

Melgarve Cluster Project

EIA Report:
Non Technical Summary

March 2024



Scottish & Southern
Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 This Non-Technical Summary (NTS) forms part of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report ('EIA Report') that 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 The EIA Report has been prepared to accompany an application for consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 ("the 1989 Act").
- 1.1.3 The Applicant is applying for consent to construct and operate approximately 7 km of new 132 kV overhead line (OHL) to connect the consented Cloiche Wind Farm¹ and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm² to the electricity transmission network at Melgarve substation approximately 11 km west of Laggan, in the Highlands of Scotland. The location of the Proposed Development is shown in **Figure 1** in relation to environmental designations.
- 1.1.4 The Applicant is also seeking deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) for certain elements of the project, or ancillary development required to facilitate its construction and operation. The ancillary development will include the installation of approximately 9.9 km of underground cable (UGC) and cable sealing end (CSE) compounds, new permanent access tracks (including bridges) and new temporary access tracks, vegetation clearance, temporary working measures/areas and upgrades to existing access tracks.
- 1.1.5 The project, referred to as the Melgarve Cluster Project, and hereafter as 'the Proposed Development', is being driven by the requirement to connect the consented Cloiche Wind Farm and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm to the National Grid at the existing Melgarve substation. The Proposed Development is recognised in Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) as a National Development³ under 'ND3 Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure'. It therefore forms a vital element to deliver network and grid infrastructure required to deliver the Government's legally binding targets for net zero emissions and renewable energy electricity generation objectives.
- 1.1.6 An Environmental Impact Assessment ("EIA") has been undertaken for the Proposed Development in accordance with the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 to assess the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development. The findings of the EIA are presented in the EIA Report, including the measures which would be taken to prevent, reduce and, where possible, offset predicted likely significant adverse effects. The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of the EIA Report findings in non-technical language.

1.2 EIA Report Structure

- 1.2.1 The EIA Report consists of the following volumes:
- Volume 1: Main Report;

¹ Received consent from the Scottish Government in November 2023.

² It should be noted that in August 2019, an application to build and operate Dell Wind Farm was consented following an appeal to the Scottish Ministers. However, the wind farm has been re-designed at the same location to increase capacity and energy capture with fewer wind turbines. The application for Dell 2 Wind Farm was submitted to the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit on behalf of the Scottish Ministers on 11th March 2024 and awaits decision. It is this proposed re-designed Dell 2 Wind Farm that this EIA Report refers to throughout, rather than the previously consented design.

³ Given that this development is of a scale that would have otherwise been classified as 'Major' by the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

- Volume 2: Figures;
- Volume 3A: Visualisations (NatureScot guidelines);⁴
- Volume 3B: Visualisations (The Highland Council guidelines);⁵
- Volume 4: Appendices to support each of the Chapters in the EIA Report where required; and
- Non-Technical Summary.

1.2.2 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 the development plan and national energy and planning policies.

1.3 Notifications

1.3.1 The application and the EIA Report will be advertised in The Press and Journal and the Strathspey & Badenoch Herald newspapers. Adverts will also be placed in the Edinburgh Gazette.

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

- Fort Augustus Village Hall, Bunoich Brae, Fort Augustus, PH32 4DG (opening of the hall to be arranged by appointment by calling 01320 366800)
- Laggan Community Hall, Laggan, PH201AN (opening of the hall to be arranged by appointment by calling 01528 544309)

1.3.3 An electronic version of the report is available online at: <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/melgarve-cluster/>

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

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⁴ NatureScot (Formerly Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)), (2017), Visual Representation of Wind Farms (Version 2.2) (SNH, 2017)

⁵ The Highland Council (THC), (2016), Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments (THC, 2016)

2. THE ROUTEING PROCESS AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The Proposed Development underwent a routeing appraisal process to establish a proposed route⁶ and alignment⁷ that was determined to provide an optimum balance of environmental, technical and economic factors. This process included a programme of consultation at both routeing and alignment stage, designed to engage with key stakeholders in order to invite feedback on the rationale for, and approach to, the selection of the final alignment and design solution of the Proposed Development.

2.2 Preferred Connection Technology

2.2.1 In the case of the Proposed Development, it was deemed that UGC is necessary in the areas of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm given technical constraints presented by the proximity of existing and proposed infrastructure and the resultant 'wake effect' that can result from proximity to turbines, which can lead to premature fatigue and failure of OHLs. An UGC solution was also deemed necessary on the final approach to Melgarve substation to cross the existing Beauly – Denny OHL.

2.2.2 Where OHL is feasible for the Proposed Development SSEN Transmission determined that a steel lattice tower is the preferred technological solution and would make use of this type of support structure for the OHL where possible. It is considered that steel lattice towers, are suitable to provide the required capacity of electricity export for this project, are capable of minimising environmental effects and provide the most cost efficient solution.

2.3 Route and Alignment Selection Process

2.3.1 Guidelines for the routeing of new high voltage OHLs have been established within the electricity supply industry. These guidelines are known as the 'Holford Rules' and have been widely used throughout the UK since the 1960s. The 'Holford Rules' set out a hierarchical approach to routeing which advocates avoiding areas of high amenity value, minimise changes in direction, takes advantage of topography and minimises visual interaction with other transmission infrastructure.

2.3.1 SSEN Transmission has developed its own guidance, based on the principles set out in the Holford Rules, but broadening the basis for routeing decisions to reflect contemporary practice, and providing a framework to ensure environmental, technical and economic considerations are identified and appraised at each stage of the routeing process.

2.3.2 The approach to route and alignment selection has therefore been informed by the Applicant's routeing guidance, which splits the routeing stage of a project into four principal stages, as follows:

- Stage 0: Routeing Strategy Development;
- Stage 1: Corridor Selection;
- Stage 2: Route Selection; and
- Stage 3: Alignment Selection.

2.3.3 Each stage is an iterative process and involves an increasing level of detail and resolution, bringing cost, technical and environmental considerations together in a way which seeks to achieve the best balance at each stage. The stages that are carried out can vary depending on the type, nature of and size of a project and

⁶ A linear area of approximately 1 km width (although this may be narrower/wider in specific locations in response to identified constraints), which provides a continuous connection between defined connection points.

⁷ A centre line of an overhead line or UGC.

consultation is carried out at each stage of the process, where relevant. Each stage is described in further detail in the following sections.

2.4 Corridor Selection (Stage 1)

- 2.4.1 Corridor selection stage (Stage 1) identified an initial broad search area for the consideration and analysis of route options. The search area extended from the west of Fort Augustus, across the Great Glen and up onto the Monadhliath Mountain range and the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park, before heading south to the A86 at Kinloch Laggan.
- 2.4.2 From the initial broad search areas identified, two study corridors were established: Fort Augustus Study Corridor and Melgarve Study Corridor.
- 2.4.3 It should be noted that originally, the Melgarve Cluster Project also included the proposed connection for Glenshero Wind Farm into Melgarve substation by UGC (as per the connection agreement with that wind farm developer). This additional connection requirement would have also necessitated the extension to Melgarve substation. However, in March 2022, following a public inquiry into the Glenshero Wind Farm project, Scottish Ministers refused the application on the grounds that it could have a significant visual impact, and thereby compromise the integrity of the nearby Cairngorms National Park. As the application for Glenshero Wind Farm was refused, the requirement for its grid connection was withdrawn, and the connection no longer formed an element of the Melgarve Cluster Project. Reference to the Glenshero Wind Farm connection is included up to route selection stage (Stage 2).
- 2.4.4 The Fort Augustus study corridor was explored in relation to the potential Dell 2 Wind Farm connection to Fort Augustus substation. Whereas the Melgarve Study Corridor was explored in relation to the potential Dell 2, Cloiche and Glenshero Wind Farm connections to Melgarve substation.
- 2.4.5 It was concluded that the Fort Augustus study corridor was not preferred. Natural heritage designations and landscape and visual constraints, including Fort Augustus itself, would have been particular constraints within the study corridor if it had been selected. Native woodland and other sensitive habitats present in the Tarff valley could be avoided by selecting the Melgarve study corridor. Also, although a number of technical constraints are present within the Melgarve study corridor which could limit an OHL, the challenging topography in combination with other environmental constraints in the Fort Augustus study corridor would have required any OHL to take considerable deviations.
- 2.4.6 Melgarve substation as the connection point was also the closer of the two for both wind farms. The consented Cloiche Wind Farm is approximately 8 km from Melgarve substation, while it would have been approximately 13 km from Fort Augustus substation. Dell 2 Wind Farm is approximately 11 km from Melgarve substation, while it would have been approximately 14 km from Fort Augustus substation.
- 2.4.7 As a result, the Fort Augustus corridor was discounted. The Melgarve study corridor was adopted as the proposed corridor for further consideration at Route Selection Stage (Stage 2).

2.5 Route Selection (Stage 2)

- 2.5.1 The route selection stage of the project involved the identification of route options, and an appraisal of environmental, technical and economic constraints of the route options, prior to arriving at a preferred route for the purposes of consultation and a proposed route to take forward to the alignment selection stage (Stage 3). For the Proposed Development, the route selection process was carried out between September 2021 and May 2022. Route options were initially identified following desk-based review and site walkovers, giving due consideration to the principles set out in the Holford Rules and SSEN Transmission guidance. Although the

requirement for the Glenshero Wind Farm connection has since been withdrawn, it was still active at the routing stage and was therefore included.

2.5.2 The route options were identified at varying widths, departing from the standard 1 km width of typical route options, in order to take account of physical and development constraints, namely the site topography and the operational and proposed wind turbines across the site. Route widths were increased, up to approximately 4 km in places, to allow for subsequent identification of alignments through the wind farms during the alignment selection stage. In places, route widths were also narrowed below 1 km, down to approximately 0.5 km, where steep topography was considered to preclude installation of any connection type.

2.5.3 The route selection stage reporting and consultation process is described in Appendix 4.1 - Public Consultation Report. At route selection stage, the consultation responses for the Proposed Development largely related to the design evolution of the connections. It was outlined that the development proposals must demonstrate sensitivity and respect towards the local distinctiveness of the landscape, natural heritage, visual constraints, the likely presence of Annex 1 habitats, potential impacts to wider countryside birds and transport access. The Community consultation responses raised a number of comments querying the rationale behind the potential use of OHL rather than UGC for the Cloiche and Dell 2 connections, concern for the potential for adverse effects on the operation of existing and proposed wind farms in the areas, potential impacts on sporting activities within the Stronelaig estate (namely shooting) were mentioned, as well as potential impacts on long distance walking routes due to the communities sensitivity to transport disruption.

2.5.4 The reporting on the consultation process concluded with the confirmation of the proposed route to be taken forward to the alignment selection stage as it was considered to provide an optimum balance of environmental, technical and cost factors. All comments and considerations at route stage were taken forward into the alignment stage. This process remained inclusive, seeking further consultation where appropriate.

2.6 Alignment Selection (Stage 3)

2.6.1 The alignment selection stage of the project sought to determine an alignment, subject to a Limit of Deviation (LoDs) of 100 m (approximately 50 m either side of the alignment centreline) within the proposed route identified during the route options stage and described above.

2.6.2 For the Proposed Development, the alignment selection process was carried out between May 2022 and June 2023. The requirement for the Glenshero Wind Farm connection was withdrawn by the alignment selection stage, so it was not included.

2.6.3 The following tasks were undertaken to consider the potential environmental constraints:

- Desk-based review and targeted site survey by project landscape architects, ecologists, ornithologists, archaeologists, geologists and hydrologists to review alignment options;
- Targeted Phase 1 / National Vegetation Classification (NVC) habitat surveys and protected species surveys to supplement existing data;
- Review of ornithological survey data and records for the area, including requests for data held by RSPB, and targeted bird surveys to supplement existing survey data;
- Review of comments received from stakeholders, including landowners during the route option selection stage;
- Workshops to discuss alignment options prior to the identification of a preferred alignment and design solution; and
- Site reconnaissance visits by the SSEN Transmission engineering team and environmental consultants to review alignment options.

- 2.6.4 A total of 20 alignment options were included at the alignment selection stage. A combination of at least three of the alignment options was required to satisfy all required connections.
- 2.6.5 Given the somewhat conflicting preferences across environmental and engineering topic considerations the choice of a proposed alignment was not clear cut. While there were some slight preferences for particular alignments from an environmental perspective, the differences between the options were subtle. Whereas there was often a clear engineering preference focused on the technical feasibility of constructing each of the options. This balance was taken into careful consideration when coming to an overall proposed alignment, whilst also considering SSEN Transmission's obligations to develop an efficient, co-ordinated and economical system of electricity transmission, and the contracted position between SSEN Transmission and the Cloiche and Dell 2 wind farm developers.
- 2.6.6 The alignment selection stage reporting and consultation process is described in Appendix 4.1 - Public Consultation Report. At alignment stage, the consultation process for the Proposed Development raised a number of comments seeking further understanding and justification for the use of OHL rather than UGC for parts of the connection, as well as clarification or set requirements for further assessment, particularly in relation to landscape and visual and ornithological constraints. However justification for the use of OHL over UGC was set out in the June 2023 Alignment Stage Report on Consultation.⁸ Ultimately, the decision to progress with an UGC solution through the existing (Stronelaig), the consented (Cloiche) and the proposed (Dell 2) wind farms was dictated by technical requirements given it is not possible to achieve an OHL alignment through these areas due to the proximity to wind turbines and the resultant 'wake effect' that can lead to premature fatigue and failure of the OHL.
- 2.6.7 Some of the key themes discussed in person with members of the public at consultation events held at alignment selection stage related to technology types including the use of OHL and UGC, traffic concerns regarding the main access roads for construction and hours of HGV traffic, and timings on key project steps.
- 2.6.8 The proposed alignment was taken forward to the EIA and consenting stage as it was considered to provide an optimum balance of environmental, technical and cost factors.

⁸ Melgarve Cluster Project: Report on Consultation – Alignment Options (June 2023), produced by SSEN Transmission

3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Project Overview

- 3.1.1 The Proposed Development would be required to connect both the consented Cloiche Wind Farm¹ and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm² to the electricity transmission network at Melgarve substation. Between the two proposed / consented wind farms and Melgarve substation, the Proposed Development would comprise a combination of approximately 7 km of new double circuit steel structure 132 kV overhead line (OHL) and approximately 9.9 km of new 132 kV underground cable (UGC). Cable Sealing End (CSE) compounds would be required to facilitate the transition between OHL and UGC. New permanent and temporary access tracks would also be required to facilitate the construction and operation of the Proposed Development.
- 3.1.2 The consented Cloiche Wind Farm is located on Glendoe and Garrogie Estates, adjacent to the operational Stronelaig Wind Farm and Glendoe Hydroelectric Scheme and approximately 11 km to the south-east of Fort Augustus. It consists of up to 29 turbines of a maximum height of 149.9 metres with an installed capacity of approximately 125 MW.⁹ Cloiche Wind Farm was approved by Scottish Ministers in November 2023.
- 3.1.3 The proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm is located on Dell Estate and lies approximately 5 km to the north of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm. In August 2019, an application to build and operate Dell 2 Wind Farm with associated infrastructure was consented under the Town and Country Planning Act 1997 (as amended by the Planning Etc (Scotland) Act 2006), following an appeal to the Scottish Ministers. Since that time, a revised design and layout is being developed by the wind farm developer that seeks to increase the installed capacity of the proposed wind farm to approximately 50 MW. Consent for the revised layout would be required from Scottish Ministers under the 1989 Act given the revisions increase the installed capacity to 50MW, meeting the threshold for which section 36 consent under the 1989 Act is required. A scoping opinion was received from Scottish Ministers 6 May 2022, and the application for Dell 2 Wind Farm was submitted to the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECU) on behalf of the Scottish Ministers on 11th March 2024 and awaits decision.

3.2 Development for which Section 37 Consent and deemed planning permission is sought

- 3.2.1 Section 37 Consent under the 1989 Act, including deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended), is sought for the following works:
- The installation and operation of approximately 7 km of new OHL on double circuit L7 lattice towers carrying both the consented Cloiche Wind Farm connections and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm.

3.3 Ancillary Development for which Deemed Planning Permission is sought

- 3.3.1 Deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 is also sought for the following elements, or ancillary development required to facilitate the Proposed Development's construction and operation:
- **Two Cable Sealing End (CSE) compounds** to facilitate the transition between OHL and UGC. One CSE compound would be situated at approximate Ordnance Survey (OS) grid reference NH 48474 01491 which lies approximately 1.3 km southeast of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm substation, and the other CSE compound would be situated at approximate OS grid reference NN 50665 95775 which lies approximately 0.5 km northeast of Melgarve substation **Error! Bookmark not defined.;**

⁹ Details as per the Cloiche Wind Farm Determination letter dated 30 November 2023.

- **Approximately 7.3 km of 132 kV UGC** between the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm on-site substation at approximate OS grid reference NH 49722 06710 and the new CSE approximately 1.3 km to the southeast of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm substation;
- **Approximately 1.8 km of 132 kV UGC** between the consented Cloiche Wind Farm on-site substation at approximate OS grid reference NH 47429 02486 and the new CSE approximately 1.3 km to the southeast of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm substation; and
- **Approximately 0.8 km of two 132 kV UGCs** running parallel to each other from the new CSE located approximately 0.5 km northeast of Melgarve substation, splitting apart again before they enter into Melgarve substation itself. The existing Melgarve substation is situated at OS grid reference NN 50119 95611.

3.3.2 The following ancillary works would also be required as part of the Proposed Development, or to facilitate its construction and operation:

- Upgrades to existing access tracks;
- New permanent access tracks (including bridges) and new temporary access tracks;
- Permanent stone hardstanding areas related to the CSE compounds and associated working areas around infrastructure to facilitate construction;
- Vegetation clearance to facilitate construction and operation of the Proposed Development, to comply with the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations (ESQCR) 2002¹⁰;
- Temporary measures to protect water crossings (e.g. scaffolding and temporary bridges); and
- Working areas around infrastructure to facilitate construction.

3.4 Limits of Deviation

3.4.1 In general terms, a Limit of Deviation (LoDs) defines the maximum extent within which a development can be built. In the case of the Proposed Development, a prescribed horizontal LoDs is required for each of the key components of the project to allow flexibility in the final siting of individual towers, UGCs and access tracks to reflect localised land, engineering, and environmental constraints.

3.5 Description of Overhead Line (OHL)

3.5.1 The proposed OHL would commence from a CSE Compound approximately 1.3 km southeast of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm substation. From the CSE Compound, the proposed OHL would continue to the southeast for approximately 2.5 km, crossing Allt Creag Chomaich, passing to the northeast of Lochan Iain and Dubh Lochan. Approximately 1.5 km to the west of the Corbett Meall na h-Aisre, the Proposed Development would turn in a generally more southerly direction for approximately 4.5 km. It would pass between Meall nan Ruadhag and Sherramore Forest and cross the Allt Gilbe. It would pass to the east of the Meall a Ghiubhais and before reaching the nearby Beaully-Denny OHL would terminate at another CSE Compound, which lies approximately 0.5 km northeast of Melgarve substation.

Double Circuit L7 Lattice Towers

3.5.2 The 33 steel lattice towers that form part of the Proposed Development would be constructed from fabricated galvanised steel and would be grey in colour. The towers would likely comprise a 'L7' series of steel lattice tower (an example photograph of which is shown in **Plate 3.1**). Three types of tower are proposed to be used, as described below:

- suspension towers: these are used for straight sections of OHL where there is no need to terminate the conductor. There are 23 suspension towers proposed;

¹⁰ The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations (2002), available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2665/contents/made>

- angle / tension towers: these are typically used where there is a need to change the orientation of the OHL. There are 8 angle / tension towers proposed; and
- Terminal towers; where the OHL transitions to UGC, via a CSE. There are 2 terminal towers proposed, where the OHL transitions to UGC.

3.5.3 The span length (distance between towers) would vary slightly depending on topography and land usage. Typically, the span lengths for the Proposed Development would be between approximately 124 m and 308 m. Tower heights would also vary, depending on local topography, but would typically be in the region of approximately 26 m to 37 m in height. The average OHL structure height would be approximately 30 m.

3.5.4 The towers would carry two circuits, each with three conductors supported from either glass, porcelain, or composite insulators attached to the horizontal cross arms on both sides of each steel lattice tower. An Optical Ground Wire (OPGW)¹¹ would be suspended between tower peaks, above the conductors. **Plate 3.1** shows a photograph of a typical steel lattice tower for illustrative purposes.

Plate 3.1: Photograph of Steel Lattice Tower Double Circuit (L7 series)



3.6 Description of Cable Sealing End Compounds

3.6.1 Two CSE Compounds are required to facilitate the transitions from underground cable to OHL (and vice versa). These are proposed at the following locations:

- approximate OS grid reference NH 48474 01491 which is approximately 1.3 km southeast of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm substation.
- approximate OS grid reference NN50665 95775 which lies approximately 0.5 km northeast of Melgarve substation.

¹¹ Optical Ground Wire is a dual functioning cable, providing a 'shield' to conductors from lightning, whilst also comprising optical cables for telecommunication purposes.

3.6.2 The compounds would be anticipated to be approximately 50 m x 50 m. Due to the hazards associated with live electricity, the compound is secured by installing fencing and gates around the perimeter of usually 2.4 m in height.

3.7 Description of Underground Cables.

3.7.1 Three sections of UGC would be required for the Proposed Development, one of which would consist of the two connections running parallel to each other (double circuit installation). These are:

- Approximately 7.3 km of single circuit installation 132 kV UGC between the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm on-site substation and the proposed CSE Compound approximately 1.3 km to the southeast of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm substation;
- Approximately 1.8 km of single circuit installation 132 kV UGC between the consented Cloiche Wind Farm on-site substation and the proposed CSE approximately 1.3 km to the southeast of the consented Cloiche Wind Farm substation; and
- Approximately 0.8 km of double circuit installation 132 kV UGCs running parallel to each other from the new CSE located approximately 0.5 km northeast of Melgarve substation, splitting apart again before they enter into Melgarve substation itself.

3.7.2 A working corridor of approximately 25 m would be required during the installation for the single circuit installations, while a working corridor of approximately 37 m would be required during the installation for the double circuit installation.

3.7.3 **Plate 3.6** shows a typical UGC construction corridor and a photograph of a typical installation.

Plate 3.6: Photograph of Underground Cable Installation



3.8 Associated Works

3.8.1 Other associated works are required to facilitate construction of the Proposed Development, or would occur as a consequence of its construction and operation. These works, listed below, do not form part of the description of the Proposed Development and are therefore not included in the application for statutory consents. On that basis they are therefore not assessed in detail in the EIA Report. The associated works are:

- Borrow pits and quarries which would be required to source stone for the construction of access tracks. Separate planning applications for these works would be sought by the Principal Contractor; and

- Temporary construction compounds which would be required to facilitate construction of the Proposed Development. The final location and design of temporary site compounds would be confirmed by the Principal Contractor and separate planning permissions would be sought as required.

3.9 Construction Programme and Working Hours

- 3.9.1 It is anticipated that construction of the project would take place over a 24-month period, following the granting of consents, although detailed programming of the works would be the responsibility of the Contractor in agreement with SSEN Transmission.
- 3.9.2 Construction activities would in general be undertaken during daytime periods. Weekend working would also be proposed with timings to be confirmed by the Contractor in due course. Construction working is likely to be during daytime periods only. Working hours are anticipated 7 days a week between approximately 07.00 to 19.00 March to September and 07.30 to 17.00 (or within daylight hours) October to February. Working hours would be confirmed by the Principal Contractor and agreed with The Highland Council as local authority.
- 3.9.3 SSEN Transmission considers it important to act as a responsible developer with regards to the communities which host the construction works. The delivery of a major programme of capital investment provides the opportunity to maximise support of local communities. Employment of construction staff would be the responsibility of the Contractor; however, the Applicant would encourage the Contractor to make use of suitable labour and resources from areas local to the Proposed Development where possible.

3.10 Environmental Management during Construction

- 3.10.1 During construction, best practice measures will be applied, including the implementation of General Environmental Management Plans (GEMPs) and Species Protection Plans (SPPs) developed by the Applicant. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be developed and implemented by the Contractor as a contractual requirement, aiming to avoid, minimise, and control adverse environmental impacts associated with the project. Monthly inspections and quarterly audits by SSEN Transmission will ensure CEMP compliance, managed on-site by an Environmental Clerk of Works (ECoW) and supported by other environmental professionals where required.

Reinstatement

- 3.10.2 Reinstatement works during and post-construction aim to address ground disturbance and landscape changes caused by the development. A site reinstatement plan outlines principles and measures for restoring disturbed areas. Access tracks will be partially reinstated after construction, with temporary tracks removed and land restored. For work areas like towers and underground cables, soil will be stored within the working area and reinstated with subsoil, topsoil, and turves replaced vegetation side up.

SSEN Transmission's Biodiversity Ambition

- 3.10.3 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) ensures that nature is left in a better state after development, achieved through a toolkit developed by SSEN Transmission based on the Natural England Biodiversity Metric. This toolkit quantifies biodiversity by habitat value, allowing assessment of development projects' impact on biodiversity post-construction. SSEN Transmission is committed to minimising environmental impacts by ensuring natural environment considerations are considered throughout project development stages, utilising mitigation hierarchy to avoid impacts, contributing positively to biodiversity strategies, and collaborating with the supply chain for maximum benefit. As part of this approach, SSEN Transmission has made commitments to ultimately ensure a 10% net gain for biodiversity in line with the Applicants biodiversity ambition and environmental legacy

commitments¹², Sustainability Strategy¹³ and Sustainability Plan¹⁴. The project's design aligns with these commitments.

3.11 Operation and Maintenance

3.11.1 In general, OHLs and UGCs require very little maintenance. Regular inspections are undertaken to identify any unacceptable deterioration of components, so that they can be replaced. From time to time, inclement weather, storms or lightning can cause damage to either the insulators or the conductors on OHLs. If conductors are damaged, short sections may have to be replaced.

3.11.2 During the operation of the Proposed Development, it would be necessary to manage vegetation to maintain required safety clearance distances from infrastructure.

3.12 Decommissioning the Proposed Development

3.12.1 If the Proposed Development were to be decommissioned all components of the OHL, inclusive of steel from the towers, conductors and fittings, would be removed from site and either recycled or disposed of appropriately. The UGCs would be removed where practical to do so, however if they could not be retrieved then the ducts would be cut and sealed. The expectation is that this cable system would be recoverable at decommissioning.

3.12.2 A method statement would also be agreed with The Highland Council setting out the detail of the decommissioning process for OHL and UGC.

3.12.3 Efforts would be made to repurpose the Proposed Development for future connections prior to any decommissioning. Consent to be applied for is therefore in perpetuity.

¹² SSEN Transmission (2023). Delivering a positive environmental legacy. <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/documents/sustainability-and-environment/environmental-legacy-booklet>

¹³ Delivering a smart, sustainable energy future: The Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission Sustainability Strategy (2018) <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/media/2701/sustainability-strategy.pdf>

¹⁴ Our Sustainability Plan: Turning Ambition into Action. (2019) SHE Transmission. <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/media/3215/our-sustainability-plan-consultation-report.pdf>

4. EIA APPROACH, SCOPE AND CONSULTATION

4.1 EIA Approach

4.1.1 EIA is a process that considers how a proposed development is predicted to change existing environmental conditions and what the consequences of such changes will be. It therefore informs both the project design and the decision-making processes related to the grant of development consents or planning permission.

4.2 Pre-application Consultation

4.2.1 SSEN Transmission has sought to maintain an open dialogue with local communities within the vicinity of the Proposed Development throughout the evolution of the project. This has included carrying out consultation events during the route and alignment selection stages, engaging with local elected members such as Ward Councillors and Community Councils and engaging with landowners, residents, community groups and businesses that may be affected by the Proposed Development. SSEN Transmission has held parallel communication with other stakeholders, including statutory consultees, to understand their views on the proposals at the route and alignment selection stages, which has led to key areas of design evolution and development.

4.2.2 The appraisal of route options was set out in a Consultation Document¹⁵, published in October 2021, and virtual public consultations were held in January 2022. Comments received from all stakeholders (including members of the public) in response to the Consultation Document (October 2021), or following virtual consultation events, were documented in a Report on Consultation, published in May 2022.¹⁶ The Report on Consultation also outlined the Applicant's responses provided at route stage consultation, along with confirmation of the action to be taken, where relevant.

4.2.3 The appraisal of alignment options was set out in a Consultation Document,¹⁷ published in January 2023, and in-person consultations were held in February 2023. Comments received from all stakeholders (including members of the public) in response were documented in a Report on Consultation, published in June 2023.¹⁸ The Report on Consultation also outlined the Applicant's responses provided at alignment stage consultation, along with confirmation of the action to be taken, where relevant.

4.3 Screening

4.3.1 A Screening Opinion was sought¹⁹ from Scottish Ministers, as consenting authority, for consideration under the EIA Regulations to determine whether the Proposed Development would constitute 'EIA Development'. The Screening Determination of the Scottish Ministers issued on 20 September 2023, confirmed that the Proposed Development constitutes 'EIA Development', and the application for consent under section 37 of the 1989 Act should be accompanied by an EIA Report.

4.4 Scoping report

4.4.1 In October 2023, an EIA Scoping Report²⁰ was developed to support a formal request under Regulation 12 of the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 by the Applicant for a Scoping Opinion to determine the information to be provided within the EIA Report.

¹⁵ Melgarve Cluster Consultation Document: Route Options (October 2021), produced by SSEN Transmission

¹⁶ Melgarve Cluster Project: Report on Consultation (Route Stage) (May 2022), produced by SSEN Transmission

¹⁷ Melgarve Cluster Project: Consultation Document: Alignment Options (January 2023), produced by SSEN Transmission

¹⁸ Melgarve Cluster Project: Report on Consultation – Alignment Options (June 2023), produced by SSEN Transmission

¹⁹ Screening Request and Proposed Scope of Environmental Appraisal – Melgarve Cluster Project – June 2023, produced by SSEN Transmission

²⁰ Melgarve Cluster Project: Scoping Report (October 2023), produced by SSEN Transmission

4.4.2 The Scoping Opinion of the Scottish Ministers was issued on 1st March 2024. Key Issues that were raised by the Scoping Opinion have shaped the EIA Report.

4.5 Further Consultee Engagement

4.5.1 Stakeholder consultation has been ongoing since the early stages of the project and has continued throughout the scoping and EIA process.

4.6 Approach to Mitigation

Mitigation measures are identified to prevent, reduce or remedy any potentially significant adverse environmental effects identified, beyond that already taken into account as normal good practice (i.e. embedded mitigation for example, the Construction Environment Management Plan. Such measures would be implemented during detailed design, construction and / or operation of the Proposed Development.

5. PLANNING AND ENERGY POLICY CONTEXT

5.1 Overview

- 5.1.1 In recent years the United Kingdom (UK) and Scottish Government policies have focused increasingly on concerns about climate change. Each tier of Government has developed targets, policies, and actions to achieve targets to deal with the climate crisis and generate more renewable energy and electricity.
- 5.1.2 The UK Government retains responsibility for the overall direction of energy policy, although some elements are devolved to the Scottish Government. The UK Government has published a series of policy documents setting out how targets can be achieved. Renewable energy generation in Scotland is identified as an important component to achieve these various goals.
- 5.1.3 The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 requires that the Scottish Ministers must ensure that the net Scottish emissions account for the net-zero emissions target year of 2045 is at least 100% lower than the baseline (the target is known as the “net-zero emissions target”).
- 5.1.4 The Highland Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in May 2019. In October 2023 the Council launched their Net Zero Strategy to set out the Council’s approach to addressing the climate emergency by reducing emissions and preparing for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The strategy includes a route Map to Net Zero by 2045, with key interim targets to reduce emissions by at least 75% by 2030 and at least 90% by 2040 (in line with the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019).

5.2 Statutory Framework

- 5.2.1 The Proposed Development requires consent from the Scottish Ministers under s.37 of the 1989 Act. The Scottish Ministers will determine the application having regard to the statutory duties in the 1989 Act, where relevant, and any other relevant material considerations, one of which will be relevant aspects of the statutory Development Plan.
- 5.2.2 In the case of the Highland Council, the statutory development plan is comprised of the National Planning Framework 4 (2023) (NPF4), the Local Development Plan and associated supplementary guidance.
- 5.2.3 The principal planning statute in Scotland is the 1997 Act as amended by The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 and by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

5.3 National Planning Policy

- 5.3.1 Scotland’s Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) was adopted on February 13th 2023. NPF4 sets out the Government’s national spatial strategy for Scotland, identifying regional priorities, national developments, and national planning policy. Unlike NPF3 and SPP, NPF4 forms part of the statutory development plan. As part of the national spatial strategy, NPF 4 also makes it clear that Scotland must make significant progress by 2030 to achieve net zero emissions target by 2045.

5.4 Local Development Plan

- 5.4.1 The Proposed Development lies wholly within The Highland Councils administrative area. The adopted statutory Local Development Plan comprises the Highland Wide Local Development Plan, (HwLDP) adopted in 2012, the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan (IMFLDP) adopted in 2015, the West Highland and Islands Local Development plan (WestPlan) adopted in 2019 and associated supplementary guidance.

6. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

6.1 Landscape and Visual

6.1.1 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been undertaken for the Proposed Development, in accordance with best practice guidance, the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition (GLVIA3).

6.1.2 The LVIA considers the two separate subjects of landscape and visual amenity as follows:

- The landscape assessment has considered the potential effects of the Proposed Development on landscape character, designated and protected landscapes.
- The visual assessment has considered the potential effects of the Proposed Development on the visual amenity of those present within the landscape, including established views from residential areas and routes.

6.1.3 The LVIA also gives consideration to cumulative effects occurring as a result of the addition of the Proposed Development to other proposed electrical infrastructure developments within the study area. This includes the consented Cloiche Wind Farm and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm.

6.1.4 Mitigation measures are proposed to help minimise the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development and are considered within the assessment of operational effects.

6.2 Landscape Effects

6.2.1 The landscape assessment has established that there would be a short-term, temporary significant effect during construction within a localised area of LCT 221 (Rolling Uplands) confined to the area within Coire Iain Oig where construction works would lead to some disruption to remote qualities within the corrie.

6.2.2 Whilst there would be some effects in other areas, these are not predicted to be significant, due to the presence of other existing infrastructure including wind turbines on the upland plateau and existing transmission infrastructure within the Spey Glen, and the indirect nature of the effects, which would be less likely to change existing characteristics within this context.

6.2.3 During operation, after reinstatement has established, all effects on landscape character would reduce to levels which would be not significant, because the Proposed Development is not predicted to be sufficiently prominent within the setting to lead to an overriding change to any landscape characteristics.

6.2.4 No significant effects are predicted to the Special Landscape Qualities or landscape character within the Cairngorms National Park or any other designated or protected landscapes would be affected.

6.3 Visual Effects

6.3.1 The visual assessment has identified that there would be a short term, temporary significant visual effect for recreational receptors accessing a Meall na h-Aisre, a Corbett summit within the study area. This route follows Coire Iain Oig via various options but all would result in the construction works for the Proposed Development being a prominent feature within the view. However, this effect is predicted to reduce and become not significant during operation, as the lattice tower structures would be less prominent against the backdrop of hills in the longer term.

6.3.2 Visual effects for all other building-based and recreational receptors within the study area would be not significant during both construction and operation, largely because the Proposed Development would be seen

either distantly with limited perceptibility, or within a context where other infrastructure is already more prominent.

6.4 Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

- 6.4.1 The cumulative landscape and visual assessment carried out for the Proposed Development has established that there would be no significant cumulative landscape or visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development, when considered in addition to other proposed developments.

7. ECOLOGY

- 7.1.1 An assessment has been undertaken to consider the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on non-avian ecology including designated sites, terrestrial and aquatic habitats, and protected species. The assessment was based on best practice guidance including the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management's (CIEEM) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (2022).
- 7.1.2 The scope of the ecological assessment and baseline conditions were determined through a combination of desk study, field surveys, and consultation with relevant organisations. This process established ecological features that could potentially be impacted by the Proposed Development.
- 7.1.3 There are a number of designated sites and areas of ancient woodland within 5km of the site. Most of the study area consists of degraded and actively eroding blanket bog, with wet heath, acid grassland and bare peat also present. Evidence of protected species including hare, otter, red squirrel, reptiles and water vole was recorded during surveys. A number of watercourses are present which provide some suitability for non-migratory brown trout populations; all watercourses on site are inaccessible to migratory species due to impassable barriers.
- 7.1.4 The Proposed Development has been designed to minimise impacts on important habitats, peatland and protected species as far as practicable. This has been achieved through embedded mitigation and the iterative design process. This process, combined with further commitments to certain mitigation measures pre-construction, during construction, and post-construction / during operation, allowed potential effects on several habitats and species present to be scoped-out of the assessment.
- 7.1.5 Assessment of potential effects and their significance were determined through consideration of the sensitivity of the feature and magnitude of change / effect. The most tangible effect during construction of the Proposed Development was considered to be direct habitat loss due to the construction of infrastructure, in addition to some potential indirect drainage effects. The assessment concluded that there would be a **Minor adverse** and **Not Significant** effect on blanket bog and wet heath. No significant operational, decommissioning or cumulative effects were identified.
- 7.1.6 An Outline Habitat Management Plan (OHMP) for the Proposed Development would be developed to compensate for the effects on blanket bog and wet heath, and further enhance habitats. With the implementation of the HMP, overall effects on blanket bog and wet heath would be beneficial with the restoration and enhancement of habitats.
- 7.1.7 A detailed assessment of the impacts on the qualifying features of the River Spey SAC has been undertaken in a Shadow Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) for the Proposed Development to meet the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (the 2017 Habitat and Species Regulations).

8. ORNITHOLOGY

- 8.1.1 An assessment has been undertaken to consider the potential effects of the Proposed Development on ornithological features.
- 8.1.2 Methods used to establish the bird species and populations present that may be affected by the Proposed Development as well as to determine their Nature Conservation Importance included a comprehensive desk study and a suite of ornithological surveys undertaken in accordance with NatureScot guidance between October 2021 and September 2022.
- 8.1.3 As a result of the desk studies and field surveys, it was possible to scope out several species and potential impacts from further assessment, including birds of high Nature Conservation Importance due to low levels of activity, distance from the Proposed Development and the nature and location of noted activity.
- 8.1.4 Collision Risk and electrocution was scoped out from further assessment, due to time spent crossing the Proposed Development at collision risk height for all species was negligible. A Habitats Regulations Screening Assessment concluded no Likely Significant Effect (LSE) on the Loch Knockie and nearby Lochans Special Protection Area (SPA) and Creag Meagaidh SPA. Habitat Loss, disturbance and displacement for Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Merlin, Golden Plover and Dunlin were taken forward for further assessment.
- 8.1.5 Habitat loss arising from the construction of the Proposed Development is unlikely to result in significant adverse effects upon any bird species. Displacement and disturbance impacts are also likely to be negligible.
- 8.1.6 Mitigation in the form of species-specific protection plans detailing working methods and disturbance buffers are proposed.
- 8.1.7 As the Proposed Development, in isolation, would have no adverse effect on the regional populations of bird species, cumulative effects of the Proposed Development with other planned developments in the area are considered to be unlikely to have a significant effect on existing bird populations.
- 8.1.8 Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development would not have a significant effect on ornithology under the terms of the EIA Regulations.

9. GEOLOGY, HYDROLOGY AND HYDROGEOLOGY

- 9.1.1 An assessment has been undertaken of the potential effects on geology (including soils and peat) and the water environment (hydrology and hydrogeology) during the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development.
- 9.1.2 Information for the study area was compiled using baseline information from a desk study, which was verified by an extensive programme of field work. The assessment undertaken considered the sensitivity of receptors identified during the baseline study and mitigation measures incorporated in the development design. It has also considered potential future changes to baseline conditions.
- 9.1.3 The scope of the assessment was informed by pre-application advice, scoping and consultation responses received during the route and alignment stages of the Proposed Development.
- 9.1.4 The assessment is supported by Appendices that consider potential effects on carbon rich soils and peat (peat management plan), and peat stability (peat landslide hazard risk assessment). A schedule of proposed watercourse crossings associated with the Proposed Development is also provided as an Appendix.
- 9.1.5 Subject to adoption of best practice construction techniques and a site-specific Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), no significant adverse effects on geology (including soils and peat) and the water environment have been identified. The CEMP includes provision for drainage management plans which will be agreed with statutory consultees, including Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), and which will be used to safeguard water resources and manage flood risk. A commitment to deploy Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) in these plans has been made. The CEMP also includes provision of a Pollution Prevention Plan which would also be agreed with statutory consultees including SEPA prior to any construction works being undertaken.
- 9.1.6 The design of the Proposed Development has been informed by a detailed programme of peat depth probing as required by National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and it has been shown that wherever possible areas of deep peat have been avoided. The assessment of peat and carbon rich soils has considered all of the proposed infrastructure, including temporary and permanent access tracks. A project specific peat management plan has been prepared which confirms the soils disturbed by the development are limited in volume and that these soils can be readily and beneficially reused in restoration works.
- 9.1.7 Notwithstanding these safeguards, a programme of baseline and construction phase water quality monitoring is proposed which would be used to confirm that the Proposed Development does not have a significant effect on geology and the water environment. It is proposed that the monitoring programme is agreed with statutory consultees.

10. TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

10.1 Overview

10.1.1 A review of the transport and access issues associated with the Proposed Development has been undertaken.

10.1.2 The study area encompasses the area over which all desk-based and field data were gathered to inform the assessment presented in this Chapter. The study area comprises the road links assessed as part of this assessment.

- The A82 at Fort Augustus;
- The B862 between Fort Augustus and the Stronelairg access track;
- The A86 between Spean Bridge and Laggan; and
- The A889 between Laggan and Dalwhinnie.

10.1.3 The Proposed Development would lead to a temporary increase in traffic volumes on the road network within the study area during the construction phase.

10.1.4 An assessment of average daily development trips is considered an appropriate method of assessing the impact of the Proposed Development, as this will account for peaks and troughs during the construction programme. The construction traffic would result in a temporary increase in traffic flows on the road network surrounding the Proposed Development.

10.1.5 No link capacity issues are expected on any of the roads assessed due to the additional movements associated with the Proposed Development. The effects of construction traffic are temporary in nature and are transitory.

10.1.6 Whilst no significant impact on the study network is predicted, a series of mitigation measures and management plans have been proposed to help mitigate and offset impacts of the traffic flows from the construction phase of the Proposed Development.

11. SOCIO-ECONOMICS, RECREATION AND TOURISM

- 11.1.1 An assessment has been completed to consider the predicted effects on socio-economic activity, and recreation and tourism activity during construction and operation of the Proposed Development.
- 11.1.1 As a significant investment (approximately £100 million by SSEN alone) in a key economic sector, the Proposed Development supports the National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the emerging Energy and Just Transition Plan at the national level. Regionally it supports the Economic Development Action Plan for the Highlands, the Inverness and Highland City Vision as well as the emerging Community Wealth Building Strategy for the Highlands. It would provide contract and employment opportunities for Highland based people and businesses throughout the duration of the Proposed Development.
- 11.1.2 During the construction phase, the Proposed Development is expected to generate up to 350 direct Person Years Employment (PYE) at the Scotland level. At the Highland level, this equates to up to 175 direct PYE. These PYE can be converted to direct GVA through the GVA for specialised construction activities, generating £22.4 million in direct GVA nationally, including £11.2 million direct GVA at the Highland level.
- 11.1.3 In addition, there would be potential beneficial effects through temporary increased local spending on the supply of goods and services during construction including worker accommodation. Based on other similar projects this is anticipated to be approximately £2.8 million throughout the construction period. It is anticipated that these effects, would bring additional opportunity for the supply chain and the creation of local jobs. The construction activity will benefit wider Highland and Scottish companies and contribute to the economy. Once operational, the Proposed Development would facilitate renewable generation planned for the consented Cloiche Wind Farm and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm.
- 11.1.4 Construction is predicted to result in a temporary **Negligible** and not significant effect on the economy of Scotland. Construction is predicted to result in a temporary **Minor Beneficial** and not significant effect on the economy of the Highlands. The predicted residual socio-economic effect in relation to operational activities are deemed to be of **Negligible** and not significant at the national level. The predicted residual socio-economic effect in relation to operational activities are deemed to be of **Minor Beneficial** and not significant at the regional level.
- 11.1.5 The main benefits will be associated with the construction phase, and the Proposed Development is not expected to generate any direct full time employment onsite during its operation. There will be regular and ad hoc maintenance as required, however this work will be periodic, so it would be very hard to say any of this would be sufficient to fully support and/or sustain additional employment from these activities.
- 11.1.6 The predicted residual socio-economic effect in relation to operational activities are deemed to be **Negligible** and not significant at the national and regional levels. The predicted residual socio-economic effect in relation to operational activities are deemed to be **Negligible** and not significant at the national and regional levels.
- 11.1.7 The review of the recreational and tourism asset base found that there are no notable visitor attractions or activities located close to the Proposed Development. There are country sport activities on the estate and neighbouring estates and these are not expected to be adversely affected by the Proposed Development. The area is remote with very little population, limited to a few scattered properties around Garvamore and Garvabeg around 2.5 km to the east of Melgarve substation. There are also a few recorded and publicised recreational routes within the area giving the potential for views of the Proposed Development. These include the General Wade's Military Road which passes to the south of Melgarve, and forms part of the popular Corrieyairack Pass route (part of Scottish Hill Tracks 236 and 237). In addition, the main spine road of the Stronelairg Wind Farm is promoted by the South Loch Ness Access Group as part of the Monadhliath Trail between Fort Augustus and

Whitebridge. There are also some path routes leading from Glen Spean which provide access to local mountains, notably a route from Garva Bridge, ascending the Corbett Meall na h-Aisre which follows the ridgeline to the east of the Proposed Development. The mitigation proposed and the review of secondary research around visitor motivation confirms that visitors are not dissuaded from visiting or revisiting an area where there is renewable infrastructure. This confirms that there will be no adverse effects on these assets as a result of the Proposed Development.

- 11.1.8 The predicted residual recreational and tourism effect in relation to construction activities are deemed to be **Negligible** and not significant at the national and regional levels. The predicted residual recreational and tourism effect in relation to operational activities are deemed to be **Negligible** and not significant at the national and regional levels.

12. CULTURAL HERITAGE

- 12.1.1 The Proposed Development is located in a landscape of very sparse features of land use, primarily the use of uplands for seasonal shielings and later sporting activities with a small number of features associated with commercial sheep farming. The most significant use of the area has been as an important land route from the Upper Spey through to the Great Glen, with strategic significance for military movements in the 18th century.
- 12.1.2 Extensive survey work has been completed across the site of the Proposed Development, as part of other archaeological evaluations, including environmental assessment work for Glendoe Hydroelectric scheme, Stronelaig and Cloiche Wind Farms, Stronelaig Wind Farm buried cable grid connection route, Melgarve Substation and the Beauly-Denny 400 kV OHL. These evaluations have indicated that the potential for direct impacts is low to negligible within the vicinity of the Proposed Development, and the potential for further visible archaeological features is considered to be low to negligible. A detailed assessment of direct impacts is therefore scoped out, and the potential for sub-surface features liable to be disturbed during ground works is also considered to be low.
- 12.1.3 Within the wider area of the upper Strathspey, there are a small number of cultural heritage sites of national importance with statutory protection. Five Designated assets, one Scheduled Monument (SM) and five listed buildings are located within the study area of 5km. For reasons of both the sensitivity of the Designated assets to indirect impact and the reduction of magnitude of this impact through elements such as minimal breaking of the horizon, setting against other modern landscape elements such as forestry blocks, the significance of any visual impact is considered to be low. One Scheduled Monument has been taken forward for more detailed assessment.
- 12.1.4 The assessment concludes that there would be no potential significant indirect impacts as a result of the Proposed Development, as the sensitivity of this site is already reduced by the presence of modern elements in the landscape, particularly the presence of the Beauly to Denny 400 kV OHL transmission towers, which are located at closer proximity and cross the arc of view to the Proposed Development from this designated site.

13. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

13.1 Summary

13.1.1 The Applicant is applying for consent to construct and operate approximately 7 km of new 132 kV overhead line (OHL) to connect the consented Cloiche Wind Farm and the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm to the electricity transmission network at Melgarve substation. Deemed planning permission is also sought for certain elements of the project, or ancillary development required to facilitate its construction and operation, including the installation of approximately 9.9 km of underground cable (UGC) and cable sealing end (CSE) compounds, new permanent access tracks (including bridges), new temporary access tracks, vegetation clearance, temporary working measures/areas and upgrades to existing access tracks.

13.1.2 The Proposed Development is recognised in Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) as a National Development²¹ under 'ND3 Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure'. It therefore forms a vital element to deliver network and grid infrastructure required to deliver the Government's legally binding targets for net zero emissions and renewable energy electricity generation objectives.

13.1.3 Consultation with statutory and non-statutory consultees was carried out throughout the routeing, alignment, EIA and Scoping process, in addition to in person and online virtual consultation events, to invite comment on the Proposed Development and specific areas of environmental assessment to incorporate into the EIA.

13.1.4 The EIA incorporates assessment of the Proposed Development's likely significant effects on the following environmental aspects:

- Landscape and Visual impact;
- Terrestrial Ecology;
- Ornithology;
- Geology, Hydrology and Hydrogeology;
- Traffic and Transport;
- Socio-economic, Recreation and Tourism; and
- Cultural Heritage.

13.2 Conclusion

13.2.1 Subject to implementation of the Applicant's good practice and working control measures, as well as the identified site-specific mitigation measures outlined in each technical chapter of the EIA Report, it is considered that the Proposed Development would not give rise to long-term significant effects.

13.2.2 The following short-term / temporary significant effects have been identified:

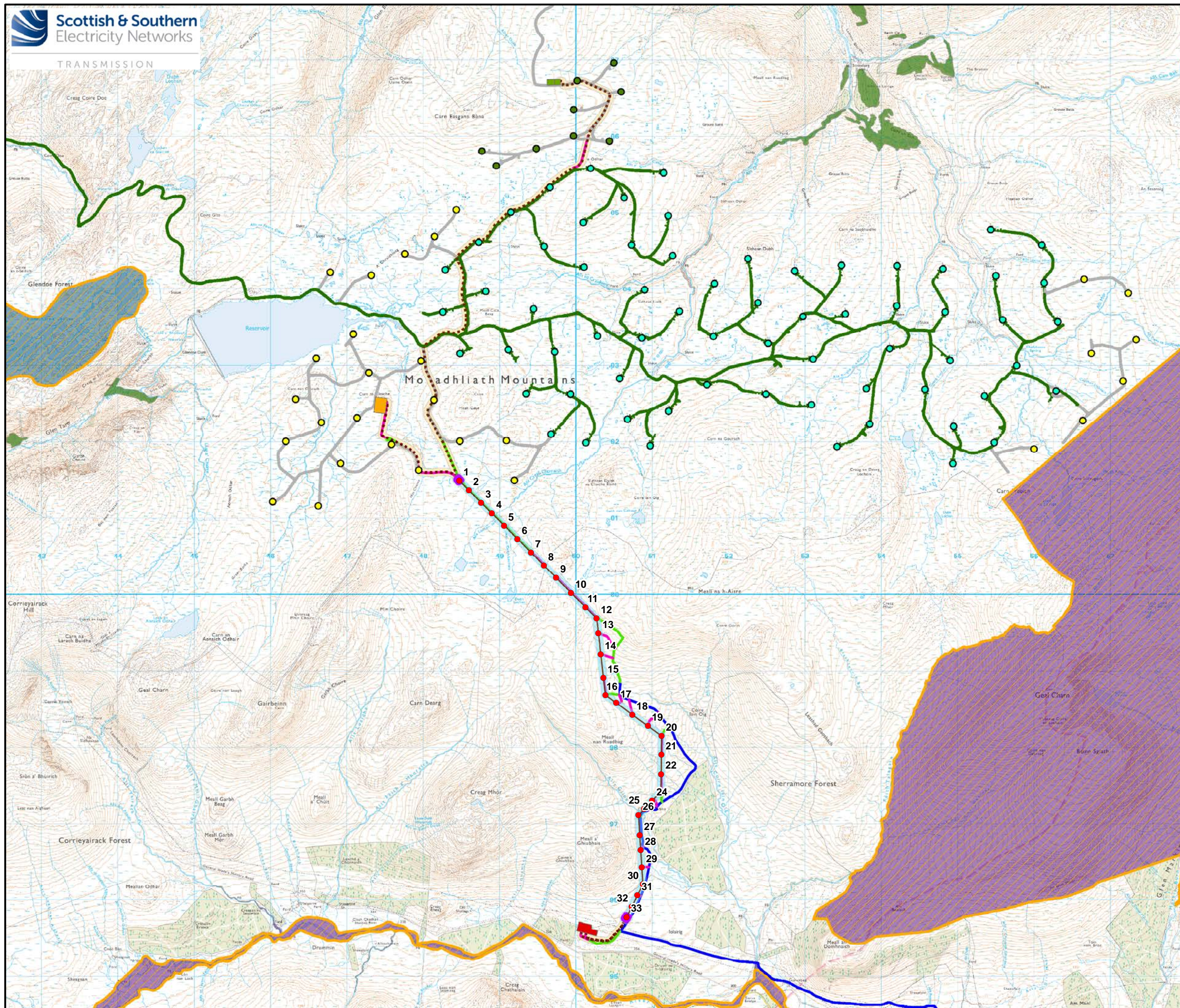
- The landscape assessment has established that there would be a short term significant effect during construction within a localised area of LCT 221 (Rolling Uplands) confined to the area within Coire Iain Oig where construction works would lead to some disruption to remote qualities within the corrie. During operation, after reinstatement has established, all effects on landscape character would reduce to levels which would be not significant.
- The visual assessment has identified that there would be a short term significant visual effect for recreational receptors accessing a Meall na h-Aisre, a Corbett summit within the study area. This route follows Coire Iain Oig via various options but all would result in the construction works for the Proposed

²¹ Given that this development is of a scale that would have otherwise been classified as 'Major' by the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009.

Development being a prominent feature within the view. However, this effect is predicted to reduce and become not significant during operation, as the lattice tower structures would be less prominent against the backdrop of hills in the longer term.

13.2.3 In order for the competent authority to assess the potential effects of the Proposed Development on the integrity of European designated sites, information in the form of a shadow HRA has been undertaken. The information provided demonstrates that the Proposed Development would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of such sites.

FIGURES



Legend

Overhead Line (OHL) Works

- Proposed Tower Location
- Proposed Overhead Line (OHL)
- Limit of Deviation (LoD) for Proposed OHL (50m either side of OHL alignment)

Ancillary Development

- Indicative Underground Cable (UGC) Alignment
- LoD for Proposed UGC (50m either side of UGC alignment)
- CSE Compound Outlines
- New - Temporary Access
- New - Permanent Access Tracks

Existing Infrastructure

- Stronelairg Wind Farm Turbines
- Stronelairg Wind Farm Access Tracks
- Existing Access Tracks
- Melgarve Substation

Consented Wind Farm Infrastructure

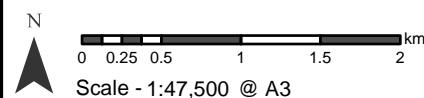
- Cloiche Turbines
- Cloiche Access Tracks
- Cloiche Substation

Proposed Wind Farm Infrastructure

- Dell Turbines
- Dell Access Tracks
- Dell Substation

Ecological Designations

- Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)
- Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- Special Protection Area (SPA)



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Project: Melgarve Cluster Project:
Environmental Impact Assessment:
Non Technical Summary

Title: Figure 1 - The Proposed Development
and Environmental Designations

Drawn by: CG/AW/HL Date: 28/03/2024

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