

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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### Figures (Volume 2 of this EIA Report)

Figure 1.1: Site Location

### Technical Appendices (Volume 4 of this EIA Report)

There are no technical appendices associated with this Chapter.

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Environmental Impact Assessment Report ("EIA Report") has been prepared by ASH design+assessment Limited ("ASH") on behalf of Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc ("the Applicant") who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission ("SSEN Transmission"), own, operate, and develop the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and remote islands.
- 1.1.2 In this EIA Report, the Applicant and SSEN Transmission are used interchangeably unless the context requires otherwise. The EIA Report has been prepared to accompany an application for consent under section 37 (s. 37) of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended) ("the 1989 Act").
- 1.1.3 The Applicant is applying for consent to construct and operate approximately 13 kilometres (km) of new double circuit steel structure 400 kilovolt (kV) overhead transmission line (OHL) to facilitate a grid connection between the consented Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme and the existing Fort Augustus Substation. The project, referred to hereafter as 'the Proposed Development', is required to connect the consented Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme to the National Grid. The location of the Proposed Development is shown in **Figure 1.1**.
- 1.1.4 The Applicant is also seeking deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 for certain elements of the project, or ancillary works required to facilitate its construction and operation. These ancillary works form part of the Proposed Development and include the construction of temporary and permanent access tracks, and tree and vegetation clearance.
- 1.1.5 Other associated works for which separate consent under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, would be sought by the Applicant include a new 400 kV switching station located within Glen Garry Forest near White Bridge (hereafter referred to as 'the Coire Glas Switching Station') and a new 400 kV / 132 kV substation near Loch Lundie, Invergarry (hereafter referred to as 'the Loch Lundie Substation').
- 1.1.6 These works are referred to in this EIA Report as "Associated Works". They do not form part of the s.37 consent for the Proposed Development but have been considered in relation to potential for cumulative effects when determining the scope of the EIA Report, where relevant. The Proposed Development, in combination with the Associated Works, form what is referred to as 'The Coire Glas Grid Connection Project'.
- 1.1.7 The Proposed Development would also form part of a wider rationalisation exercise to reduce the overall amount of electrical grid infrastructure in the surrounding area. The Proposed Development would therefore include re-routing the existing 132 kV Fort Augustus to Fort William OHL and the existing 132 kV Invergarry Tee OHL into the proposed Loch Lundie Substation. Following the construction of the Proposed Development, the existing 132 kV Fort Augustus to Fort William OHL would also be decommissioned and dismantled between the proposed Loch Lundie Substation and the existing Fort Augustus Substation. The Proposed Development would also include a new temporary OHL diversion approximately 0.7 km in length, to enable the continued operation of the 132 kV Fort Augustus to Fort William OHL whilst the OHL is rerouted into the proposed new Loch Lundie Substation.
- 1.1.8 An Environmental Impact Assessment ("EIA") has been undertaken for the Proposed Development in accordance with the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 ("EIA Regulations") to assess the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development. The findings of the EIA are presented in this EIA Report, including the measures which would be taken to prevent, reduce and, where possible, offset predicted likely significant adverse effects.

## 1.2 Background and Project Need

- 1.2.1 The Applicant owns and maintains the electricity transmission network across the north of Scotland and holds a transmission licence under the 1989 Act. Under section 9(2) of the 1989 Act, the Applicant has a statutory duty to develop and maintain an efficient, co-ordinated, and economical system of electrical transmission, and a separate duty to facilitate competition between current and new generators of electricity.
- 1.2.2 The Proposed Development is required to facilitate the connection of the consented 1,500 megawatts (MW) Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme, being developed by Coire Glas Hydro Pumped Storage Ltd (CGHPSL).
- 1.2.3 CGHPSL have applied to The National Grid Electricity System Operator (ESO) for a grid connection for the Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme. In accordance with the Applicant's statutory duties, SSEN Transmission are developing the connection arrangement for the Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme.
- 1.2.4 Feasibility and optioneering studies have been carried out to determine the most efficient solution for the connection of Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme to the National Electricity Transmission System (NETS). The solution must be compliant with the requirements of the Security Quality of Supply Standard (SQSS) which sets out the criteria and methodology for the planning and operation of the NETS. The optimal solution requires new 400 kV transmission infrastructure between the Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme location and the nearest point of connection onto the network which can accommodate the additional load, which in this case is Fort Augustus Substation at Auchterawe.
- 1.2.5 The Coire Glas Pumped Storage Scheme, together with the Proposed Development, will help to meet increased electricity demand and meet net zero carbon targets fixed by the Scottish and UK Governments to achieve net zero by 2045 and 2050 respectively. The policy objective of "net zero" is the reduction of carbon emissions by 100 per cent (%) from 1990 levels by 2050 to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and seeks to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- 1.2.6 This target applies to all sectors of the economy, including energy. The Coire Glas Grid Connection Project will also form part of a wider rationalisation exercise to reduce the overall amount of grid infrastructure in the surrounding area. National planning policy and energy policy objectives are summarised in **Chapter 6: Planning and Energy Policy Context**.
- 1.2.7 The Applicant has undertaken studies to identify and appraise route and alignment options for the Proposed Development, involving consideration of environmental, technical, and cost factors. This work was carried out prior to selecting the proposed alignment for the Proposed Development.
- 1.2.8 Consultation has been undertaken during both route and alignment selection stages to seek comments from stakeholders, including members of the public, on the options put forward prior to finalising the design of the Proposed Development as described in this EIA Report. Further detail on the routeing and alignment selection stages of the project is contained within **Chapter 2: The Routeing Process and Alternatives**.

## 1.3 Legislative and Statutory Context

- 1.3.1 Consent for the Proposed Development is sought from Scottish Ministers under s.37 of the 1989 Act. The 1989 Act is the primary legislation governing the electricity supply industry in Great Britain and places statutory and licence obligations upon a licence holder.
- 1.3.2 The Applicant, as a transmission licence holder under the 1989 Act has a statutory duty, under paragraph 1 of Schedule 9 of the 1989 Act "*when formulating proposals to generate, transmit, distribute or supply electricity*" to:

- “have regard to 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”; and
- “do what [it] reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects”.

1.3.3 The requirement to undertake an EIA for developments requiring consent under section 37 of the 1989 Act is set out in the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017<sup>1</sup>, (hereafter referred to as ‘the EIA Regulations’). This is discussed further in Section 1.4 of this Chapter.

1.3.4 Construction of the Proposed Development and ancillary works constitutes development in terms of section 26 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (“the Planning Act”). Accordingly, these works require planning permission. However, section 57(2) of the Planning Act provides that on the granting of a consent under section 37 of the 1989 Act, for overhead transmission lines and ancillary development, the Scottish Ministers may direct that planning permission for that development shall be deemed to be granted. Deemed planning permission under section 57 of the Planning Act is therefore being sought from the Scottish Ministers in terms of the application.

## 1.4 The Need for EIA

1.4.1 Schedule 1 of the EIA regulations lists developments that require mandatory EIA, and states that developments which involve “*construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220 kilovolts or more and a length of more than 15 kilometres;..*” require mandatory EIA. The Proposed Development exceeds the voltage in the definition but is under the distance threshold for the Proposed Development to be classed as a Schedule 1 development.

1.4.2 Schedule 2 of the EIA regulations lists developments where EIA may be required and states, that developments involving:

*“(2) an electric line installed above ground –*

*(a) with a voltage of 132 kilovolts or more;*

*(b) in a sensitive area; or*

*(c) the purpose of which installation is to connect the electric line to a generating station the construction or operation of which requires consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989; or...”*

1.4.3 The Proposed Development is categorised as ‘schedule 2’ development under the EIA Regulations, as it has a voltage of 132 kV or more. Whilst this does not automatically trigger the requirement for an application for development consent to be supported by an EIA Report, the Applicant has decided to undertake an EIA for the Proposed Development. The EIA Report provides environmental information in accordance with Schedule 4 of the EIA Regulations.

1.4.4 A request for a Scoping Opinion was made to the Scottish Ministers under Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations in February 2023. A Scoping Report was submitted to support the request, which sought input from statutory and non-statutory consultees regarding the information to be provided within this EIA Report.

1.4.5 The EIA Report and s.37 application has been submitted prior to a Scoping Opinion being issued by Scottish Ministers. However, where scoping responses from statutory and non-statutory consultees have been received, such responses have been considered in this EIA Report, and are referred to within the relevant technical chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/101/contents/made>. Accessed 27/03/2023.

## 1.5 EIA Report Structure

1.5.1 This EIA Report consists of the following volumes:

- Volume 1: Main Report;
- Volume 2: Figures;
- Volume 3A: Visualisations (NatureScot Standard);
- Volume 3B: Visualisations (THC Standard);
- Volume 4: Technical Appendices;
- A Non-Technical Summary; and
- A Planning Statement.

1.5.2 This volume of the EIA Report, the Main Report, introduces the project and provides a description of the key components, including construction and operational access requirements, and the main alternatives considered during the development of the project. The approach to the EIA Report is also outlined, as well as the consultations that have been undertaken to define the scope of the EIA. This volume also includes the individual assessments undertaken under each of the specialist environmental topics identified, providing assessment of the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development. This volume contains the following Chapters:

- Chapter 1: Introduction;
- Chapter 2: Routeing Process and Alternatives;
- Chapter 3: Project Description;
- Chapter 4: EIA Process and Methodology;
- Chapter 5: Scoping and Consultation;
- Chapter 6: Planning and Energy Policy Context;
- Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual;
- Chapter 8: Terrestrial Ecology;
- Chapter 9: Ornithology;
- Chapter 10: Geology, Soils and Water;
- Chapter 11: Cultural Heritage;
- Chapter 12: Traffic, Access and Transport;
- Chapter 13: Noise and Vibration;
- Chapter 14: Forestry; and
- Chapter 15: Socio-economics, Recreation and Tourism.

1.5.3 Volume 2 contains supporting figures referred to in Volume 1 of the EIA Report.

1.5.4 Volume 3 (a and b) comprises photomontage visualisations of the Proposed Development from a series of viewpoints throughout the route that have been prepared in accordance with the relevant guidance from both NatureScot (Volume 3a) and The Highland Council (Volume 3b).

1.5.5 Volume 4 comprises supporting appendices to Volume 1, including a schedule of mitigation and further detailed reporting or information to support the EIA Report and technical assessments contained therein.

1.5.6 A standalone Non-Technical Summary is also provided which describes the Proposed Development and the likely significant effects predicted in a concise, non-technical manner.

1.5.7 A Planning Statement is also included with the application as supporting documentation. The Planning Statement considers the compatibility of the Proposed Development in the context of existing and emerging development plan and national energy and planning policies. **Chapter 6: Planning and Energy Policy Context** provides an overview of the relevant planning and energy policy context for the Proposed Development and the separate Planning Statement contains an assessment in respect of the Proposed Development against relevant planning policy.

## 1.6 Notifications

1.6.1 In accordance with the Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990, and Regulation 14 of the EIA Regulations, the application and this EIA Report will be advertised in the Press and Journal newspaper. Adverts will also be placed in the Edinburgh Gazette.

1.6.2 Notice of the s.37 application, including this EIA Report and associated documents and figures, will be available for viewing at the following public locations during normal opening hours:

- Glengarry Community Hall, Invergarry, PH35 4HG; and
- Fort Augustus Village Hall, Bunoich Brae, Fort Augustus, PH32 4DG (opening of the hall to be arranged by appointment by calling 01320 366800).

1.6.3 An electronic version is available online at <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/coire-glas-connection-project/>

1.6.4 This EIA Report is available in other formats if required. For details, including costs, contact:

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