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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 This Environmental Appraisal (EA) 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. In this EA "the Applicant" and "SSEN Transmission" are used interchangeably unless the context requires otherwise. The EA has been prepared to accompany an application for consent under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 ("the 1989 Act").
- 1.1.2 The application seeks consent under section 37 of the 1989 Act to construct and operate a new single circuit 132 kV overhead line (OHL) between the consented Achany Wind Farm Extension on-site substation¹ and the existing Shin substation, the locations of which are shown on Figure 1.1: Location Plan. Deemed planning permission under section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended) is also sought.
- 1.1.3 This new single circuit 132 kV OHL connection is known as the "Achany Wind Farm Extension Grid Connection". The project, hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development', is being driven by the requirement to provide a grid connection for the consented Achany Wind Farm Extension¹.
- 1.1.4 The Proposed Development would include the following works (see also **Figure 1.2: Overview of the Proposed Development**):
 - The installation and operation of approximately 16 km of new trident H-wood pole 132 kV OHL. This would commence at a new Cable Sealing End ("CSE") structure at approximate grid reference: NC 45724 07688, which lies approximately 1.2 km south-west of the consented Achany Wind Farm Extension on-site substation (approximate grid reference: NC 46355 08761). The OHL would terminate at the existing Shin substation at approximate grid reference: NH 57220 97484.
 - Ancillary works required to facilitate the construction and operation of the Proposed Development, including tree felling and vegetation clearance, temporary measures to protect road and water crossings, upgrades to existing access tracks and existing access points, new permanent and temporary (likely trackway) access routes, permanent stone hardstanding areas related to the CSE structure, and associated working areas around infrastructure to facilitate construction.
- 1.1.5 The Proposed Development would also include the following works, which would fall under the Applicant's permitted development rights²:
 - Approximately 1.2 km of Underground Cable (UGC) between the Achany Wind Farm Extension on-site substation and the proposed CSE structure to the south-west³.

1.2 Background to the Proposed Development

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. In terms of 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 Received consent from the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit in May 2023, reference number ECU00001930.

² Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992

³ As Permitted Development works do not require specific express consent, an appraisal of effects likely to arise from installation of the UGC are included separately in **Appendix 1.1: Permitted Development Works Appraisal**.

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1.2.2 The consented Achany Wind Farm Extension will comprise 18 turbines and will have an approximate generating capacity in excess of 80 Megawatts (MW). It is located approximately 4.5 km north of the village of Rosehall, 11 km north-west of Lairg (see Figure 1.1) and requires connection to the electricity transmission network at Shin substation by 30 March 2028 in accordance with agreements between SSEN Transmission, National Grid Electricity System Operator (as operator of the National Grid), and SSE Renewables (as developer of the wind farm). It is proposed that this would be achieved via the construction and operation of a new 132 kV single circuit connection, between the wind farm's on-site substation and Shin substation, being the Proposed Development (see Figure 1.2).

Routeing and Alignment Process

- 1.2.3 As described in **Chapter 2: Routeing Process and Alternatives** of this EA, the Proposed Development has been subject to a routeing process in which alternative routes for connection between the Achany Wind Farm Extension and Shin substation were compared to find the best option based on the most appropriate balance between environmental, technical and economic factors.
- 1.2.4 Following this, a study of alignment options within the chosen route was carried out to inform the selection of a proposed alignment and design solution to take forward for section 37 consent.
- 1.2.5 **Section 1.6** of this Chapter provides an overview of the consultation carried out with statutory consultees and members of the public as part of the routeing and alignment process, and **Chapter 2** outlines how the routeing and alignment processes responded to the consultations undertaken.

1.3 Legislative and Statutory Context

- 1.3.1 Consent for the OHL and CSE components of the Proposed Development is sought from Scottish Ministers under section 37 of the 1989 Act. The 1989 Act is the primary legislation governing the electricity supply industry in Great Britain and places statutory obligations upon a licence holder.
- 1.3.2 Installation of the UGC falls under the Applicant's permitted development rights². As such these works do not require specific express consent. The assessment of potential effects from the installation of the UGC are however included in Appendix 1.1: Permitted Development Works Appraisal for completeness.

1.4 The Need for the Environmental Appraisal (EA)

- 1.4.1 Applications under section 37 of the 1989 Act are subject to the requirements of the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, hereafter referred to as "the EIA Regulations".
- 1.4.2 The Proposed Development is classified as Schedule 2 development under the EIA Regulations by virtue of it being classed as:

"The carrying out of development (other than development which is Schedule 1 development) to provide any of the following -

- (2) an electric line installed above ground -
- (a) with a voltage of 132 kilovolts or more"
- 1.4.3 A Screening Opinion was sought from Scottish Ministers, as consenting authority, for consideration under the EIA Regulations to determine whether the section 37 application for the OHL would constitute 'EIA Development'. The Screening Request was submitted in June 2023⁴. A Screening Opinion was received on 21 August 2023, noting that a full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report would not be required. The

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⁴ SSEN Transmission (2023) Achany Wind Farm Extension Grid Connection Screening Request (June 2023)



Screening Opinion received is included as Appendix 1.2: Achany Wind Farm Extension Grid Connection Works: Electricity Act (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017: Screening Opinion.

- 1.4.4 The Applicant recognises that the Proposed Development may give rise to some environmental effects. As such, whilst a formal EIA is not required, a voluntary Environmental Appraisal (EA) has been undertaken, including a number of environmental studies, the results of which are detailed in this EA. Mitigation measures that have been identified to prevent, reduce or offset an effect, are identified within the relevant technical chapters and consolidated within **Chapter 10: Schedule of Mitigation**.
- 1.4.5 The comments and advice received as part of the Screening Opinion informed the assessments carried out and information presented within this EA. Further details are included within the relevant technical chapters of this EA.
- 1.4.6 The assessment of potential environmental effects and preparation of the EA has been co-ordinated by environmental and landscape consultants ASH on behalf of SSEN Transmission. The core ASH team has been supported by specialists providing inputs on terrestrial ecology (habitats and mammals), ornithology, geology, hydrology and hydrogeology, cultural heritage and forestry. Appendix 1.3: EA Team summarises the EA Team details.
- 1.4.7 Other inputs relating to construction and future maintenance of the Proposed Development have been provided by SSEN Transmission.

1.5 Structure of the Environmental Appraisal

- 1.5.1 The EA is reported in one volume including text, figures and appendices.
- 1.5.2 The EA is structured as follows:
 - Chapter 1 Introduction and Background;
 - Chapter 2 Routeing Process and Alternatives;
 - Chapter 3 The Proposed Development;
 - Chapter 4 Landscape and Visual Amenity;
 - Chapter 5 Ecology;
 - Chapter 6 Ornithology;
 - Chapter 7 Geology, Hydrology and Hydrogeology;
 - Chapter 8 Cultural Heritage;
 - Chapter 9 Forestry; and
 - Chapter 10 Schedule of Mitigation.
- 1.5.3 These Chapters are supported by a series of figures and appendices, as appropriate.
- 1.5.4 As described in **Section 1.3**, the appraisal of effects likely to arise from installation of the UGC are included in **Appendix 1.1**, rather than within the chapters noted above, given that they fall under the Applicant's permitted development rights.

1.6 Consultation

1.6.1 Consultation with statutory consultees has been undertaken to agree the proposed scope of environmental surveys and / or assessments associated with the Proposed Development. The statutory consultees and key stakeholders that were part of preliminary consultations included Energy Consents Unit (ECU), Forestry and



Land Scotland (FLS), NatureScot, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), Historic Environment Scotland (HES), and The Highland Council (THC), including local ward councillors. Further details on consultations undertaken are included in the relevant technical chapters of this EA.

Public Consultation

- 1.6.2 The approach to public consultation has ensured that the local community has been given the opportunity to comment on the Proposed Development and provide feedback throughout its development. This has enabled locally important issues and concerns to be identified and subsequently considered. Consultation feedback has been pivotal in the design evolution of the project.
- 1.6.3 At the routeing selection stage, an in-person consultation event, advertised in the local press, on SSEN Transmission social media channels and on the dedicated project website⁵, took place on:
 - 22 November 2022 at Lairg Community Centre in Lairg.
- 1.6.4 SSEN Transmission also organised a public exhibition at alignment selection stage, advertised in the same ways as set out above, on:
 - 14 June 2023 at Rosehall Hall in Rosehall.
- 1.6.5 A mail drop of a booklet and letter informing residents of the events was also carried out to around 1,390 households along the Proposed Development ahead of both of the consultation events.
- 1.6.6 Further details of the consultation process can be found in the Routeing Report on Consultation⁶ and the Alignment Report on Consultation⁷. Both reports are available via the project website⁵.

1.7 Representations to the Application

1.7.1 Representations with respect to the section 37 application should be made to the ECU. These can be made via the ECU's case search webpage at: https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationSearch.aspx.

⁵ SSEN Transmission (2025) Achany Wind Farm Extension Connection, Online, available at: https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/projectmap/achany-wind-farm-extension-connection, [accessed 13th March 2025].

⁶ SSEN Transmission (2023) Achany Wind Farm Extension Grid Connection Report on Consultation – Route Options (April 2023)

⁷ SSEN Transmission (2024) Achany Wind Farm Extension Grid Connection Report on Consultation – Alignment Options (September 2024)