experience a significant effect during the hours of darkness.
- 8.5.13 As outlined in **Chapter 6, paragraph 6.9.21** of the EIA Report, significant visual effects would be experienced from sections of 8 core paths in the surrounding area. In addition, there would be significant visual effects from sections of the A836 (travelling north) and the Far North Railway Line although in all cases there would be no significant effects during the hours of darkness.
- 8.5.14 In terms of cumulative effects, **Chapter 6, paragraph 6.9.21** of the EIA Report concluded that when each of the other consented, in-planning and scoping wind farms were considered to already form part of the baseline landscape, the proposed Development would not introduce a cumulative significant visual effect. In many cases there would be either no change or a reduction in the effects identified in the main assessment. Nor would they introduce any additional significant sequential effects to any of the routes assessed in detail.
- 8.5.15 In relation to effects on the special landscape qualities of the Dornoch Firth NSA, **Chapter 6 paragraph 6.9.22** of the EIA Report considers that there would not be any significant effects on its SLQs. There would be some limited non-significant effects on 'The contrast between the enclosed west and the expansive east', 'Inhabited surrounds within a wilder backdrop of hills and moors' and 'The tranquillity of an undeveloped coastline' SLQs, but these would not be of such a degree as to undermine their overall integrity.
- 8.5.16 The LVIA concludes in **Chapter 6, paragraph 6.9.22** of the EIA Report, noting that localised significant effects on landscape character and visual amenity are inevitable as a result of commercial wind energy development anywhere in the UK. Whilst the LVIA identified some significant landscape and visual effects it is considered that the landscape has the capacity to accommodate the effects identified, particularly when the consented but as yet unbuilt wind farms in the surrounding landscape are taken into account in the baseline.
- 8.5.17 Whilst each application must be considered on its merits, there is precedent developing regarding what comprises a localised effect as discussed within **Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment** within **Table 1.1** under criterion ii. This includes a review of the Glendye, Chleansaid, Achany, Sanquhar II and Garvary Wind Farm Decisions where they demonstrate

that even with significant landscape and visual effects Reporters and Scottish Ministers have considered that where they are localised and balanced against the contributions to energy generation and net zero targets, are considered to be acceptable. The proximity, effects and therefore precedent regarding the acceptability of the similar overall effects set by the Scottish Ministers recent decision on the Garvay Wind Farm on the neighbouring site are considered to be of significant weight. The decision references clearly reflect the policy position outlined in NPF4 Policy 11 and the OWPS, that these types of landscape and visual effects are expected from this type of development and where the effects are localised and adequate mitigation is undertaken are generally acceptable. As discussed in the assessment section of **Appendix 1**, the effects of the proposed Development are in keeping with the effects which have been considered localised on other similar projects and which are expected for this type and scale of development. Taking account of the design mitigation adopted for the proposed Development, effects only relate to localised significant landscape and visual effects.

- 8.5.18 Specifically with regard to NPF4 Policy 4, the assessment (as contained in **Table 1.2 of Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment**) confirms that the potential effects on the three SLQ's of the Dornoch Firth NSA were fully assessed within the within the EIA Report. It concluded in **paragraph 6.1.9 of Technical Appendix 6.7** that the assessment has not identified any significant effects on the three SLQ's identified by NatureScot for assessment, and therefore it is not considered that the overall integrity of the NSA would be compromised, ensuring that the proposed Development complies with the Policy 4 requirements as outlined in criteria c) i).
- 8.5.19 As demonstrated in **Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment**, the proposed Development has given due consideration to all other requirements outlined within Policy 11 and with the exception of the landscape and visual effects noted above, no other significant effects are predicted. **Tables 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 in Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment** find that the limited significant effects discussed above are considered to meet the policy tests as outlined in NPF4 Policies 4 and 11 and accords with NPF4 in all other regards, furthermore that the Proposed Development meets the requirements of the HwLDP.
- 8.5.20 NPF4 Policy 11 is clear that in considering these limited effects, that there is a balance which should give significant weight to renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas reduction targets and in meeting the climate and nature crises under Policy 1, which it is considered weigh in favour of the proposed Development. In considering this balance, the benefits as outlined below, should be weighed by the decision maker against the limited Significant effects of the proposed Development.
- 8.5.21 Details of the numerous benefits which weight in favour of the proposed Development are undernoted.

Summary of Benefits secured by the Proposed Development

Reduced Carbon Emissions

- 8.5.22 Predicted to deliver total emissions savings of 49,505.6 tonnes of greenhouse gases per year and 1,485,168 tonnes over its 30-year operational lifetime.

Supporting Jobs

- 8.5.23 The socio-economic assessment confirms in **Section 5.1** that during the construction phase it is estimated that the proposed Development could generate 205 job years across Scotland,

with approximately 69 job years' worth of this total directly benefitting the Highlands and 11 job years being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.

8.5.24 Over the course of the operational phase of the proposed Development, the socio-economics statement confirms in **Section 5.2**, that it is estimated that over the proposed Development's 30-year operational lifetime, the operations and maintenance could generate approximately 580 job years across Scotland, 487 job years for the Highlands and 177 job years in Caithness and Sutherland.

8.5.25 The Applicant is committed to maximising the socio-economic benefits as outlined in **Section 7** of the socio-economics assessment. This ensures maximising direct effects whilst enabling the maximisation of indirect effects. Measures such as local procurement, developing supplier networks and skills in the local area are being put in place. Vestas is an existing local employer with a service centre in Inverness employing 20 technicians, with 3 apprentices currently being trained.

Community Funding

8.5.26 Whilst not a material consideration, the proposed Development has committed to annual community funding of £5,000 per MW during the operational life of the proposed Development. Based on an installed capacity of 66 MW, the total community funding would be around £180,000 per year, which would equate to £5.4 million for a 30-year lifetime.

Powering Homes

8.5.27 The proposed Development is anticipated to provide enough electricity to power the equivalent of 34,661⁵ households in Scotland each year.

Economic Benefits

8.5.28 The socio-economic statement confirms in **Section 5.1** that during the construction phase it is estimated that the proposed Development could generate up to £13.2 million GVA for Scotland, with approximately £4.1 million worth of this total directly benefitting the Highlands and £0.7 million GVA being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.

8.5.29 Over the course of the operational phase of the proposed Development, the socio-economics statement confirms in **Section 5.2**, that it is estimated that over the proposed Development's 30-year operational lifetime, the operations and maintenance costs could generate up to £39.4 million GVA, with approximately £35.3 million GVA directly benefitting the Highland economy and £12.9 million GVA in Caithness and Sutherland.

8.5.30 During its operation, it is expected to generate approximately £388,420 in non-domestic rates yearly.

Environmental

8.5.31 Significant measures are proposed to contribute to improving the habitat extent and biodiversity across the Site delivering a Biodiversity Net Gain enhancement from the

⁵ This figure is based on 8 turbines with an installed capacity of 36 MW at a site derived capacity factor of 35.6% and assuming 3,239 is the average UK household electricity consumption in kW hours (based on most recent statistics from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Jan 2024 (DESNZ)).

baseline. Compensation and enhancement measures, such as blanket bog and wet heath restoration and enhancement and positive habitat management for bird species and wider biodiversity, are proposed for the operational phase as part of the proposed Development's OBEMP, as detailed in **Technical Appendix 8.6** of the EIA Report. The OBEMP is expected to provide significant beneficial effects (as summarised in Table 1.1 in Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment under criterion ix)).

- 8.5.32 Areas of peat have been avoided as far as possible and any peat that is removed will be reused on-site within target restoration areas where restoration will be most beneficial.
- 8.5.33 The project has explored opportunities to deliver long-term beneficial habitat enhancement measures for habitats and species, including specific management for upland habitat restoration and enhancement (including priority peatlands) and creation/enhancement of a riparian corridor.
- 8.5.34 The proposed Development has gone through a series of design iterations to achieve a design which minimises impacts on the environment.

8.6 Conclusions

- 8.6.1 It has been demonstrated that, through the design iteration process and proposed mitigation, the identified impacts in NPF4 Policy 11 Energy, would be addressed and that socio-economic effects are maximised, ensuring the intention and outcome of Policy 11 is achieved.
- 8.6.2 A detailed assessment has been undertaken against the relevant Development Plan considerations in Tables 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 in Appendix 1 Development Plan Assessment. The conclusion of this assessment finds that the limited significant effects are considered to meet the policy tests as outlined in NPF4 Policies 4 and 11 and accords with NPF4 in all other regards and the Proposed Development meets the requirements of the HwLDP.
- 8.6.3 The proposed Development will deliver substantial Biodiversity Net Gain enhancements for the Site, providing linkages to the wider area, meeting the requirements of, and gaining support from, NPF4 Policy 1 and NPF4 Policy 3.
- 8.6.4 NPF4 Policy 11 Energy requires significant weight to be placed on the contribution of the proposed Development to renewable energy generation targets and on GHG reduction targets. In addition, Policy 1 Tackling the climate and nature crises of NPF4 requires significant weight to be given to the global climate and nature crises when considering all development proposals. It is considered that the limited predicted effects, when balanced against these contributions weigh in favour of the proposed Development.
- 8.6.5 The proposed Development is strongly supported by the energy and climate change legislation, policy and guidance at an international, national and local level, which confirms the pressing need to address climate change and meet net zero carbon emission targets and there are no effects which are considered to outweigh this pressing need.
- 8.6.6 The Planning Statement demonstrates that the proposed Development is in accordance with the Development Plan when read as a whole and is consistent with and gains significant support from other relevant considerations.

APPENDIX 1: DEVELOPMENT PLAN ASSESSMENT

Policy 11 Energy Policy

1. It is considered Policy 11 Energy is the lead policy. Policy 11 supports renewable energy developments.

National Parks and National Scenic Areas

2. Policy 11 b) confirms that proposals for wind farms in National Parks and NSAs will not be supported. The proposed Development is not located within either of these designations; therefore, this criterion is not applicable to the proposed Development.

Maximise Net Economic Impact

3. The Applicant is committed to maximising the net economic impact of the Proposed Development, as required by Policy 11 c).
4. The Socio-Economic Impact Assessment outlines a series of initiatives the Applicant would undertake to maximise the proposed Development's local economic impact. This includes:
 - The proposed development would be liable for non-domestic rates, the payment of which would contribute directly to public sector finances;
 - High quality, secure jobs and developing future workforce skills. Vestas is an existing local employer with 20 technicians and 3 current apprentices based in the Highlands;
 - Supporting local services, investment in the local community, and maximising local supply-chain content.
5. The socio-economic assessment confirms in **Section 5.1** that during the construction phase it is estimated that the Proposed Development could generate up to £13.2 million GVA and 205 job years across Scotland, with approximately £4.1 million and 69 job years' worth of this total directly benefitting the Highlands and £0.7 million GVA and 11 job years being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.
6. Over the course of the operational phase of the Proposed Development, the socio-economics statement confirms in **Section 5.2**, that it is estimated that over the Proposed Development's 30-year operational lifetime, the operations and maintenance costs could generate up to £39.4 million GVA and 580 job years across Scotland, with approximately £35.3 million GVA and 487 job years worth of this total directly benefitting the Highland economy and £12.9 million GVA and 177 job years being generated in Caithness and Sutherland.
7. The proposed Development is expected to support the provision of local services and investment priorities of local communities. During its operation, it is expected to generate approximately £388,420 in non-domestic rates yearly.
8. Whilst not a material consideration, it is also expected to provide an annual contribution of around £180,000 in community benefits.
9. The Applicant is committed to maximising the socio-economic benefits as outlined in Section 7 of the socio-economics assessment. This ensures maximising direct effects whilst enabling the maximisation of indirect effects. Measures such as local procurement, developing supplier networks and skills in the local area are being put in place.

International or National Designations

10. With regard to assessment against criterion d), it has been demonstrated through **Chapter 6 of the EIA Report** that following a process of detailed design iteration (described fully in **Chapter 3** of the EIA report and the Design and Access Statement) and summarised in the Project Design and Mitigation section below, that appropriate mitigation has been employed by the Applicant and their consultants to limit significant effects from representative viewpoints from within the National Scenic Area. This reduced and mitigated landscape effects to the extent that the EIA Report concludes that the proposed Development will not result in any significant effects on the special landscape qualities nor integrity of the Dornoch Firth NSA or Assynt-Coignach National Scenic Areas. Although the impact is not considered to result in any significant effects on its special landscape qualities (SLQ) part d) of Policy 11 is applicable, which states that:

“Development proposals that impact on international or national designations will be assessed in relation to Policy 4.”

11. An assessment against Policy 4 is made in **Table 1.2** below

Project Design and Mitigation

12. Policy 11 Energy, part e) outlines that project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts will be addressed.
13. The proposed Development has undergone a series of variations following an initial review of the Site constraints as identified in **Section 3.2, Chapter 3** of the EIA Report, including repositioning of turbine locations to avoid areas of deep peat and increasing the height of two turbines from 180 m to 200 m to improve the composition of the proposed Development. The design evolution process is detailed in **Chapter 3** of the EIA Report and the Design and Access Statement. The proposed Development has gone through four principal iterations since the initial layout, which was landscaped and developed through the project design process.
14. The design and layout represents a proposed Development which carefully balances protection of the receiving landscape and receptors whilst maximising wind yield. Based on the iteration process, the final layout achieves the following:
- Is in accordance with The Highland Council Climate Emergency Declaration, National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and Onshore Wind Policy Statement;
 - Delivers long-term beneficial habitat enhancement measures for habitats and species, which will be delivered by an Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Management Plan (OBEMP);
 - Enhances energy production efficiency and maximises energy yield capture;
 - All key considerations are addressed to create a design that is both environmentally responsible and technically robust;
 - Can be engineered and constructed safely;
 - Optimises turbine separation distances and engineering constructability;
 - Uses the tracks from the Proposed Garvary Wind Farm, reducing the amount of new track and water crossings required for the construction of the proposed Development;
 - Minimises not only the length of track used to access turbines but also the construction footprint of infrastructure as a whole to minimise the impact on carbon-rich soils;
 - Ensures that the turbines, turbine erection platforms and access tracks avoid deep peat;
 - From a visual amenity perspective, improved composition of the array from key viewpoints;
 - Positioned turbines to create balance in the array in key views from the NSA;
 - Avoids noise and visual amenity impacts to nearby (involved properties);

- Avoids impacts on telecommunications links;
 - Maintains a suitable buffer to Black Grouse Leks;
 - Optimal location of infrastructure elements near the entrance to the Site;
 - The substation, BESS and Site compound are all positioned on a more level area of the Site to avoid excessive cut and fill;
 - Optimal location selected for infrastructure elements near the entrance to the Site;
 - Roads and turbine crane pads are carefully positioned to avoid excessive cut and fill to reduce the project footprint across the Site and to avoid deep peat and more sensitive habitats;
 - Maximising the separation distance between the proposed Development and Dornoch Firth NSA;
 - Avoiding siting on the more visible and sensitive south west slopes within the Site around Cnoc a' Choire that would otherwise have increased the visibility of the proposed Development from the NSA;
 - Avoiding siting on higher ground within the south western part of the Site around Cnoc a' Choire Buidhe and Síthean Mór;
 - Maximising the separations distances from the nearby residential properties;
 - Takes account of the key landscape and visual design viewpoints from within or overlooking the Dornoch Firth NSA, comprising LVIA Viewpoints 2 (Bonar Bridge) which represented views from within the NSA, LCT 145 and the closest settlement Bonar Bridge, 4 (Ardgay (N) which related to viewpoints from the settlement of Ardgay and 10 (Struie Viewpoint on B9176 (N)) which looks across the closest part of the NSA towards the development and is a key viewpoint and representative of core paths in the area. These viewpoints were identified by the landscape architects to be key design viewpoints for design iteration and mitigation, as noted in **paragraph 6.7.4** of the EIA Report.
 - Creates a compact layout, contained by adjacent topography that avoids outlying turbines and turbines crossing into adjacent landscapes when viewed from LVIA design viewpoints. Creates a development which concentrates on the most suitable development area, to the north western corner of the Site.
 - Secures a reduced visible aviation lighting scheme, which has been agreed with the CAA.
 - Minimises effects on associated habitats and species by applying a minimum 50 m buffer between infrastructure or construction activity around all watercourses, except where a minimum number of watercourse crossings are required.;
 - That minimises the extent of new track and number of watercourse crossings required where feasible considering the topography of the Site and other environmental Site constraints;
 - Avoids deeper peatland (>0.5 m) and potential high Ground Water Dependant Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTE) for the location of turbines and other infrastructure as far as practicable; and
 - A minimum 50 m buffer from turbine blade tips to important edge habitats for bats across the Site to reduce collision risk.
15. **Table 1.1** below outlines how each impact of Policy 11 (e) has been addressed in the project design and mitigation of the proposed Development.

Development Plan

16. This section provides a summary of the detailed assessment of the proposed Development against the policies outlined in **Chapter 7** of the **Planning Statement**.

Table 1.1 Assessment against NPF4 Policy 11 e)

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
<p><i>i. impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise and shadow flicker;</i></p>	<p><u>Residential Visual Amenity</u></p> <p>The residential visual amenity assessment (RVAA) is detailed in Technical Appendix 6.6 of the EIA Report. The RVAA considered 7 residential properties within the 2 km RVAA study area, 5 of which were brought forward into detailed assessment. The RVAA concluded that the 5 properties would experience some significant visual effects, with most properties only experiencing significant visual effects from their access tracks, with the exception of Property 1 - Coirshellach (financially involved) where significant visual effects would only be experienced to the rear of the property and curtilage, with predominant views to the front of the property remaining unaffected and Property 5 – Reidbreac where significant visual effects would also be experienced from the property. As noted in paragraph 1.1.9 of the assessment it is not uncommon for a significant effect to occur at a residential property but that does not automatically engage the RVA threshold (as outlined in paragraph 1.1.8 of Technical Appendix 6.6 of the EIA Report as whether “<i>the effect on the outlook/visual amenity of a residential property is so great that it is not generally considered to be in the public interest to permit such conditions to occur</i>”). Therefore, whilst it is acknowledged that all properties would experience some visual effects, it is not the case that any of the effects would be of such significance as to become dominant or overbearing due to the position of the properties relative to the proposed Development and the availability of expansive, open views in other directions. On this basis none of the properties would reach the Residential Amenity Threshold.</p> <p>Furthermore, In the recent Strath Oykel decision, Scottish Ministers state the following in paragraph 125: “<i>The Scottish Ministers find that the significant effects on residential visual amenity do not constitute a failure in maintaining residential amenity overall, that the significant effects on the landscape and on visual amenity are contained to the extent that they are acceptable overall in the context of the benefits the proposed Development will bring in terms of its contribution to renewable energy and climate change targets</i>”.</p> <p><u>Noise</u></p> <p>Chapter 13: Noise of the EIA Report assesses the potential noise effects associated with the construction and operation of the proposed Development.</p> <p>Through embedded design mitigation, all residential locations are a minimum of at least around 1 km from the nearest turbine hardstanding area, construction compound, substation and the nearest borrow pit.</p> <p><i>Construction</i></p> <p>Table 13.16 of Chapter 13 of the EIA Report provides the construction noise calculations and notes that these are calculated as a worst-case scenario, by assessing the worst-affected building façade facing construction areas, with a +3 dB increase adopted in each case to account for the façade reflection. Other parts of the property not facing the construction areas, or garden areas away from the building façade, would experience lower sound levels. The predicted maximum noise levels at receptors CR1, CR4, CR5 and CR6 for the construction period only are greater than the daytime noise criteria in Table 13.7, by up to 5 dB, indicating the potential for a significant effect. However, the assessment takes account of the number of a maximum of four receptors being affected, the extent of the exceedance, and the duration and character of works.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>Works relate to a 180 m length of access track and this is anticipated to be completed in a short timeframe, such that the construction effects are considered to be Not Significant, subject to the appropriate adoption of Best Practical Means (BPM) mitigation measures as set out in paragraph 13.7.3 of the EIA Report. Furthermore, the assessment assumes that the effects are attributed to Balblair, if Garvary Wind Farm is consented, they will construct and built the road and the effects will not be caused by/attribution to the proposed Development.</p> <p>Predicted noise levels from construction vehicles using the access track away from the public road network are up to 65 dB at the closest approach, which meets the daytime threshold in Table 13.7 of the EIA Report and are therefore Not Significant. For vehicles using the public road network, the highest predicted temporary increase in 1.5dB, which is predicted to be minor and Not Significant.</p> <p>Noise from blasting will not exceed the construction noise thresholds in Table 13.7 for a substantial period of time. As such blasting noise is considered to be Not Significant, subject to the adoption of appropriate BPM mitigation measures.</p> <p>Any night-time transportation requirements would be infrequent and would be agreed in advance with THC and is predicted to be Not Significant. This could be secured within the CEMP (based on Technical Appendix 2.1 Outline CEMP) which can be controlled through an appropriately worded planning condition.</p> <p><i>Operation</i></p> <p>The assessment confirms that the noise limits for the daytime are derived on the basis of, daytime noise limits of 5 dB above background noise levels or 35 dB LA90 (whichever is higher) and night-time noise limits of 5 dB above background noise levels or 38 dB (whichever is higher), except for receptors R1 and R2 (financially involved) which have noise limits derived on the basis of 5 dB above background noise levels or 45 dB LA90 (whichever is higher) for both daytime and night-time.</p> <p>At all identified receptors, the direct operational noise impact (turbine noise) from the proposed Development meets the applicable noise limits and is therefore Not Significant.</p> <p>In term of operation noise effects from the substation and BESS, due to the large separation distances and where there is no line of sight, it is considered to be highly unlikely that noise from the substation and BESS would be audible at any noise-sensitive receptor locations. Operational noise effects from the substation and BESS are therefore considered to be Not Significant.</p> <p>Cumulative effects are considered under criterion xiii.</p> <p><u>Shadow Flicker</u></p> <p>The impact of shadow flicker has been considered based upon consideration of the proposed Development alone and cumulatively with other developments and an assessment is detailed in Chapter 14: Other Issues of the EIA Report.</p> <p>Based on the realistic worst case scenario, which incorporates data from the Highland Council's Wind Turbine Open Map Data, Met Office and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's solar calculator, the assessment found that none of the identified receptors would experience shadow flicker exceeding the thresholds of 30 hours per year or 30 minutes per day. Therefore, the shadow flicker effects are Not Significant and meets acceptable thresholds to protect residential amenity.</p> <p><u>Conclusion</u></p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
<p><i>ii. significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable;</i></p>	<p>Taking account of the mitigation proposed, the proposed Development is considered to protect residential amenity and has fully addressed the requirements of Policy 6 e) i).</p> <hr/> <p>As noted in Chapter 7 of this Planning Chapter and column one of this table, it is recognised by NPF4 that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy development and where they are locations and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered acceptable. The OWPS also confirms that to meet the climate targets, taller and more efficient turbines will be required and the recognition that <u>this will change the landscape</u>.</p> <p>Chapter 6 of the EIA Report provides a detailed assessment of the Landscape and Visual Impacts of the proposed Development. In summary, it confirms that there are no international, national or local landscape designations or wild land areas covering the Site. The Dornoch firth NSA, a national landscape designation, is located approximately 4.8km to the south of the proposed Development. As required by Policy 11 d) where a proposed Development impacts on a national designation it requires to be assessed under NPF4 Policy 4. This assessment is provided in Table 8.2 of this Planning Statement.</p> <p>Construction Visual Effects</p> <p>The assessment in Chapter 6 of the EIA Report confirms that construction activities associated with the proposed Development would be screened from most parts of the study area due to the topography of the rounded hills LCT (LCT 135 Strath Fleet unit) where the proposed Development would be located. Construction activities would be visible from more elevated locations that allows views across the uplands where the proposed Development is located and from locations near to the Site access from the A836 to the west of the Site. Cranes would also be visible for a relatively short period and would be incidental when considered in the context of the turbines being erected, and would not give rise to Significant effects.</p> <p>From more elevated locations in relative proximity to the proposed Development, such as from Viewpoint 5, views extend across part of the Site allowing views of construction activities and vehicular movements, in addition to the views of the cranes used to install the turbines which would result in a moderate major effect which would be Significant. However, from all remaining viewpoint due to screening through landform and vegetation effects are not predicted to be Significant.</p> <p>Construction Landscape Effects</p> <p>No significant effects are predicted to existing landscape features. There would be localised areas of moderate major Significant, but temporary effects within approximately 1 km within Landscape Character Type (LCT) 135, however effects on the wider LCT would be lower.</p> <p>The proposed Development would result in a temporary moderate major and Significant effect on landscape features a very small and highly localised part of LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland (Kyle of Sutherland Unit) extending to approximately 400 m to the south the proposed access track.</p> <p>Operational Visual Effects</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>During daylight hours a viewpoint assessment was undertaken (Technical Appendix 6.5 of the EIA Report) which confirms that there would be significant effects at seven of the 16 representative views as noted below, however during the hours of darkness there would be no Significant visual effects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Viewpoint 1 - Minor Road, Drochaid na h-Uidh; <li>● Viewpoint 3 – Core path Cornhill – Culrain, via Invercharron Hill/Carbisdale; <li>● Viewpoint 4 – Ardgay; <li>● Viewpoint 5 – Creagan Glas; <li>● Viewpoint 7 - A836 at Ardchronie; <li>● Viewpoint 8 – Auchintoul; and <li>● Viewpoint 10 - Struie Viewpoint on B9176. <p>Whilst no Significant effects are predicted, during the hours of darkness, this is on the basis of the aviation lighting proposals and mitigation which has been considered. A reduced visible aviation lighting scheme has been agreed with the CAA. In total six of the eight turbines (T1, T2, T3, T4, T6 and T7) are proposed to be fitted with visible red 2,000/200 candela (cd) lights on the nacelle of each turbine. These will operate in the reduced 200 cd intensity where meteorological visibility is greater than 5 km and where visibility is less than 5 km the lights will operate at 2,000 cd. The lights are required to be at maximum intensity at 3 degrees above and 1 degree below horizontal. Light intensity reduces beyond those parameters.</p> <p>It has been agreed with the CAA that infra-red lights (that are not visible to the human eye) would be installed on all turbines except T8 for operators carry night vision capability. It has also been agreed with the CAA that there will be no requirement for intermediate lighting to be installed halfway between the nacelle and the ground-level.</p> <p>Should the relevant regulatory actions concerning the mandatory carriage of a compatible Electronic Conspicuity system on aircraft be completed and signed into law the project could consider the installation an Electronic Conspicuity (i.e. transponder) based Aircraft Detection Lighting System. The installation of such a suitable Aircraft Detection Lighting System would significantly reduce the occasions when the lighting would be visible. A planning condition can be attached to the grant of consent which requires investigation and agreement to such a scheme, if regulatory approval for such systems becomes available. For the purposes of assessment it was assumed that turbines will require visible aviation lighting as set out above.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>With regard to visual receptors effects on residential properties this is assessed under criterion i) which confirms that at no property would the proposed Development reach the RVAA threshold.</p> <p>For settlements within 5 km which includes Bonar Bridge, no Significant effects are predicted. For settlements within 5 km to 10 km Ardgay is located on the southern side of the Dornoch Firth, approximately 5.8 km to the south of the proposed Development where theoretical visibility of up to all eight turbines is predicted from the settlement and visibility of up to six hubs from the part of the settlement to the north and south of Ardgayhill and theoretical visibility of up to four hubs from the part of the settlement to the north along Church Street and Manse Road. During daylight hours, paragraph 6.8.163 of the EIA Report confirms that turbines would be introducing new elements on the distant horizon occupying a small to medium lateral extent of the view. Receptors would not experience any views of the substation/BESS and other ground-level components which would be screened by the topography of the hillside to the north east of Bonar Bridge that forms the view horizon. The turbines would extend slightly above the distant horizon but would be set beyond it. As such the assessment confirms that they would be more closely associated with the moorland beyond horizon rather than the wooded valley sides that form the backdrop to the view. The effect on Ardgay is predicted to result in a moderate and Significant effect, but during hours of darkness no Significant effect is predicted. Lairg is not predicted to have Significant effects during either daylight or hours of darkness from the proposed Development.</p> <p>Effects on Core paths, roads, railways and promoted tourist routes are considered under criterion iii) in this table. Which confirms the extent of significant effects are limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Core Path SU03.10 Ardgayhill, located approximately 6.1 km to the south during daylight hours only; ● Core Paths SU03.12 Oakwood Chalet – Oldtown, SU03.08 Oldtown – Badvoon, SU03.04 Badvoon Forest, Link Path, SU03.05 Badvoon Forest, Allt Eiteachan Path, SU03.03 Badvoon Forest, Forest Road approximately 6.9km to the south, during daylight hours only; ● Far North Railway Line for a 4.6km section between Fearn Lodge and Ardgay, where passengers would experience oblique views intermittently screen as the route passes through cuttings, during daylight hours only. ● John O’Groats cycle route - northbound cyclists taking the westerly leg towards Culrain for a distance of approximately 1.6km between Ardgay and Cornhill, during daylight hours only. <p>Operational Landscape Effects <i>LCT Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland (south of Strath Fleet unit)</i></p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>Paragraph 6.8.77 of the EIA Report confirms that the proposed turbines would introduce direct effects on the LCT in the immediate vicinity and indirect effects on the remaining parts of the LCT. The proposed Development would be built within a landscape of rounded hills with a simple landcover so that views of the substation and BESS would be limited to areas within the immediate vicinity of their locations. Whilst paragraph 6.8.78 and 6.8.79 note that existing Lairg Wind Farm, the consented Lairg II Wind Farm alongside existing electricity infrastructure are also located within the northern part of this LCT therefore a further wind farm would not introduce entirely new features into the landscape. Furthermore, although representing a notable change to the immediate vicinity of the Site, their locations are contained in the landform away from more sensitive edges of the LCT. The assessment considers that the turbines do not dominate the scale of the landscape, allowing the scale and openness of the landscape to still be perceived and whilst adding to the existing characteristic feature of wind farms in the LCT, would not be so great so as to become the single-most dominant characteristic feature.</p> <p>Paragraph 6.7.80 notes that the moderate significant effects of the proposed Development within the LCT would extend to approximately 5 km to the north east, 2.3 km to the east and 5 km to the south east. It would also extend to approximately 4 km to the north, 3.5 km to the north west and west and to approximately 1 km to the south.</p> <p>Paragraph 6.8.81 provides the extent of effect beyond 5km and confirms that to the north, east and south east visibility is much more intermittent and generally limited to areas of higher ground. To the north, Lairg Wind Farm has a greater influence on the perception of the character of this part of the LCT. To the north east, visibility is very intermittent and is generally limited to high ground and south west facing slopes e.g. At Creagan Glas (Viewpoint 5), Meall Meadhonach, Blar Buidhe, Meall Mòr and Creag na Mèine, with the proposed turbines backgrounded against distant landform. To the east, actual visibility would be less than predicted due to the extensive area of forestry to the south of Loch Buidhe that would restrict available views. To the south east visibility would also be very intermittent. Accordingly, beyond 5 km effects are assessed as being Not Significant.</p> <p>There are no other LCTs where the proposed Development is considered to result in Significant effects.</p> <p>Decommissioning Landscape and Visual Effects</p> <p>These were assessed to be the same as, or less than, the construction phase.</p> <p>Designated Landscapes</p> <p>There are no national landscape designations covering the Site. A detailed assessment of the impacts on the NSAs is contained in Table 8.2 under NPF4 Policy 4, which in summary confirms that no significant effects are predicted and that the objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised and that notwithstanding that, the proposed Development secures national environmental benefits of national importance.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>With regard to Local Landscape Areas ('LLAs') (or Special Landscape Areas as referred to by THC) the effects of the proposed Development were considered in Technical Appendix 6.3 of the EIA Report and conclusions outlined in paragraph 6.6.12 of the EIA Report which advises that none of the LLAs have the potential to experience significant effects.</p> <p>There is a Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) at Skibo Castle, however there is no predicted theoretical visibility of the proposed Development from the GDL.</p> <p>With regard to Wild Land, NPF4 Policy 4 g) does not require a buffer zone around wild land, therefore as the proposed Development is not within Wild Land, it is not a relevant consideration.</p> <p>Cumulative Effects</p> <p>These are considered in detail under criterion xiii), in summary, as detailed in paragraph 6.10.19 of the EIA Report, it is acknowledged that wherever more than one wind farm is visible at any given location, there will be a greater overall or cumulative effect on landscape character and visual amenity than a single wind farm. Furthermore, the more wind turbines that are constructed, the greater the magnitude of overall (or combined) change to the landscape character or views.</p> <p>Paragraph 6.10.20 notes that when the other consented wind farms are considered to already form part of the baseline landscape it is assessed that there would be a reduction in the extent of significant landscape character effects to LCT 135 Rounded Hills – Caithness & Sutherland (South of Strath Fleet unit) introduced by the proposed Development from approximately 4 km to the north, 5 km to the north east, 2.3 km to the east and 5 km to the south east, 4.4 km to the north west and west and 1.8 km to the south to approximately 1.5 km to the north, 2 km to the north east, 2.3 km to the east and 5 km to the south east, 4.4 km to the north west and west and 1.8 km to the south (associated with Scenario 2 as detailed in paragraph 6.9.8 of the EIA Report).</p> <p>Paragraph 6.10.21 also confirms that when all consented, in-planning and scoping wind farms were considered to already form part of the baseline landscape, the proposed Development would not introduce a cumulative significant visual effect. In many cases there would be either no change or a reduction in the effects identified in the main assessment. Nor would they introduce any additional significant sequential effects to any of the routes.</p> <p>Relevant considerations for assessing whether an effect is localised</p> <p>There have been a number of onshore wind decisions which have discussed whether effects are considered to be localised. In the case of Glendye Wind Farm (ECU Reference: ECU00000676), paragraph 3.160 of the Reporters' Report outlined they agreed:</p> <p><i>“with the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment that the proposed development would have a significant effect on part of the landscape character unit of the Moorland Plateau Landscape Character Type and that this would extend up to 5km from the proposed turbines, as indicated within Figure 6.6 of the Environmental Impact Assessment.”</i></p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>Paragraph 3.284 of the Reporters' Report concluded that: <i>"The majority of the significant effects identified would be confined to viewpoints within 5km of the closest wind turbine (viewpoints 1 – 6). We consider these effects to be localised. The remaining viewpoints from which significant effects are predicted are limited to four regional locations (situated 9.6km, 14.5km, 17.7km, and 18.5km from the nearest visible turbine). Given the scale of the proposed development we find that the wind farm would be well positioned to minimise medium to long distance effects."</i></p> <p>The Scottish Ministers agreed with the Reporters' conclusions and adopted them for their own decision.</p> <p>The decision notice for Chleansaid Wind Farm ECU Reference: ECU00002031 outlines that: <i>"The Scottish Ministers agree with the EIA report conclusions that the proposed Development will have some significant landscape and visual impacts but overall these would remain relatively localised with the majority of significant effects occurring not more than 12km from the proposed Development. It is therefore considered by the Scottish Ministers that the landscape and visual impacts are acceptable"</i>.</p> <p>Further commentary on what Scottish Ministers considered to be localised effects was provided in the decision notice for the Achany Extension ECU Reference ECU00001930. The Scottish Ministers acknowledge that the proposed Development would have some significant landscape and visual impacts but overall these would remain relatively localised with the majority of significant effects occurring within 10km of the proposed Development and none at a distance greater than 12.5km. It was also acknowledged that no national or regional landscape designations would be significantly affected by the proposed Development. It is therefore considered by the Scottish Ministers that the landscape and visual impacts, including on the NSA, were acceptable</p> <p>The Reporter for Sanquhar II Community Wind Farm (ECU Reference: ECU00001801) prepared a report pre NPF4 and post NPF4 and in both instances recommended by the Reporter that the development was consented by Scottish Ministers. In relation to landscape effects, the Reporter concluded in paragraph 3.101 of the original report that: <i>"significant landscape effects would be confined to within 7km of the proposed turbines."</i></p> <p>In relation to visual effects, the Reporter outlined in paragraph 3.128 that: <i>"I consider that significant effects in views from the south and southwest would not generally extend beyond elevated areas of land within around 8 to 10 km of the turbines."</i></p> <p>In the upland area, the Reporter outlined in paragraph 3.173 of the original report that: <i>"All told, I find the visual effects of the development in the upland area within around 5 km of the windfarm would be significantly adverse."</i></p> <p>The Reporter considered these effects localised and the Scottish Ministers agreed.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>Whilst all sites are considered on individual merit, a recent decision was made by Scottish Ministers for the Garvary Wind Farm (ECU Reference: ECU00003251) with similar effects on a neighbouring site¹ and which are therefore very relevant to the conclusions and assessment of the Balblair proposal. The Reporter agreed with the assessment in the EIA and this position was adopted by Scottish Ministers. This recognised that there would be significant landscape and visual effects, however, these were considered to be localised and would not impact on the special qualities or integrity of the Dornoch NSA. In paragraph 89 of the Scottish Ministers Decision, they recognised that these effects are considered acceptable in the context of the benefits that the proposed Development will bring in terms of contributing to renewable energy and climate change targets and economic benefits. Due to the close relationship to this site, the EIA assessment for the proposed Development, is consistent with the findings on Garvary which were accepted by the Reporter and Scottish Ministers.</p> <p>These decisions demonstrate what has been determined to be acceptable to Scottish Ministers in these cases in relation to significant landscape and visual impacts.</p> <p>Design Mitigation</p> <p>Chapter 3 of the EIA Report confirms the iterative process which was undertaken to evolve and mitigate the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development. A further, more detailed description of the design process is contained within the DAS accompanying the S.36 application. Following the application of the detailed design mitigation and iterative design process, Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual confirms that based on general good practice principles and an analysis of Site-specific opportunities and constraints, the wind farm layout has evolved to take into consideration a number of landscape and visual constraints to mitigate the effects of the Proposed Development as far as possible. This ensures that the landscape and visual impacts are limited to localised effects and appropriate design mitigation was applied. These measures are as set out in paragraph 8.4.13 of this Planning Statement.</p> <p>Specifically, with regard to landscape and visual effects, the measures included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● maximising the separation distance between the proposed Development and Dornoch Firth NSA;

¹ Significant effects are assessed to occur on site and in its immediate vicinity, up to around 1.5km northwest and 5km east of the nearest turbine. Significant effects were also found to occur within 6km of the proposed Development on parts of the Farmed and Forested Slopes with Crofting – Lairg Unit LCT and the Rounded Hills LCT – other areas between Loch Shin and the Kyle of Sutherland and around Meall Dola. the Dornoch Firth NSA is located approximately 7.5km to the south and southeast of the nearest turbine. Significant visual effects are also assessed for parts of Lairg, users of the A836 (including during construction on the A836 site access), Far North Railway, eastbound users of the A839 and A838 and core paths within 6km.

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● avoiding siting on the more visible and sensitive south west slopes within the Site around Cnoc a' Choire that would otherwise have increased the visibility of the proposed Development from the NSA; ● avoiding siting on higher ground within the south western part of the Site around Cnoc a' Choire Buidhe and Síthean Mór; ● maximising the separations distances from the nearby residential properties; ● Testing each evolving layout from landscape and visual design viewpoints comprising LVIA Viewpoints 10, 2 and 4. ● Focusing on creating a compact layout, contained by adjacent topography that avoids outlying turbines and tubines crossing into adjacent landscapes when viewed from LVIA design viewpoints. Concentrating on the north western corner of the Site. ● Securing a reduced visible aviation lighting scheme which has been agreed with the CAA. <p>Summary</p> <p>In summary, it is considered that the proposed Development meets the policy test, which indicates that “<i>where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable</i>”. As demonstrated above, the proposed Development has been designed to ensure appropriate embedded design mitigation with landscape and visual impact as a key driver. As a result of this embedded mitigation, the proposed Development has done all it can to minimise landscape and visual impact effects, particularly from key views to respect the NSA and protect it's SLQ's and overall integrity. Furthermore, the design has limited the extent from which significant landscape and visual effects will be experienced during operation to the Landscape Character Type (LCT) within which it is located (LCT 135 – South of Strath Fleet unit) within approximately 5 km, and indirect significant effects on other LCTs extending to approximately 5 km north east, 2.3 km east and 5 km south east. During construction and decommissioning, significant temporary additional direct effects would be confined to approximately 1 km within the host LCT and within the adjacent LCT (LCT 142 - Kyle of Sutherland unit) near to the Site access. In terms of visual effects, significant effects are experienced at seven of 16 viewpoints, eight core paths, Ardgay, a 5.2km stretch of the A836 (travelling north westward) and Far North railway line for a 4.6km part of the route, and cyclists on the John O'Groats Cycle Route on the A836 between Wester Fearn and Bonar Bridge and between Ardgay and Cornhill. With the proposed aviation lighting mitigation proposed, all these effects are during daylight hours only. The effects on residential properties would not reach the residential visual amenity threshold.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>Paragraph 4.2.14 of the EIA Report confirms that localised effects on landscape and visual amenity are inevitable and “<i>whilst the LVIA identified some significant landscape and visual effects it is considered that the landscape has the capacity to accommodate the effects identified, particularly when the consented but as yet unbuilt wind farms in the surrounding landscape are taken into account in the baseline</i>”.</p> <p>Whilst each application must be considered on its merits, there is precedent developing regarding what comprises a localised effect. The effects of the proposed Development are in keeping with the effects which have been considered localised on other projects and which are expected for this type and scale of development. Taking account of the design mitigation, extent of effects and the mitigation employed, the policy indicates such development will generally be acceptable. The proposed Development is therefore considered to accord with criterion ii).</p>
<p><i>iii. public access, including impact on long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes;</i></p>	<p>Chapter 12 Traffic and Transport, paragraphs 12.5.16 and 12.5.17 of the EIA Report confirm that a review of foot and cycle paths that may be affected by the movement of construction traffic was undertaken. THC’s Interactive Core Paths Map indicates that there are no Core Paths recorded by THC near the proposed Site access. Core Path SU16.04 (Station – Gruids Road) is located approximately 4.5 km to the north of the proposed Site access. To the south, Core Path SU08.01 (Culrain – Invershin) and SU05.06 (Balblair Wood – Invershin) are located 4 km from the proposed Site access.</p> <p>The A836 does not have any pedestrian or cyclist infrastructure near the Site access junction, although the A836 is listed as part of National Cycle Route 1.</p> <p>Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual of the EIA Report confirms in Table 6.1 that a preliminary assessment of all routes within the 20 km detailed study area is included in Technical Appendix 6.4 of the EIA Report, whilst routes where receptors had the potential to experience significant effects were assessed, with the findings detailed below.</p> <p>For core paths within 5 km to 10 km (SU08.03 Lochcoire, Lower Track & SU03.01 Cornhill – Culrain, via Invercharron Hill/Carbisdale) during daylight hours, overall the assessment confirms that there would be a moderate Significant effects experienced over a distance of approximately 5.7km and during hours of darkness, a moderate but Not Significant effect.</p> <p>For Core Path SU03.10 Ardgayhill, located approximately 6.1 km to the south during daylight hours, overall the assessment confirms that there would be a moderate Significant effect, but during hours of darkness, a minor/moderate but Not Significant effect.</p> <p>For Core Paths SU03.12 Oakwood Chalet – Oldtown, SU03.08 Oldtown – Badvoon, SU03.04 Badvoon Forest, Link Path, SU03.05 Badvoon Forest, Allt Eiteachan Path, SU03.03 Badvoon Forest, Forest Road approximately 6.9 km to the south, during daylight hours, overall the assessment confirms that there would be a moderate Significant effect, but during hours of darkness, a minor/moderate but Not Significant effect.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>No significant effects were predicted on core paths within 10 to 15 km.</p> <p>With regard to roads used by tourists/tourist routes, effects on the A836 North Westbound are predicted to at most minor/moderate and South Eastbound predicted at most to have a minor effects, both of which are Not Significant.</p> <p>The B9176 is a promoted tourist route, which the assessment confirms would not experience Significant effects. Similarly, travellers on the Far North Railway Line are not predicted to experience Significant effects, except during daylight hours for a 4.6 km section between Fearn Lodge and Ardgay, where passengers would experience oblique views intermittently screen as the route passes through cuttings.</p> <p>On the Moray Firth Tourist Route which follows the B1976, A836, A839 and A9, tourists would experience views over the same sections of road as reported above.</p> <p>For cycle routes, cyclists both north and southbound on the John O'Groats cycle route are not predicted to experience Significant effects except northbound cyclists taking the westerly leg towards Culrain would experience moderate and Significant effects. This relates to a distance of approximately 1.6 km between Argay and Cornhill, where cyclists would experience very oblique views, with the proposed Development appearing behind the direction of travel for the majority of this section due to the orientation of the road relative to the proposed Development. Where views are available the turbines would be seen set beyond the landform to the north of Bonar Bridge that forms the view horizon. As such they would be more closely associated with the moorland beyond the horizon rather than the valley slopes that form the backdrop to the view.</p> <p>Chapter 6, Table 6.1 of the EIA Report confirms that there are no long distance walking routes within the study area and therefore there is no potential for effects.</p> <p>The proposed Development has addressed the requirements of criterion iii).</p>
<p><i>iv. impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording;</i></p>	<p>Aviation is detailed in Chapter 14: Other Issues of the EIA Report, as well as Technical Appendix 14.2, which is an Aviation Technical Report.</p> <p>In respect of impacts on radar, a radar line of sight assessment and an assessment of the operational significance of technical effects on RAF Lossiemouth Primary Surveillance Radar ('PSR') was undertaken, concluding that effects on the RAF Lossiemouth PSR will not be significant. The Ministry of Defence has confirmed there will be no objection on the basis of this radar.</p>

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	<p>In respect of impacts on low flying aircraft, as the turbines in the proposed Development exceed 150m, the turbines are required to be fitted with obstacle lighting. A proposal for a reduced lighting scheme has approved by the Civil Aviation Authority (letter dated 20th November 2024, Annex A, Technical Appendix 14.2).</p> <p>Impacts on aviation and defence interests have been addressed by the proposed Development in accordance with criterion iv).</p>
<p><i>v. impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised;</i></p>	<p>Telecommunications are covered in Chapter 14: Other Issues of the EIA Report, as well as Technical Appendix 14.1, which is a Mitigation Analysis Engineering Report. Ongoing mitigation and redesign of the layout was undertaken to ensure no unacceptable interference with microwave and UHF links and Joint Radio Company ('JRC') communications links, with the final design incorporating feedback from the JRC. Technical Appendix 14.1 confirms the proposed mitigation solution as agreed with JRC. As a result, there are no unacceptable impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations and transmission links are not compromised.</p> <p>Impacts on telecommunication and broadcasting installations have therefore been addressed by the proposed Development.</p>
<p><i>vi. impacts on road traffic and on adjacent trunk roads, including during construction;</i></p>	<p>The transport assessment is detailed in Chapter 12: Transport and Access of the EIA Report. The proposed Development would lead to a temporary increase in traffic volumes on the A9, A836, A839 and A949 during the construction phase which would decrease outwith the peak period of construction. The assessment confirms that moderate effects predicted prior to mitigation measures will be reduced to minor and Not Significant once mitigation is employed.</p> <p>The range of mitigation measures proposed include the implementation of both a Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) (detailed in Technical Appendix 12.2 of the EIA Report) and Abnormal Load Access Review (Technical Appendix 12.1 of the EIA Report), which would be agreed in advance with THC and Transport Scotland. Both measures can be controlled through the application of an appropriately worded planning condition.</p> <p>The proposed Development has addressed the impacts on road traffic and on the adjacent truck roads as required by criterion vi).</p>
<p><i>vii. impacts on historic environment;</i></p>	<p>Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage assesses the likely significant impacts with respect to cultural heritage, as well as mitigation measures to address them.</p> <p>Construction Effects</p> <p>The EIA Report confirms in Table 10.7 Known Heritage Assets within the Site that there are 40 known heritage assets within the Site, of these, four known non-designated heritage assets within the Site would be subject a direct physical impact during the construction phase (as shown on Figure 10.1 of the EIA Report). These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MHG9290 Cnoc na Moine, field system. Within the Site boundary, are five platforms which would be avoided by proposed Development infrastructure. Establishment of the Garvary Wind Farm construction compound is proposed within the area defined by the HER as containing the earthworks comprising MHG9290. There is also an existing modern trackway already established through the area that would be widened and realigned as part of the proposed Development. A very small part of the heritage asset MHG9290 (overall measuring 785 m x 290 m maximum dimensions in plan) could therefore be physically impacted by the construction compound (should Garvary not be constructed) and a stretch of proposed access track measuring

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	<p>120 m in length as a result of the proposed Development. However, the effect is assessed as being negligible and Not Significant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MHG10054 Leathad Breac, hut circle and field system. This comprises two hut circles with an accompanying field system. These would be avoided by proposed Development infrastructure. The proposed Development design includes the construction compound (requiring benching measuring c.120 m x 80 m in plan) and 585 m of internal Site access track through the area defined by the HER as a field system. In addition to the identified direct physical impact, it is considered likely that groundworks for the proposed Development and its associated drainage programme could potentially result in a lower water table in the vicinity of MHG10054 which could result in an indirect physical impact through degradation of waterlogged organic remains within and associated with the heritage asset. The assessment concludes that the effects would be minor and Not Significant. • MHG18357 Leathad Breac, farmstead. This comprises of two unroofed buildings, avoided by proposed Development infrastructure. The NRHE records a larger area defining an associated enclosure defined by field walls. The field visit for this assessment recorded that the surrounding enclosure walls were difficult to identify due to the covering heather and scrub grass. The proposed Development design includes Turbine 4, its crane pad, and c. 500 m of access track located within the enclosure for MHG18357. It is calculated that a total of c.200 m of enclosure walling would need to be removed for the proposed Development. Benching for Turbine 1 and its crane pad, although within the HER-defined area, would avoid any OS-mapped surface boundary remains. The assessment confirms that the effect would be minor and Not Significant. • MHG10058 Coirshellach, township and head dyke. This comprises an area of 18th/19th century depopulation consisting of seven building footings, with accompanying enclosures and field walls. Outwith the head dyke or bank are several random building footings. All of the township buildings would be avoided by the proposed Development infrastructure, however, one of the outlying buildings at NGR 260838, 896597 and a c.120 m section of head dyke would be removed by the proposed access track to Turbine 7. The assessment concludes that the effect would be minor and Not Significant. <p>All known heritage assets considered in the EIA are avoided in the Outline Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Plan (OBEMP) (Appendix 8.6 of the EIA Report) for any proposals potentially involving ground-breaking works and therefore with a potential for a direct physical impact upon surface or subsurface archaeological remains. No direct physical impacts are anticipated as a result of the OBEMP proposals and are therefore assessed as negligible and Not Significant.</p> <p>Accidental damage and effects of Micrositing are also addressed in paragraph 10.7.12, Chapter 10 of the EIA Report and considers two additional non-designated assets within the 50m micrositing allowance. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MHG12881 Altnagar Lodge Hotel, cairnfield. The assessment confirms that accidental or micrositing effects are predicted be negligible and Not Significant. • MHG10335 Craigton, hut circle. The assessment confirms that accidental or micrositing effects are predicted be negligible and Not Significant. <p><i>The Site is considered to hold high archaeological potential for hitherto unknown subsurface archaeological remains of the Prehistoric and/or post-medieval periods and low potential for medieval period remains. Although the effects for unknown heritage assets cannot be fully assessed, a reasonable worst-case assessment is presented assuming occurrence of unexpected archaeological remains which could result in a Moderate and Significant effect without mitigation, therefore mitigation measures are proposed. Where construction impacts are unavoidable, these will be offset by excavation and</i></p>

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	<p>recording of the remains in accordance with NPF4 Policy 7(o) and PAN2/2011, sections 25-27, and THC HwLDP Policy 57. A programme of archaeological monitoring, fieldwork, recording, and reporting is likely to be required, to be specified in a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI). THC has indicated through consultation that a programme of palaeo-environmental survey would also be appropriate. The scope and nature of additional mitigation will be outlined in a WSI and agreed with THC in advance of construction, a matter which the Applicant agrees can be secured as an appropriately worded planning condition. Paragraph 10.1.246 of the EIA Report confirms that following the implementation of the identified programme of mitigation which could be secured through an appropriately worded planning condition, the residual result would be Not Significant.</p> <p>Operational Effects</p> <p>Three scheduled monuments, two category B Listed Buildings and five non-designated heritage assets were assessed in Chapter 10 of the EIA Report.</p> <p><u>Listed Buildings</u></p> <p>With regard to LB52528 Lydsurach Crofthouse, Balblair Estate, near Bonar Bridge, the Category B Listed Building. The building would remain physically unaltered by the proposed Development and its relationship with surrounding ruins would remain unaffected. The only element of the buildings setting is its location in a dip to provide shelter and this would remain unaffected by the proposed Development. The proposed Development would be in the opposite direction from the main views from the crofthouse across the Dornoch Firth and so views would remain unchanged. The assessment considers the existing relationship between the building and the visibility of the proposed Development with the closest turbine 1.2 km away. It concludes that the proposed Development would have no impact on the cultural significant of the Category B Listed Building and effects would be Not Significant. Furthermore, it preserves the character, special architecture or historic interest of the listed building.</p> <p>Turning to LB7165 Carbisdale Castle and Entrance Gates, the Wireline CHVP02 (Figure 10.4 of the EIA Report) shows that the hub and blades of five turbines would be visible with blade tips only of a further two turbines from the east facing rooms of the listed building. The nearest proposed Turbines (Turbine 7) is located 3.8 km to the north east. The proposed Development may also be visible from the castle's entrance court although not on its approach which is from the west (with the proposed Development obscured by the castle). The visual relationship with the Kyle of Sutherland (and railway bridge) the Dornoch First beyond would remain unaffected as would immediate designed views of the castle gardens. The prominence of the castle viewed from the Kyle and A836 would remain unaffected. The views of the hillside where the proposed Development would be visible was probably not an intentional factor in the siting of the castle, but the proposed Development would become prominently visible within views over the Kyle of Sutherland which contributed to its cultural significance. This effect is predicted to result in a minor and Not Significant effect. The proposed Development would preserve the character and special architectural or historic interest of this Listed Building.</p> <p><u>Scheduled Monuments</u></p> <p>With regard to SM1785 Drumliah, chambered cairn, hut circles & clearance cairns, Tulloch, the assessment of the proposed Development advises that it is not located in any parts of the landscape that contribute to the chambered cairn's cultural</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>significance and a view towards the proposed Development from the cairn/settlement where one blade tip would be theoretically visible, if the existing trees were removed, is therefore peripheral and incidental. Theoretical intervisibility between the cairns and its associated settlement would similarly remain unaffected. Furthermore, there is no evident chamber to the cairn to indicate important sightlines in any particular direction. From the lower ground to the south, the proposed Development would be outwith the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV), with no change in these views anticipated.</p> <p>In summary, the proposed Development is predicted to have no effects, which are Not Significant on this scheduled monument and the understanding, appreciation and experience of SM1785 would be adequately retained such that the integrity of setting would not be significantly adversely affected.</p> <p>With regard to SM1784 Druim Baile Fuir, stone circle, cairns, hut circles and enclosure. Both CHVP04 and CHVP05 (Figures 10.6 and 10.7 of the EIA Report) show that the hubs and blades but not bases of all eight turbines would be visible. The closest Turbine is Turbine 4, located 7.9 km to the south east. The assessment considers that the proposed Development is located in a distinct topographical landscape zone to the settlement comprising the scheduled monument at Gruids Wood and likely occupied by a different community and no evidence that it is within part of the landscape that contributes to, or that views in this direction, contribute to the settlement's cultural significance. It concludes that a view towards the proposed Development is therefore peripheral and incidental and that any intervisibility between the various elements of the scheduled monument, including potentially important views would remain to be appreciated. The burial cairns, intended to be clearly visible from within or adjacent to the settlement, would remain prominently visible and unchallenged by the proposed Development. No effect, which is Not Significant is predicted on the cultural significance of SM1784. Furthermore, the understanding, appreciation and experience of SM1784 would be adequately retained such that the integrity of setting would not be significantly adversely affected.</p> <p>With regard to SM1758 Achany, cairn 890m NW of, Chapter 10 of the EIA Report confirms that Photomontage CHVP04 (Figure 10.6 of the EIA Report) is a 'representative view' and CHVP06 (Figure 10.8 of the EIA Report) is a wireline generated from the cairn. CHVP06 shows that the hubs and blades of five turbines would be visible from the scheduled monument, with blade tips only of a further two turbines also theoretically visible. The closest Turbine, Turbine 1, is located 7.1 km to the south east of the scheduled monument. The assessment considers that the proposed Development is located on ground which forms a distinct topographical landscape zone to the settlement at Gruids Wood, which provides the context of cairn SM1758. Therefore, the view towards the proposed Development is peripheral and incidental. The cairn would remain prominently visible and unchallenged by the proposed Development. The assessment concludes there would be No Effect and therefore Not Significant. Furthermore, the understanding, appreciation and experience of SM1758 would be adequately retained such that the integrity of setting would not be significantly adversely affected.</p> <p><u>Non-Designated Heritage Assets</u></p> <p>Of the 39 known non-designated assets, only five were considered to derive cultural significance from their setting, these are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MHG10054 Leathad Breac Hut Circle; Field System; ● MHG10335 Craighton Hut Circle;

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MHG10058 Coirshellach Township; and ● MHG18357 Leathad Breac Farmstead. <p>The assessment in Chapter 10 of the EIA Report recognises that the Turbines and associated infrastructure, predominantly the proposed access tracks would have a high adverse impact on these non-designated assets, however the conclusion of the assessment is due to their low importance, the resulting effect is minor and Not Significant. The assessment also recognises that the proposed Development does not preserve the setting of these non-designated assets, however notes that as these impacts cannot be avoided, that embedded design through the design iteration process has sought to minimise the effects as much as possible and further mitigation in the form of buffer zone and protection of the assets throughout construction and operation.</p> <p>The final non-designated asset of the five considered further in Chapter 10 of the EIA Report is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MHG18358 Coirshellach Farmstead. <p>The assessment confirms that the effect would be Not Significant and that the proposed Development would preserve the setting of the non-designated asset.</p> <p>All other assets within the Outer Study Area (OSA) which comprises the area around the Site up to 2 km from the closest turbines were considered for potential operational effects in Technical Appendix 10.1, Annex 1 of the EIA Report and no significant effects of the additional assets were considered likely.</p> <p>As there are no Significant effects predicted during the operational phase of the development, no additional mitigation is proposed beyond the mitigation embedded into the design of the proposed Development which sought to minimise effects on the historic environment.</p> <p>The proposed Development has considered the impacts on the historic environment and therefore meets the requirement of criterion vii).</p>
<p><i>viii. effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk;</i></p>	<p>A full assessment of the proposed Development in relation to Geology, Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Peat during the construction and operational phases is contained in Chapter 9 of the EIAR. The design iteration process of the proposed Development was informed by a detailed programme of peat depth and condition surveying, and the S.36 Application is accompanied by a Peat Slide Risk Assessment ('PSRA') (Technical Appendix 9.1 of the EIA Report) and Peat Management Plan (Technical Appendix 9.2 of the EIA Report) which demonstrate the avoidance and safeguarding of deep peat and peat resources.</p> <p>Construction</p> <p>One private water supply (PWS) was identified on Site, which had the potential for interaction with the proposed Development. The assessment confirms that there is no direct risk from the proposed Development, however recommends protection via</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>mitigation proposed in paragraph 9.7.42 of the EIA Report including monitoring and installation of additional sediment management protections and /or extra lines of silt fencing. Following mitigation the assessment confirms the residual effect on this PWS is minor and Not Significant. A further twelve PWS within 2 km of Site had no hydrological linkage with the proposed Development.</p> <p>Of the five designation sites identified in Chapter 9 of the EIA Report within 5 km of the Site, four designations associated with geology, hydrology, and peat were considered to have potential linkages to the proposed Development including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SSSI; ● River Oykel SAC (including the Kyle of Sutherland); ● Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC; and ● Kyle of Sutherland Marshes SSSI. <p>These designation sites were assessed within Chapter 9 of the EIAR Report. The assessment found that with the proposed mitigation, which included precautions during construction to prevent contaminating materials to enter the watercourses within the Site and supervision by an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW), that the effects would be negligible and Not Significant.</p> <p>The Site is not at risk of flooding, however the need to prevent flood risk downstream was also considered. Drainage proposals include for the embedded mitigation outlined in paragraph 9.7.51 of the EIA Report with residual effects considered to be negligible and Not Significant for both receptors and the increase of flood risk.</p> <p>Physical changes brought about by excavation work can interrupt shallow and deeper groundwater. Mitigation as outlined in paragraph 9.5.59 of the EIA Report relating to laying cable trenches ensures that any residential effects on groundwater would be negligible and Not Significant.</p> <p>With regard to soil erosion and compaction, detailed mitigation which would be included in the CEMP (based upon Technical Appendix 2.1 Outline CEMP) and which is detailed in paragraphs 9.7.62 – 9.7.70 of the EIA Report, which once implemented is considered to result in a minor and Not Significant effect on Soil erosion and compaction.</p> <p>The PSRA confirms that the majority of the Site has a negligible or low risk of natural or induced peat landslide. The receptors for peat landslide hazard are the peat soil, peatland habitat, the water environment including surface water and groundwater, proposed Development infrastructure and construction personnel. Six areas were identified as potentially having a moderate risk. Mitigation measures have been recommended to control peat landslide hazard. For these areas, peat landslide hazard can be controlled by use of good construction practices and micro-siting. With mitigation measures in place, as described in Technical Appendix 9.1 of the EIA Report the residual effect is considered to be minor and Not Significant.</p> <p>Potentially GWDTE on Site were assessed on a case-by-case basis to determine their level of groundwater-dependency and potential impacts from the proposed Development. Location-specific mitigation measures are provided to manage potential impacts arising from construction activities where it has not been possible to avoid these areas reducing residual effects to Not Significant.</p> <p>Operation</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>No additional changes to overland drainage and surface water flows are predicted and a monitoring and maintenance programme is proposed during operation. Water contamination during maintenance and repair would be undertaken using best practice and monitoring would assist in ensuring the drainage network remained fully operational. The potential for water contamination from fuel, oil or foul drainage, is lower than during construction and a pollution prevention plan and spillage and emergency procedures would remain during the operational period. Monitoring and maintenance would be in place to prevent increased flood risk during operation. Maintenance may include some limited excavation of materials. No soil stripping or stockpiling is proposed during the operational phase. Limited maintenance vehicles would use the Site during the operational phase limiting the potential for soil compaction. There are no changes to the proposed infrastructure that would impact peat instability. Taking all the above into account, most of the effects would be negligible, or at highest minor effects which are Not Significant.</p> <p>Mitigation measures have been identified for all potential impacts, either through the design process or in accordance with good practice guidance. It has been shown, as a consequence of the proposed Development design and embedded mitigation, that No Significant impacts on geology, hydrogeology, hydrology and peat would arise as a result of the proposed Development. Effects on the water environment are fully addressed as required by criterion viii.</p>
<i>ix. biodiversity including impacts on birds;</i>	<p>Ecology</p> <p>Chapter 8 of the EIA Report provides the detailed assessment of the proposed Development on ecological receptors. Paragraphs 8.116 to 8.123 of the EIA Report confirms the embedded and additional mitigation proposed, including embedded design mitigation, appointing an ECoW, Species Protection Plan, micro-siting based outwith ecological buffers, CEMP (as outlined in Technical Appendix 2.1 Outline CEMP) and feathering of turbine blades. Based on this mitigation, no residual adverse Significant effects are predicted on ecological receptors. However, the proposed mitigation and enhancement proposed within the Biodiversity Enhancement and Management Plan (BEMP), as detailed below would secure moderate Significant long-term beneficial effects.</p> <p>Ornithology</p> <p>Chapter 7 of the EIA Report provides the detailed assessment of ornithological receptors where no Significant effects are predicted. In summary it confirms that Site has no statutory designations for nature conservation but has potential connectivity with the Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors and Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet Special Protection Area (SPAs). The assessment confirms that no adverse effects are predicted on these SPAs.</p> <p>The baseline studies established that the Site and adjacent habitats are used by foraging and breeding raptors (notably hen harrier and red kite), black grouse and upland breeding waders. Red-throated and black-throated diver are also known to breed in the surrounding local area. However, it notes that the Site and immediate surrounding area are not identified as being important for migratory waterfowl and the upland open moorland habitats are unsuitable for such species.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>With the adoption of identified mitigation, including the appointment of an ECoW and the implementation of a Bird Disturbance Management Plan (BDMP) during construction and where relevant during operation including pre-construction surveys, this will protect and avoid disturbance to sensitive breeding birds, including hen harrier and lekking black grouse.</p> <p>The BEMP, as detailed below will secure wider biodiversity enhancement for ornithology, including areas away from operational infrastructure where habitat enhancement to the benefit of black grouse, breeding waders and raptors will be undertaken.</p> <p>BEMP</p> <p>As detailed in Paragraph 5.7.1 the proposed Development would secure significant biodiversity enhancement on two units as part of the proposed Development's Outline BEMP (OBEMP), as detailed in Technical Appendix 8.6 of the EIA Report and as summarised below. The OBEMP is provided in Technical Appendix 8.6 and the final BEMP could be secured through an appropriately worded planning condition.</p> <p>The OBEMP is based on two main land parcels or areas for each respective habitat management and biodiversity enhancement proposal. OBEMP Unit A, which covers 629.76 ha and the majority of the application boundary (see Figure 8.11 of the EIA Report) includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Removal of self-seeded non-native conifers to enhance the existing and degraded bog and heathland habitat. These high density invading and encroaching conifers are currently adversely affecting habitat extent and quality. ● Opportunities to enhance the peatland/heathland further will be explored where there is scope to do so, for example if there are drains suitable for blocking, peat erosion restoration, or the creation of depressions/scrapes to increase habitat diversity for the benefit of breeding waders and black grouse. ● The improvement of these habitats will also be of benefit to local flora and fauna, including the upland bird assemblage. ● Moorland and peatland restoration and enhancement measures that will be applied to priority peatland habitats within Unit A cover up to approximately 308.3 ha. These same measures will also benefit up to a further 181.3 ha of wet heath and 20.7 ha of dry heath habitats. <p>Using NatureScot guidance, the compensation and enhancement requirements for priority peatland at the proposed Development were identified as being in the region of 168.63 ha. Therefore, the measures represent a significant enhancement over and above the requirements for mitigation and enhancement.</p> <p>Unit B – Riparian Corridor Creation/Enhancement relates to a further unit of 4.34 ha which would seek, where possible, to achieve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create and maintain an enhanced riparian corridor, supporting semi-natural appearing broadleaved planting.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● planting and establishment of a range of small-seeding broadleaved species in non-uniform patterns and densities within suitable habitats. ● creating structure and new breeding, shelter and foraging habitats for a range of species, from terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates to birds, bats and fish. Secondary benefits of woodland creation, such as natural flood attenuation, shade, carbon sequestration and helping to mitigate the effects of climate change. <p>As such, the BEMP is expected to provide significant beneficial effects associated with the proposed Development in the long term, particularly when contrasted with a future baseline.</p> <p>The proposed Development has addressed the impact on biodiversity including birds, in accordance with criterion ix).</p>
<i>x. impacts on trees, woods and forests;</i>	<p>There are no significant forestry areas within the Application Site. Notwithstanding this, small areas of tree cover can be found along watercourses. The lack of significant forestry on Site results in negligible predicted GHG emissions from limited forestry felling.</p> <p>The OBEMP provides details of the habitat management and enhancements which details the intention to address the widespread presence of high density invading and encroaching self-seeded non-native conifers and in unit B establishment of a range of small seeding broadleaved species in suitable locations, densities and habitats. These measures secure significant biodiversity net improvement on the Site.</p> <p>With regard to ancient woodland, only a small section overlaps the Site, but is avoided by the proposed Development and associated infrastructure.</p> <p>It is considered the requirement to address criterion x) has been addressed.</p>
<i>xi. proposals for the decommissioning of developments, including ancillary infrastructure, and site restoration;</i>	<p>The proposed Development is expected to operate for 30 years, after which it will be decommissioned, and its components dismantled, removed and recycled where possible. Any alternatives to this process would require separate approval from the ECU, and so is not considered within this EIA Report.</p> <p>During the decommissioning phase, the turbines, BESS, and associated infrastructure will be dismantled and removed, including any above-ground electrical equipment. This decommissioning process will be managed by the Applicant or any future owners of the wind farm. Underground cables will remain in place, while foundations will be removed to a depth of 0.5 m below ground level to minimise environmental impact. Before decommissioning the Site, a method statement will be prepared and approved by the Council, following any relevant guidance available at that time.</p> <p>Turbine foundations - topsoil, peat and other material excavated for the foundations would be removed and stored to for use in Site reinstatement.</p> <p>Finally, the project will conclude with Site reinstatement activities to restore the area post-construction.</p> <p>The proposed Development therefore addresses the requirement to consider decommissioning as required by xi).</p>
<i>xii. the quality of site restoration plans including the</i>	<p>The Applicant has committed to undertake appropriate Site restorations and is agreeable to a suitable condition or legal agreement if necessary to agree the submission of Site restoration plans and securing appropriate guarantees or financial bond for decommissioning.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
<p><i>measures in place to safeguard or guarantee availability of finances to effectively implement those plans; and</i></p>	<p>The proposed Development has therefore addressed the requirement to consider Site restoration plans and measure to guarantee availability of finances to implement plans, as required by criterion xii).</p>
<p><i>xiii. cumulative impacts.</i></p>	<p>Each of the technical chapters have considered cumulative impacts, as summarised below:</p> <p>LVIA</p> <p>Chapter 6 Landscape and Visual of the EIA Report provides a detailed cumulative assessment, which concludes in paragraphs 6.10.19 to 6.10.21. It confirms that it is acknowledged that where more than one wind farm is visible at any given location in the landscape, there will be greater overall or cumulative effects on landscape character and visual amenity than if just one wind farm was visible. Similarly, the more wind farms constructed in any given landscape, the greater the magnitude of overall (or combines) change to the landscape character or views.</p> <p>When the other consented wind farms are considered to already form part of the landscape, it was assessed that there would be a reduction in the extent of significant landscape character effects to LCT135 Rounded Hills – Caithness and Southerland (South of Strath Fleet Unit) introduced from the proposed Development from approximately 4.4km to the north west and west and 1.8km to the south to approximately 1.5km to the north and 2km to the north east, 2.3km to the east and 5km to the south east, 4.4km to the north west and west and 1.8km to the south (associated with Scenario 2).</p> <p>When each of the tother consented, in-planning and scoping wind farms were considered to already form part of the baseline landscape and the proposed development would not introduce a cumulative visual effect. In many cases there would be no change or a reduction in the effects identified I the main assessment, nor would then introduce additional significant sequential effects to any of the routes.</p> <p>Ornithology</p> <p>Based on the conclusions of the assessment presented in Chapter 7, Section 7.5, no significant effects are predicted and the proposed Development will also include BEMP to provide long-term positive habitat measures development with due cognisance of the other wind farms. As the potential to materially contribute to significant effect at a regional level in combination with other wind farms was considered very unlikely and scoped out of further assessment.</p> <p>At a local level consideration has been given to the joint access with the Garvary Wind Farm and relevant overhead lines development. The proposed Development, alongside Garvary may prolong effects on receptors but with the adopted mitigation measures, is not considered to give rise to cumulative interactions between developments. For the overhead line, assuming the implementation of mitigation as outlined for the proposed Development and for the OHL, in accordance with Condition 13 of the latter project’s Deemed Planning Permission, the potential for significant cumulative risks with the proposed Development are very unlikely and concluded as Non-significant.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>Ecology</p> <p>Chapter 8 of the EIA Report confirms it is unlikely that any significant cumulative effects at a local or regional level will arise as a consequence of the proposed Development adding to habitat loss associated with other projects. Furthermore, based on the commitment of the Applicant to implement the BEMP over the operational phase of the proposed Development, as well as similar requirements for other wind farm projects, the long-term cumulative effect significance is considered likely to be Negligible-Minor beneficial and Not Significant.</p> <p>Geology, Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Peat</p> <p>Chapter 9 of the EIA Report confirms that effects relating to geology and soils are very localised. As a result, there are no cumulative effects relating to geology and soils from this development as effects do not transmit over any noticeable distance. Effects on hydrogeology are confined to shallow groundwater found within the same hydrological catchments as the proposed Development. There will be some cumulative effects arising from works within the An Uidh and River Shin catchments, but effects on groundwater are expected to be minor as long as good construction practice is followed for both developments (including Garvary alongside the proposed Development). Use of a shared access would help to minimise cumulative effects. The overall cumulative effects are predicted to be minor, temporary and Not Significant.</p> <p>With regard to surface watercourses and designated Sites. It is assumed that construction of Garvary would be completed before construction commenced at the proposed Development. Cumulative effects are most likely to affect the hydrological regime and hydraulically connected designated sites during the construction phase of development when activity on Site is highest, therefore cumulative effects would be reduced. It is assumed that established best practice construction methods would be employed and on this basis predicts minor and Not Significant cumulative impacts on surface watercourses and designated sites.</p> <p>Cultural Heritage</p> <p>Chapter 10 of the EIA Report confirms that there is no potential for cumulative construction effects on any known or unknown and previously unrecorded cultural heritage assets. Operational impacts on the cultural significance of heritage assets in the study area is considered, but confirms no cumulative effects are identified over and above those identified for the proposed Development on its own.</p> <p>Climate Change</p> <p>Chapter 11 confirms that all Greenhouse Gas emissions are inherently cumulative on the same receptor, the Global Climate. Renewable energy developments considered together have a net beneficial effect, however as the receptor is not geographically constrained, it is not appropriate to undertake a conventional cumulative effects assessment.</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>Transport and Access</p> <p>Chapter 12 provides a detailed cumulative assessment of all relevant developments, it confirms that for the construction phase, both the total traffic and HGV traffic flows assessment results indicate an increase on all links within the study area, including large increases on the links previously taken forward for assessment of effect significance, namely the A836, A839 and A949. Sections of the A9 would also experience a temporary significant increase in HGV traffic. However, it notes that the construction period is transitory and all impacts are short lived and temporary. The inclusion of additional traffic flows in the baseline will dilute the potential impact that the Proposed Development will have. The approach taken is therefore considered to be a suitably robust assessment. Should the construction of committed developments take place at the same time as the Proposed Development, it would be mitigated through the use of an overarching Traffic Management Plan (TMP) for all of the sites and by introducing a phased delivery plan which would be agreed with the local roads departments and Police Scotland.</p> <p>Noise</p> <p>Chapter 13 of the EIA Report provides a detailed assessment of cumulative noise effects. In summary the findings confirm:</p> <p><i>Construction</i></p> <p>Taking account of built and consented wind farms, there is the potential for construction to occur at a similar time to Lairg II, Garvary or Acheilidh, or other developments. However, due to the remote nature of the area and the large separation distances involved, no cumulative construction noise effects are predicted. Construction vehicles could result in short-term increases in noise levels however, due to the limited increase and duration, is predicted to be Not Significant.</p> <p><i>Operation</i></p> <p>Again, taking account of built and consented wind farms, as a worst-case assumption, predictions are undertaken for the combined downwind noise levels for all identified cumulative wind farm developments. The highest noise levels are predicted at Craigton, which is financially involved in the proposed Development and is predicted to experience cumulative noise levels of up to 37.4 dB (with an applicable noise limit lower limiting value of 45 dB). Cumulative noise levels at all other locations are below the noise limits in Table 13.18 for all locations at all wind speeds, which confirms no significant cumulative operational noise effects.</p> <p>A future scenario also considered existing, consented and 'in planning' developments, in this circumstance noise levels are predicted to exceed the daytime noise limits at R3 Ausdale for standardised wind speeds of 6 to 8 ms⁻¹ by a margin of up to 0.7 dB, and at R4 Reidbreac by a margin of up to 0.6 dB in the scenario where all existing, consented and in planning developments are consented and operating, in addition to the proposed Development. A potential 'Significant' effect is indicated for this scenario. All night-time noise limits are predicted to be met.</p> <p>The assessment in Chapter 13 of the EIA Report notes that the margin by which the noise limit may be exceeded at R3 and R4 is small. Where there is the potential for this to occur, it would be infrequent, occurring only under downwind conditions, i.e. wind blowing from the north, which is uncommon in the UK (Met Office, 2023). In practice, the small margin of exceedance is likely to result in effects which are 'Not Significant' and further mitigation is not recommended. In the event that Garvary and Acheilidh are consented, a higher cumulative noise limit should therefore be considered appropriate, based on the</p>

Impact	How the impact has been addressed
	<p>recommendations of ETSU R 97, to adopt of higher noise limits in terms of cumulative noise of 5 dB above background noise levels or 37 dB, whichever is greater.</p> <p>Shadow Flicker</p> <p>Chapter 14 of the EIA Report confirms that cumulative shadow flicker has been considered. Garvary has the closest turbines to the proposed Development, but for the receptors identified for the proposed Development, the Garvary turbines are well beyond the area within which shadow flicker would occur. Similarly for those developments in scoping, the turbines for the proposed Inveroykel development are well beyond the area in which shadow flicker would occur.</p> <p>No other cumulative effects are identified by the EIA Report.</p> <p>The proposed Development has addressed the requirement to consider cumulative effects as required by criterion xiii).</p>

Balancing the impacts with contribution to renewable energy and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets

17. Part e) of Policy 11 continues by stating: “that in considering these impacts, significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.”
18. Significant weight is to be afforded to the contribution of the proposed Development to GHG emissions reduction targets and renewable energy target. The proposed Development is predicted to have a total GHG saving of 1,485,168 tCO₂e over a modelled 30-year operational lifetime, against a fossil fuel mix electricity generation and will generate approximately 112.2GWh of electricity annually which is enough to power the equivalent of 34,661 homes.

Assessment against other relevant NPF4 policies

19. **Table 1.2** provides the assessment against the other relevant NPF4 policies.

Table 1.2 Assessment against Relevant NPF4 Policies

Policy	Assessment
<p>Policy 1 Tackling the Climate and Nature Crisis</p>	<p>Climate – Contributions to greenhouse gas emissions reduction: The proposed Development is predicted to have a total GHG saving of 1,485,168 tCO₂e over a modelled 30-year operational lifetime, against a fossil fuel mix electricity generation, and will generate approximately 112.2 GWh of electricity annually which is enough to power the equivalent of 34,661² homes.</p> <p>Nature - Compensation and additional enhancement via the implementation of a BEMP which includes bog and upland heathland restoration/ enhancement as outlined in Table 8.1, under criterion ix) clearly demonstrates the significant long-term enhancements for biodiversity to address the nature crisis.</p> <p>Therefore, it is considered that the proposed Development would meet the requirements of Policy 1 and significant weight should be afforded to the proposed Development’s contribution to tackling the climate and nature crises.</p>
<p>Policy 3 Biodiversity</p>	<p>National scale development is required to demonstrate that the proposal will conserve, resort and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks, including future management. This is achieved by the proposed Development.</p> <p>The design of the proposed Development was subject to a thorough environmental constraints and consultation consultation-led iteration process. This process was aimed at optimising a renewable energy development that minimised environmental impacts, in accordance with Schedule 9, paragraph 3(1) of the Electricity Act 1989. Chapter 7 Ornithology and Chapter 8: Ecology of the EIA Report concludes that no significant residual effects are predicted to occur upon any important ornithological or ecological species, habitat or feature as a result of the proposed Development.</p> <p>Compensation and enhancement measures, such as blanket bog and wet heath restoration and enhancement and positive habitat management for bird species and wider biodiversity, are proposed for the operational phase as part of the proposed Development’s OBEMP, as detailed in Technical Appendix 8.6 of the EIA Report and outlined below. The OBEMP is expected to provide significant beneficial effects (as summarised in Table 1.1).</p> <p>As such, the BEMP is expected to provide significant beneficial effects associated with the proposed Development in the long term, particularly when contrasted with a future baseline, which accords with and gains positive support from meeting the requirements of Policy 3.</p>

² This figure is based on 8 turbines with an installed capacity of 36 MW at a site derived capacity factor of 35.6% and assuming 3,239 is the average UK household electricity consumption in kW hours (based on most recent statistics from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Jan 2024 (DESNZ)).

Policy	Assessment
Policy 4 Natural Places	<p>Due to the potential for the proposed Development to impact on a National Scenic Area, Policy 11 requires assessment under Policy 4 and in particular Policy 4c). NPF4 Policy 4c) states that “<i>Development proposals that will affect a National Park, National Scenic Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest or a National Nature Reserve will only be supported where:</i></p> <p><i>i. The objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the areas will not be compromised; or</i></p> <p><i>ii. Any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance.”</i></p> <p>A full assessment of the closest NSAs is undertaken in Chapter 6 of the EIA Report. This confirms that the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area (NSA) is located approximately 4.8 km to the south of the proposed Development (as shown on Figures 6.10 and 6.11 of the EIA Report) along with other landscape designations. The Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the Dornoch Firth NSA are defined as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “The contrast between the enclosed west and the expansive east; ● Inhabited surrounds within a wilder backdrop of hills and moors; ● A wide diversity of woodland cover; ● A rich variety of alluvial lands, dunes and links; ● The ever-changing firth; ● The tranquillity of an undeveloped coastline; and ● Migdale, a microcosm of the wider Dornoch Firth.” <p>Effects on the Dornoch Firth NSA are assessed in the EIA Report, both in Technical Appendix 6.3 and subsequently in the Assessment of Effects on the Special Landscape Qualities (AESLQ) of the Dornoch Firth NSA in Technical Appendix 6.7. In the latter, focus is given to the three SLQs identified by Nature Scot as requiring detailed assessments at Scoping, as the SLQ’s which had the potential for significant effects. These three SLQ’s are shown in bold in the bullet point list above and the conclusion and summary of findings undernoted.</p> <p><i>The contrast between the enclosed west and the expansive east</i></p>

Policy	Assessment
	<p>The potential change to the SLQ would result from the introduction of the turbines. Other component elements such as tracks, substation and BESS would be screened by intervening landform ensuring no views. Due to the turbine height, there are limited option for mitigation, but design mitigation has been included, such as limiting the lateral extent of the scheme, avoiding location on higher ground, maximising the distance to the NSA and material/colour of turbines.</p> <p>Theoretical visibility of the proposed Development is mainly concentrated in the enclosed western part of the NSA, whereas in the more expansive eastern part, theoretical visibility commences near Dornoch Sands and continues towards its eastern end, where theoretical visibility from within the NSA would be mostly limited to blade tips only and very limited theoretical visibility of turbine hubs. The majority of the central section would experience no theoretical visibility of either blad tips or hubs from the A9 Dornoch Bridge which is not as where <i>“the contrast east and west are brought to the fore”</i>. The proposed Development would not affect the contrast between the two parts of the NSA, introducing a view low magnitude of change, considered on its own and cumulatively with other schemes.</p> <p>The assessment concludes that the effect of this SLQ would be minor and Not Significant, both on its own and cumulatively.</p> <p><i>Inhabited surrounds within a wilder backdrop of hills and moors</i></p> <p>The potential change to the SLQ would result from the introduction of the Turbines. Other component would be screened by intervening landform ensuring no views from the NSA. Due to the turbine height, there are limited option for mitigation, but design mitigation has been included, such as limiting the lateral extent of the scheme, avoiding location on higher ground, maximising the distance to the NSA and material/colour of turbines.</p> <p>The proposed Development lies beyond the hills that frame northern edge of the NSA, lying within the moorland hills beyond. The assessment confirms that in views across the NSA from the south, in particular from Viewpoint 7 and the Struie Viewpoint (Viewpoint 10) where the Firth and its inhabited surrounds are seen against the wilder backdrop of hills and moors. From these locations, it is apparent that the proposed Development would be set beyond these hills. The effect is moderated by the distance to the NAS, compact size of the proposed Development, small proportion of the view it occupies, the scale of the receiving landscape and simple form, location away from the <i>“inhabited surrounds”</i>, it’s location <i>“beyond the backdrop of hills and moors”</i>, screening, and location where energy generation and infrastructure is already associated which would introduce a change of low magnitude on its own and low medium cumulatively. This would result in effects on the SLQ of minor moderate on its own and moderate cumulatively, but neither Significant.</p> <p><i>The tranquillity of an undeveloped coastline</i></p> <p>The potential change to the SLQ would result from the introduction of the turbines. Other component would be screened by intervening landform ensuring no views from the NSA. Due to the turbine height, there are limited option for mitigation, but design mitigation has been included, such as limiting the lateral extent of the scheme, avoiding location on higher ground, maximising the distance to the NSA and material/colour of turbines.</p>

Policy	Assessment
	<p>When travelling along the A836 or the Far North Railway Line there are relatively few locations where there would be theoretical visibility identified. The assessment notes that the proposed Development would be set beyond and would be partially screened by the hills to the north of the NSA and that views of large metal buildings of The HUB, buildings within Bonar Bridge, telecommunication masts and overhead pylons that across the hills to the north of the NSA, influence the perception of “<i>The tranquillity of an undeveloped coastline</i>”. Furthermore, the position of the proposed Development beyond the hills to the north of the NSA means that it does not impinge on the rural character perceived when travelling along these routes to the south NSA. Figure 6.12 of the EIA Report demonstrates there would be no theoretical visibility from the A9 and the Dornoch Firth Bridge that crosses through the eastern part of the NSA. The proposed Development would therefore introduce a very low magnitude of change on the SLQ when considered on its own and low cumulatively, both resulting in a Not Significant effect.</p> <p>Paragraph 6.1.9 of Technical Appendix 6.7 of the EIA Report confirms that the assessment has not identified any significant effect on the three SLQ’s identified by NatureScot for assessment, and therefore it is not considered that the overall integrity of the NSA would be compromised.</p> <p>The Assynt-Coigach NSA is located over 30 km to the north west of the proposed Development. Its SLQs are considered in the assessment with a summary concluding the assessment provided in paragraph 6.6.8 of the EIA Report, that at over 30 km to the north-west of the proposed Development significant effects are considered unlikely given the intervening distance.</p> <p>The proposed Development is considered to demonstrate compliance with Policy 4.</p>
Policy 5 Soils	<p>Part c) of this Policy allows renewable energy development on peatland, carbon rich soils and priority peatland, subject to compliance with other parts of the Policy. The assessment focuses on part d) which is the most relevant aspect of the Policy as it relates to the proposed Development. The effect on soils has been addressed under Table 8.1 in criterion viii). In terms of complying with Policy 5 d), a detailed programme of peat depth and condition surveying has been completed and the results used to inform the Site design. A Peat Slide Risk Assessment (PSRA) and an Outline Peat Management Plan (Technical Appendix 9.2 of the EIA Report) have been produced for the proposed Development, which show that areas of deep peat can be avoided and peat resources can be safeguarded. Any excavated peat would be considered for reuse on Site or nearby for peatland restoration.</p> <p>Surveys have been undertaken which have shown the depth, condition and stability of carbon rich soils on the Site. Chapter 9 of the EIA Report has assessed the potential impact on peat instability. With appropriate design constraints and mitigation measures in place, as described in Technical Appendix 9.1, the magnitude of effect is considered to be ‘Slight’ and Not Significant.</p> <p>Chapter 11 Other Issues of the EIA Report calculates the likely net effects of the proposed Development on climate emissions and loss of carbon. The emissions related from the manufacture, construction and decommissioning activities, including the loss of peat and forestry are predicted to be offset 0.6 years after the proposed Development becomes operational against a fossil fuel mix of electricity. The overall impact is considered to be a significant positive effect and will contribute to long term climate change mitigation.</p>

Policy	Assessment
	It has been demonstrated the proposed Development meets the requirements of Policy 5.
Policy 6 Forestry, Woodland and Trees	<p>The impact on forestry, woodland and trees has been addressed in Table 8.1 under criterion x). There are no significant forestry areas within the Application Site. In accordance with Policy 6 the BEMP would secure improvement to woodland and tree cover, removing invasive species and planting broadleaf alternatives in suitable locations according with the requirements of c). The proposed Development will not result in the loss or impact on the woodlands as identified in b).</p> <p>The proposed Development is considered to meet the policy requirements of Policy 6.</p>
Policy 7 Historic Assets and Places	<p>The assessment in Table 8.1 vii), provides a summary of the detailed assessment undertaken in Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage of the EIA Report on the potential impact on historic assets.</p> <p>The assessment included detailed assessment as to whether the proposed Development accorded with the requirements of Policy 7 in all cases the proposed Development accords with Policy 7 requirements to protect designated assets. With regard to non-designated assets, the Policy notes that assets, places and their setting should be protected and preserved in situ wherever feasible. Of the 39 known non-designated assets, only five were considered to derive cultural significance from their setting, these are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MHG10054 Leathad Breac Hut Circle; Field System; ● MHG10335 Craigton Hut Circle; ● MHG10058 Coirshellach Township; and ● MHG18357 Leathad Breac Farmstead. <p>The assessment in Chapter 10 of the EIA Report recognises that the proposed Development does not preserve the setting of these non-designated assets, however notes that as these impacts cannot be avoided, that embedded design through the design iteration process has sought to minimise the effects as much as possible and has included a buffers zone and will seek additional mitigation to ensure protection of the assets throughout construction and operation. Whilst the setting cannot be preserved the policy (o) recognises that this may not always be feasible and measures are being put in place to mitigate the effects as far as possible. Appropriate measures are also in place regarding potential non-designated buried archaeology in accordance with Policy 7.</p> <p>The Proposed Development is considered to comply with the requirements of Policy 7.</p>

HwLDP

20. The majority of the requirements from policies relevant to the proposed Development in the LDP have been addressed under the assessment of NPF4. **Table 1.3** provides an assessment against the HwLDP applicable policies, as detailed in **Chapter 7 of the**

Planning Statement, and notes where the assessment has already been undertaken as part of the assessment against NPF4 and therefore a further detailed assessment is not required. Where there is an incompatibility with NPF4, NPF4 will prevail as the most recently adopted document. Where the HwLDP is considered to be compatible, the table considers whether there are additional criteria that needs to be assessed. The Policy requirements are as set out in **Chapter 7 of the Planning Statement**.

Table 1.3 Assessment against relevant HwLDP Policies

Policy	Is LDP Compatible with NPF4	Assessment
Policy 28 - Sustainable Design	Compatible except where it states significant effects will not comply with the LDP and where no alternatives exist.	<p>The requirements of Policy 28 are met through the production of an EIA Report, Design and Access Statement and Socio-Economics Report. Together these shown that full consideration has been given to all considerations outlined in the Policy.</p> <p>As noted the policy is not compliant with NPF4 where it requires no alternatives to be available where significant effects are present of that the proposed Development does not comply with the Policy. Policy 11 sets out prevailing policy regarding the key considerations and recognises that in considering effects, significant weight should be given to renewable energy and greenhouse gas emissions targets.</p> <p>The proposed Development is considered to comply with all compatible elements of the policy and defers to NPF4 regarding the tests where significant effects are predicted.</p>
Policy 30 - Physical Constraints	Compatible	The proposed Development has given careful consideration through the EIA process to physical constraints and put in place appropriate mitigation to address constraints.
Policy 31 - Developer Contributions	Compatible	The proposed Development is not considered to give rise to a need for new public services or infrastructure.
Policy 51 - Trees and Development	Compatible	The requirements of this Policy have been considered under Table 8.1 under criterion x) and in Table 8.2 under Policy 6. No further consideration is required. The proposed Development is considered to comply with this Policy.

Policy	Is LDP Compatible with NPF4	Assessment
Policy 55 - Peat and Soils	Compatible	The proposed Development is considered to be compliant with this policy without further assessment, as that has been carried out in Table 8.1 under criterion viii) and Table 8.2 under Policy 5.
Policy 57 - Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage	Partially incompatible as relating to Wild Land areas and the policy test for 1. which requires no unacceptable impacts, whereas NPF4 will consider this in the balance giving significant weight to renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas reduction targets and no such balance exists within this policy. For 2 with regard to the test which confirms effects can be outweighed by social or economic benefits, but not of environmental benefits as recognised in NPF4. Additionally 2 requires such development to support fragile communities which is not a policy test required by NPF4. Criteria 3 is not considered to be relevant to the proposed Development.	<p>NPF4 policy is considered to prevail in the minor areas of identified incompatibility. However, not significant detrimental effects are predicted for natural or built heritage as previously assessed under Table 8.1 in under criteria ix) and vii) and Table 8.2 under Policies 3, 5 and 7.</p> <p>Furthermore, the proposed Development will secure national level environmental benefits and secure significant biodiversity enhancements over and above current NatureScot recommendations.</p> <p>The Site is not located in a Wild Land Area. NPF4 prevails in this regard and does not require a buffer around Wild Land areas, no further consideration on Wild Land is required.</p> <p>Accordingly, the proposed Development is considered to comply with Policy 57.</p>
Policy 58 - Protected Species/Policy 59 Other Important Species/Policy 60 Other Important Habitats and Article 10 Features.	Materially compatible except for policy test for Policy 58, which does not include planning balance to give significant weight to renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas reduction targets, as required by NPF4.	<p>The proposed Development would not give rise to significant adverse effects on protected or other important species as assessed previously under Table 8.1 under criterion ix) and Table 8.2 under Policy 3.</p> <p>The proposed Development accords with the requirements of Policies 58, 59 and 60, and through BEMP measures will secure significant biodiversity improvement to the benefit of a wide range of habitats and species.</p>
Policy 61 – Landscape	Compatible	The proposed Development has fully considered landscape considerations and taken into account relevant supplementary guidance. Detailed assessment of landscape for renewable energy is considered with regard to the HwLDP under Policy 67

Policy	Is LDP Compatible with NPF4	Assessment
		which should be referred to in terms of assessments already undertaken against NPF4.
Policy 63 - Water Environment / Policy 64 Flood Risk	Compatible	The proposed Development has fully considered the water environment and flood risk within Table 8.1 under criterion viii), which demonstrates that the requirements of Policies 63 and 64 are met.
Policy 67 - Renewable Energy Developments	Materially compatible with the exception of the emphasis in NPF4 of balancing the effects and giving significant weight to the contribution towards greenhouse gas reduction and renewable energy generation targets and recognition that some developments will result in significant effects, particularly on the landscape which if localised will generally be acceptable. Furthermore, this Policy is linked to the Onshore Wind Supplementary Guidance (OWESG), compliant aspects can be read alongside NPF4, however the areas of search are no longer relevant.	<p>As a section 36 application, the Development Plan does not have primacy, but it is considered to be a relevant consideration. Taking this and the Chief Planners' letter of 8 February 2023 into consideration (as outlined in paragraph 7.2.2 and 7.2.3) in the event of any incompatibility between a provision of NPF4 and a provision of an LDP, whichever of them is later in date is to prevail (TCPSEA, Section 24 (3)). Provisions that are contradictory or in conflict would be likely to be considered incompatible.</p> <p>This policy is materially compatible with NPF4 and sets out a range of criteria which must be taken into consideration, each of the criteria has been assessed under Table 8.1 above (with the exception of tourism), such that it is considered that the proposed Development accords with Policy 67. In addressing Policy 67, the landscape and visual effects from the proposed Development are localised and would be expected (and indeed are recognised by NPF4) and would have no significant detrimental impact overall. Furthermore the proposed Development has confirmed the positive aspects of its development, including maximising socio-economic benefits, securing net biodiversity gain and demonstrating its significant and national level contribution to renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas reduction targets. With regard to tourism, this is not listed as a consideration in NPF4, which as the latest published document should prevail. Notwithstanding this, tourism insofar as it relates to receptor groups for any visual effects and consideration under socio-economic effects has fully considered. There are no effects which would give rise to a consideration that taking account the full list of 11 factors that</p>

Policy	Is LDP Compatible with NPF4	Assessment
		<p>the proposed Development would be judged significantly detrimental overall, which is the policy test.</p> <p>With regard to any partial incompatibility between NPF4 and the HwLDP, The Meall Buidhe decision is relevant to consider (DPEA reference PPA-270-2277) which in paragraph 76 advises that <i>“I find some inconsistency overall between the Local Development Plan approach and the relevant balance of considerations now applied through NPF4. The later adopted document places emphasis on the significant weight to be placed on the contribution to renewable energy targets. It also states that landscape and visual impacts of a localised scale will generally be acceptable subject to appropriate design mitigation. The Act advises that in the event of any incompatibility between the provision of National Planning Policy Framework 4 and the provision of an LDP, the later in date is to prevail. In that context I rely on my conclusions above in relation to the topic specific National Planning Framework 4 Policy 11.”</i></p>
Policy 69 - Electricity Transmission Infrastructure	Compatible.	A separate application will be made for connection of the proposed Development to the grid, these matters are outwith the control of the Applicant. The EIA Report considers the location of the proposed on-site cables and has been addressed within the relevant technical chapters, no Significant effects are predicted in this regard, ensuring compliance with Policy 69.
Policy 72 – Pollution	Compatible.	The proposed Development has been subject to a full EIA which has considered the requirements for pollution prevent which will be addressed within the CEMP (Technical Appendix 2.1 Outline CEMP).

APPENDIX 2: REFERENCES

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