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Appendices

There are no appendices associated with this Chapter

Figures

4. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL AMENITY

4.1 Executive Summary

4.1.1 This Chapter describes the landscape and visual appraisal (LVA) for the Proposed Development. The LVA considers potential effects of the Proposed Development during construction and during operation, after approximately 10 years once reinstatement measures are assumed to have established.

4.1.2 The LVA has considered the potential for effects to the landscape character and visual amenity within a study area of 1.5 km from the proposed OHL alignment. A summary of effects is provided below.

Landscape Effects

4.1.3 The landscape appraisal has considered the potential for effects on landscape character and any designated or protected landscape areas within the study area. The appraisal has determined that there would be some limited effects on landscape character including localised skylining. However, the managed pattern of forest cover across the study area and setting of existing infrastructure around Shin substation would easily accommodate the Proposed Development with little perceptible change to landscape characteristics. Over time, the Proposed Development would be further accommodated within ongoing forest restructuring and is unlikely to result in any noticeable change to the landscape character of the study area.

Visual Effects

4.1.4 The appraisal of visual effects has considered the potential for effects on views experienced by residents, recreational users and road travellers within the study area. This has identified a small number of adverse visual effects likely to result from the Proposed Development, affecting residents, recreational users and travellers within the study area. However, the majority of these effects are predicted to be Minor in nature with one, recreational trail which already passes through the existing Rosehall Wind Farm (Core Path SU21.02: Sika Trail Cycle Route), being Minor – Moderate. Overall, none of these effects are predicted to lead to any notable reduction to visual amenity within the study area.

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Effects

4.1.5 The LVA has considered the potential for cumulative effects where the Proposed Development could combine with other developments proposed and increase the level of predicted effects. However, no cumulative effects are predicted.

4.2 Introduction

4.2.1 This Chapter presents the findings of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) which has been undertaken for the Proposed Development, including details of proposed landscape mitigation. The purpose of the LVA is to identify and describe likely landscape and visual effects arising from the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. It does not identify the likely significance of these effects.

4.2.2 The appraisal has been undertaken by Chartered Landscape Architects at ASH design + assessment Ltd (ASH), a registered practice with the Landscape Institute. The assessment has been prepared with reference to the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition[1] (GLVIA3). A table presenting relevant qualifications and experience of key staff involved in the preparation of this Chapter is included in **Appendix 1.3: EA Team**.

[1] Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. (2013). *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition.*

4.3 Scope of Appraisal

4.3.1 The LVA considers the effects of the Proposed Development, as described in **Chapter 3: The Proposed Development** of this Environmental Appraisal (EA) and illustrated on **Figure 3.1a-e: The Proposed Development**. Although closely related to one another, effects on landscape character and visual amenity have been considered separately for reasons of clarity and robustness.

4.3.2 As noted within **Chapter 1: Introduction**, one section of the Proposed Development includes a proposed technology of underground cable (UGC). The proposed UGC section is classed as permitted development under Class 40 1(a) of The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992. **Appendix 1.1: Permitted Development Works Appraisal**, the Permitted Development Works Appraisal reports the findings of the LVA for the proposed UGC and its construction.

4.3.3 Landscape and visual effects associated with the Proposed Development have been appraised at two points in time:

- During construction; and
- During operation, after approximately 10 years once reinstatement measures are assumed to have established.

4.3.4 Proposed landscape mitigation is described in paragraph 4.7.5.

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

4.3.5 The scope of the LVA has been informed by a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) (see **Figure 4.1: Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)**). The ZTV is a computer-generated diagram which uses a terrain model to indicate areas from which the Proposed Development would theoretically be visible. The ZTV for the Proposed Development has been prepared using Ordnance Survey (OS) Terrain 5 digital terrain model (T5 DTM) and ESRI ArcGIS software.

4.3.6 The ZTV for the Proposed Development has been produced following best practice guidance from NatureScot[2] and based on the following heights:

- Proposed Development: The designed height of each pole, as detailed in the indicative pole schedule (see **Appendix 3.1: Indicative Pole Schedule**); and
- Viewer height: 2 m above existing ground level.

4.3.7 The model uses earth curvature with light refraction set to 0.075 in accordance with the NatureScot guidance.

4.3.8 ZTVs are useful tools to aid the identification of potential effects but are not indicative of an effect in itself since they are generated over bare ground terrain models and do not take into account the potential screening effects of localised features, buildings or vegetation. Nor do they indicate ways in which a development may relate to its broader landscape context.

4.3.9 The ZTV shows theoretical visibility from ground level and therefore does not indicate potential visibility from other heights (e.g. 2nd storey, 3rd storey buildings) and so site appraisal is critical in appraising and evaluating on-site visibility.

Study Area

4.3.10 Following an initial site appraisal and review of the ZTV, it was considered that potential landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development would be likely to be limited to an area within 1.5 km of the Proposed Development. As such, a 1.5 km radius study area offset from the proposed wood pole OHL alignment has been adopted for the appraisal, as shown on **Figure 4.1**.

[2] NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) (2017) *Visual Representation of Wind Farms. Guidance. Version 2.2* February 2017

Screening

4.3.11 As described in **Chapter 1**, a Screening Opinion was received from Scottish Government on 21 August 2023 relating to the Proposed Development (see **Appendix 1.2**). The Screening Opinion determined that an EIA was not required for the Proposed Development and recognised that the potential for landscape and visual effects to be significant was unlikely.

Issues Scoped Out of Appraisal

4.3.12 Effects arising from the process of decommissioning are considered to be of a similar nature and duration to those arising from the construction process and therefore have not been appraised separately in this LVA. Therefore, potential construction effects referenced in the appraisal are representative of predicted decommissioning effects.

Cumulative Effects

4.3.13 A search for other similar consented developments, or developments for which an application has been submitted, with the potential to affect the landscape character or visual amenity within the study area has been undertaken[3]. No developments have been identified which are considered likely to lead to any noticeable changes to the baseline of the study area. The consented Achany Wind Farm Extension has been considered within the baseline for the appraisal, as the Proposed Development is reliant on its construction and operation.

Visualisations

4.3.14 One visualisation has been produced to illustrate the likely appearance of the Proposed Development within the landscape upon completion, after approximately 10 years once vegetation reinstatement is assumed to have taken place. The visualisation has been produced in accordance with THC visualisation guidance[4], at approximate Grid Reference NH 52091, 01730 from the A839 (see **Figures 4.5a-c: Visualisation Location 1**). The visualisation is representative of views obtained by travellers on the public road at the crossing point of the Proposed Development.

4.4 Consultation

4.4.1 The consultation process for the Proposed Development is described in **Chapter 2**. **Table 4.1: Consultation Responses** below, sets out the comments received from consultees in relation to landscape and visual amenity and the actions taken to address them within this appraisal.

Table 4.1: Consultation Responses

Organisation and Date / Project stage	Summary of Consultation Response	Response to Consultee
NatureScot July 2023 / Alignment Stage	NatureScot noted that the Proposed Development would lie within Wild Land Area (WLA) 34: Reay – Cassley. NatureScot acknowledged that the new OHL would sit within the context of the consented Achany Wind Farm Extension (once built) and therefore additional effects from the Proposed Development may not be significant. However, they noted that this should be assessed as part of a landscape and visual impact assessment, to inform any future planning application.	The Screening Opinion as received 21 August 2023 determined that a full EIA was not required for the Proposed Development and recognised that the potential for landscape and visual effects to be significant was unlikely. Therefore, as described above, a LVA has been undertaken rather than a full landscape and visual impact assessment. Given the unlikelihood for effects to the WLA, this has been scoped out of the LVA (see paragraph **4.3.12**).

[3] *Based on a cumulative baseline search of consented or submitted planning applications three months prior to submission of the application to allow finalisation of the EA.*

[4] The Highland Council (2016). *Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments*

4.5 Methodology

Appraisal Guidance

4.5.1 The appraisal has been prepared with reference to GLVIA3[1] and Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland (NatureScot (formerly SNH) and The Countryside Agency, 2002)[5].

Professional Judgement

4.5.2 GLVIA3 places a strong emphasis on the importance of professional judgement in identifying and defining landscape and visual effects. As part of this appraisal, professional judgement has been used in combination with structured methods and criteria to evaluate landscape value, sensitivity, magnitude and level of effect.

There are four key stages to the appraisal:

- Establishment of the baseline;
- Appreciation of the development proposed;
- Identification of key landscape and visual receptors; and
- Identification and appraisal of potential effects.

Establishment of the Baseline

4.5.3 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through a combination of desk study and site appraisal. The desk study has involved review the following general documents and sources:

- The Highland–wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP)[6];
- The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan[7]
- The Highland Council (THC) Core Paths Interactive Map [online][8];
- Online mapping and aerial photography resources from Ordnance Survey, Google, Bing and National Library of Scotland.
- Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Descriptions from the National Landscape Character Assessment of Scotland (SNH, 2019 [online][9]); and
- The Screening Opinion (see paragraph 4.3.11).

4.5.4 Site visits were undertaken by two landscape architects from ASH in May 2024 for the purposes of the LVA, and the identification of potential visual receptors and the nature and context of the types of views obtained.

<u>Landscape Value</u>

4.5.5 The value of the landscape is an important consideration in informing later judgement of likely effects. Landscape value concerns the perceived importance of the landscape when considered as a whole, and within the context of the study area, and is established through consideration of the following factors:

- Presence of landscape designations, other inventory or registered landscapes / landscape features or identified planning constraints;
- The scenic quality of the landscape;
- Perceptual aspects, such as wildness or tranquillity;

[5] NatureScot (formerly Scottish Natural Heritage) and The Countryside Agency (2002). *Landscape Character Assessment. Guidance for England and Scotland.*

[6] The Highland Council (2012) *The Highland – wide Local Development Plan*

[7] The Highland Council (2018) *The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan*

[8] The Highland Council, Core Paths Interactive Map [ONLINE]: https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fd3fc9c72d545f7bcf1b43bf5c8445f [accessed 10th June 2024].

[9] NatureScot (2019) Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions. Available at: https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions [Accessed on 10th June 2024]

- Conservation interests such as cultural heritage features or associations, or if the landscape supports notable habitats or species;
- Recreational value; and
- Rarity, either in the national or local context, or if it is considered to be a particularly important example of a specific landscape type.

4.5.6 It should be noted that absence of a designation does not necessarily mean that a landscape or component is not highly valued, as factors such as accessibility and local scarcity can render areas of nationally unremarkable quality highly valuable as a local resource.

4.5.7 Criteria for the allocation of perceived landscape value are outlined in **Table 4.2: Relative Landscape Value Criteria**.

Table 4.2: Relative Landscape Value Criteria

Landscape Value	Criteria
High	• The landscape is closely associated with features of international or national importance which are rare within the wider context; • The landscape is of high scenic quality and forms a key part of an important designated landscape or planning constraint; and / or • The landscape is an example of a scarce resource within the local context and is of considerable local importance for its, scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Medium	• The landscape is associated with features of national or regional importance which are relatively common within the wider context; • The landscape forms part of a designated landscape or is associated with other features of importance but is not rare or distinctive within the local context; and / or • The landscape is one of a number within the local context appreciated for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Low	• The landscape characteristics are common within the local and regional context and the landscape is not associated with any particular features or attributes considered to be important; and / or • The landscape is of poor scenic quality and is not appreciated for any recreational or cultural associations.

Appreciation of the Development Proposed

4.5.8 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline landscape, and any peripheral or ancillary features proposed. Analysis of the proposed activities and changes which would take place leads to an understanding of the potential effects that may occur to the landscape and visual resource.

4.5.9 This stage has included review of all available desk-based information relating to the Proposed Development in terms of its long term physical appearance and requirements for construction and access. Photographs of similar equipment were reviewed to gain a good understanding of the likely appearance of the Proposed Development.

Identification of Key Landscape and Visual Receptors

4.5.10 The identification of key landscape and visual receptors with the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development is the first step in the appraisal of likely effects. Landscape and visual receptors can be described as follows.

4.5.11 Landscape receptors comprise key characteristics or individual features which contribute to the value of the landscape and have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. Landscape receptors are identified through analysis of baseline characteristics when considered in relation to the impacts which might result from a development of the type proposed.

4.5.12 Visual receptors comprise individuals experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes and popular viewpoints used by the public. Potential visual receptors are identified through analysis of desk resources, mapping and field survey, as described under 'Establishment of the Baseline' above. A review of the ZTV in the context of site survey is used to identify the potential for visual receptors to be affected by the Proposed Development.

Identification of Potential Effects

4.5.13 The second step in the appraisal process involves the identification of potential effects which may occur as a result of the interaction of the Proposed Development with the identified landscape and visual receptors.

4.5.14 The LVA takes into account direct effects upon existing views, landscape elements, features and key characteristics and, also, indirect effects which may occur secondarily to changes affecting another landscape component or area. The identification of potential effects is a two-fold process, giving consideration as to how these effects may arise from aspects of the Proposed Development and how they may be accommodated by the existing baseline features.

4.5.15 Where it is established that potential effects could be limited by mitigation measures, these are also given consideration.

4.5.16 Potential effects are evaluated through the allocation of criteria for sensitivity and magnitude.

Landscape and Visual Sensitivity

4.5.17 Sensitivity concerns the nature of the baseline landscape or visual receptor, and its ability to accommodate development of the type proposed without compromising its key characteristics and / or composition.

4.5.18 There are two aspects which contribute to the evaluation of landscape and visual sensitivity: value and susceptibility to change. The consideration of these two separate aspects for landscape and visual amenity is outlined below:

- Landscape:
  - Value: The baseline value of the landscape and the contributory value of individual landscape receptors to the landscape as a whole; and
  - Susceptibility: The ability of landscape receptors to accommodate development of the type proposed without changing the intrinsic qualities of the landscape as a whole.
- Visual Amenity:
  - Value: The baseline value of a particular view to the visual receptor, including the perceived; and
  - Susceptibility: The susceptibility of the viewer to changes to the view, giving consideration to the particular activity they may be involved in and also the composition of the baseline view and importance of the proposed area of change as a part of the view.

4.5.19 Criteria for the evaluation of sensitivity to change are presented in **Table 4.3: Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Criteria**.

Table 4.3: Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Criteria

Sensitivity Rating	Landscape Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
High	A highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present.
Medium	A reasonably valued landscape with a composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present; • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present; • roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and • workplaces where the changed aspect is an important element of the view and there are no detracting features present.
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape which is potentially tolerant of a large degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: • dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and / or numerous detracting features are present; • recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and / or where numerous detracting feature are present; • roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present; and • workplaces where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present.

Magnitude of Change

4.5.20 Magnitude of change concerns the extent to which the existing landscape character or view would be altered by the Proposed Development. Elements specific to the evaluation of magnitude of change for landscape and visual amenity are detailed below:

- Landscape:
    - The degree to which features or characteristics may be removed, altered or added within the landscape;
    - The geographical extent of proposed changes;
    - Whether changes would be direct or indirect; and
    - The potential duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).
- Visual Amenity:
    - The scale or extent of proposed changes within the view;

- The location of proposed changes within the view, relevant to other existing features;
- The extent to which this may alter the composition or focus of the view; and
- The duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).

4.5.21 Criteria for the evaluation of magnitude of change are presented in **Table 4.4: Landscape and Visual Magnitude of Change Criteria**. In recognition of the differing changes that would occur over time, two ratings for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and approximately 10 years post construction, once landscape / habitat reinstatement and any other mitigation or planting has had time to establish.

Table 4.4: Landscape and Visual Magnitude of Change Criteria

Magnitude Rating	Landscape	Visual
High	Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive change over a more limited area.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a very noticeable change in the existing view.
Medium	Perceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to notable change in a localised area.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a noticeable change in the existing view.
Low	Virtually imperceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or perceptible change in a localised area.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a perceptible change in the existing view.
Negligible	No discernible change in any landscape characteristics or components.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view.

Appraisal of Effects

4.5.22 Appraisal of likely effects has been carried out through the analysis of the anticipated magnitude of change in relation to the landscape or visual sensitivity, taking into account any proposed mitigation measures, and is established using professional judgement.

4.5.23 In recognition of the potential for effects to vary over time, the appraisal has considered effects at two different stages: during the construction phase and during operation, once landscape / habitat reinstatement measures and any mitigation measures or other planting have been allowed to establish. This is assumed to be approximately 10 years after the completion of construction and reinstatement works.

4.5.24 The appraisal is based on the following considerations:

- Landscape Effects:
  - The potential for effects upon existing landscape receptors and the extent to which these would be lost or modified in the context of their importance in determining the existing baseline character.
- Visual Effects:
  - The likely changes to the visual composition, including the extent to which new features would distract or screen existing elements in the view or disrupt the scale, structure or focus of the existing view.

4.5.25 The potential for effects to be both adverse or beneficial is taken into account.

4.5.26 Criteria for the appraisal of effects are detailed in **Table 4.5: Criteria for the Appraisal of Landscape and Visual Effects**.

Table 4.5: Criteria for the Appraisal of Landscape and Visual Effects

Rating	Landscape Effects	Visual Effects
Major Adverse	The Proposed Development is at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and would be a dominant feature, resulting in considerable reduction in scenic quality and large scale change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would become a prominent and very detracting feature and would result in a very noticeable deterioration to an existing highly valued and well composed view.
Moderate Adverse	The Proposed Development is out of scale with the landscape, or inconsistent with the local pattern and landform and may be locally dominant and / or result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would introduce some detracting features to an existing highly valued view or would be more prominent within a pleasing or less well composed view, resulting in a noticeable deterioration of the quality of view.
Minor Adverse	The Proposed Development does not quite fit with the scale, landform or local pattern of the landscape and may be locally intrusive but would result in an inappreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a perceptible but not detracting feature within a pleasing or valued view or would be a prominent feature within a poorly composed view of limited value, resulting in a small deterioration to the existing view.
Negligible	The Proposed Development sits well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and would not result in any discernible reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a barely perceptible feature within the existing view and would not result in any discernible deterioration or improvement to the view.
Minor Beneficial	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a small or localised improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a fairly attractive feature and / or remove a fairly detracting feature from an existing less well composed view, resulting in a small improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.
Moderate Beneficial	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would become a new attractive feature within, or result in the removal or partial removal of an existing detracting feature from, a poorly composed or less well composed view leading to a noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.
Major Beneficial	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a very noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a prominent new attractive feature within, or result in the removal of an existing very detracting feature from, a poorly composed view leading to a very noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.

Limitations and Assumptions

4.5.27 The LVA is subject to the following limitations and assumptions:

- This LVA comprises an appraisal of predicted landscape and visual effects. It is not intended to assess the significance of these effects.
- The prominence of the Proposed Development in the landscape and views will vary according to the prevailing weather conditions. The LVA has been carried out, as is best practice, by assuming the 'worst case' scenario i.e. on a clear, bright day in winter, when neither foreground deciduous foliage nor haze can interfere with the clarity of the view obtained.
- A ZTV is used to inform the LVA. The limitations and technical specifications for production of ZTVs are included in paragraphs 4.3.5 to 4.3.9.
- The field appraisal of visual effects has been undertaken from public roads, footpaths or open spaces. For residential receptors, assumptions have been made about the types of rooms in buildings and about the types and importance of views from these rooms. For there to be a visual effect, there is the need for a viewer and therefore only buildings that are in use have been considered in the LVA.
- The appraisal of effects on visual receptors occupying buildings such as residences and public buildings includes consideration of potential for views from exterior areas associated with the building including gardens where appropriate. These effects are referenced where relevant.
- The LVA reflects the baseline situation at the time of site work (May 2024) and therefore does not take account of any changes to the landscape fabric which have taken place after this date.

4.6 Landscape and Visual Baseline Conditions

Landscape and Visual Context

4.6.1 The Proposed Development would be situated around 6 km to the west and south-west of the village of Lairg, in central Sutherland, occupying an area to the north to Kyle of Sutherland and west of Glen Cassley. This is a landscape characterised by a broad plateau featuring a mosaic of managed coniferous forest plantation and moorland which slopes down to a wide strath of open fields and river terraces, woodlands and wetland surrounding the broad tidal reaches of the Kyle of Sutherland. Small scale scattered settlement is focussed around the slopes of the strath with occasional farm properties set on the higher plateau within the forest mosaic.

4.6.2 The northern part of the study area rises into low hills which form the southern edge of an extensive area of upland moorland and mountain leading to the north-west. Wind turbines situated on the hills above the edge of the forest form a prominent characteristic and are seen across much of the study area. This area of wind turbines would be increased with the construction of the Achany Wind Farm Extension although there would be little visibility of these additional turbines across the study area. Existing OHL infrastructure is also present within the surrounding landscape, most notably in the south around the Kyle of Sutherland where a number of OHLs converge at the Shin substation.

Landscape Designations

4.6.3 There are no designated landscapes within the study area, with the closest being the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area (NSA) which lies approximately 7 km to the south-west. The Proposed Development is unlikely to be perceptible at this distance and therefore, potential effects on the NSA have not been appraised.

4.6.4 Wild Land Areas (WLA) have been defined by NatureScot as those areas comprising the greatest and most extensive areas of wild characteristics within Scotland. Although not a designation, these areas are given protection within the planning system through National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4).

4.6.5 The presence of wildness is based on the presence and strength of four perceptual responses identified in NatureScot Policy Statement Wildness in Scotland's Countryside (SNH, 2002) as follows:

- A sense of sanctuary or solitude;
- Risk or, for some visitors, a sense of awe or anxiety, depending on the individual's emotional response to the setting;
- Perceptions that the landscape has arresting or inspiring qualities; and
- Fulfilment from the physical challenge required to penetrate into these places.

4.6.6 Because these responses are very much dependant on an individual's perceptions, five physical attributes are identified as considered likely to lead to these perceptual responses being present. These are:

- A high degree of perceived naturalness in the setting, especially in its vegetation cover and wildlife, and in the natural processes affecting the land;
- The lack of any modern artefacts or structures;
- Little evidence of contemporary human uses of the land;
- Landform which is rugged, or otherwise physically challenging; and
- Remoteness and / or inaccessibility.

4.6.7 Although not a formal designation, a small part of the northern end of the study area falls within the Reay – Cassley Wild Land Area (WLA 34) (see **Figure 4.2: Designated and Protected Landscapes**). Approximately 1.3 km of the Proposed Development falls within this area including 0.4 km of wood pole OHL and 0.9 km of buried cable. However, this part of the WLA also falls within the boundary of the consented Achany Wind Farm Extension and would therefore become strongly characterised by the proposed wind turbines which would limit the presence of wild land attributes in this area. Therefore, the potential for the Proposed Development to affect the wild land qualities of the WLA is very unlikely, and the WLA has not been considered for further appraisal within LVA. This is consistent with advice from NatureScot at Screening stage.

Landscape Character

4.6.8 NatureScot has undertaken detailed review and classification of the various landscape areas and types of Scotland at a national level (Landscape Character Assessment of Scotland, NatureScot, 2019)[9]. The study area is contained within two LCTs (see **Figure 4.3: Landscape character Types**):

- LCT 135 Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland; and
- LCT 142 Strath - Caithness & Sutherland.

<u>LCT 135 Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland</u>

4.6.9 This LCT covers the majority of the study area, incorporating the higher ground towards the east and northeast. This is vast and variable landscape type which covers extensive areas of central and east Sutherland and is composed of broad, rolling hills and moorlands with a predominant cover of heather moorland, and some coniferous forest cover on lower slopes and within glens. It has a dispersed settlement pattern, with the majority of the area being uninhabited and occasional farms and crofts on lower slopes adjoining glens.

4.6.10 Within the study area, the LCT is largely characterised by a mosaic of coniferous and moorland with occasional contained areas of settlement set within pockets of improved grassland and woodland planting. The northern part of the study area rises into a range of low hills which are occupied by the existing Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms which strongly influence this part of the study area. This influence would be increased with the construction of the Achany Wind Farm Extension further to the north.

4.6.11 Key landscape characteristics comprise:

- Rolling hills forming broad, subtly rounded summits but with some more pronounced hills also occurring, often featuring steeper slopes along the coast or where truncated by deep glens;
- Hills cut by numerous narrow burns and small lochans lie within dips, corries and on plateau summits;
- Predominantly dense heather ground cover and moorland grasses, but also some areas of bog;

- Fragments of broadleaf woodland in inaccessible locations;
- Scarcely settled with a largely uninhabited interior and widely scattered crofts and farms on lower slopes adjoining straths and farmed landscapes;
- Narrow glens and lower hill slopes often rich in archaeology with features such as standing stones, brochs and medieval townships;
- Wind farms located in more accessible and generally lower rolling hills, either close to extensive forestry or the high voltage transmission line aligned broadly parallel to the south-east Sutherland coast;
- Convex character of hill slopes limiting distant visibility and views of the hill tops when travelling through the landscape;
- Views into the interior of the hills very restricted; and
- Strong sense of wild character can be experienced within the more remote and little modified parts of this landscape.

4.6.12 The landscape value is considered to be Medium. The north of the study area falls partly within WLA 34: Reay – Cassley and has some value for its wild characteristics in this context, but wild land characteristics are already reduced in this area by the turbines of the Achany Wind Farm and would be further reduced with the construction of the Achany Wind Farm Extension. The LCT has local value as a setting to residential areas, core paths and as a recreational resource for local people but it is relatively common within the wider context.

LCT 142 Strath - Caithness & Sutherland.

4.6.13 This LCT covers the south-east end of the study area where it passes into the Kyle of Sutherland around where it meets with the Achany Glen, and also fringes the western edge of the study area where it passes alongside Glen Cassley which extends further to the north. The LCT incorporates a range of different straths within Caithness and Sutherland. Within the study area, the Kyle of Sutherland is a typically open, and flat-bottomed strath with a wide, tidal river. Woodland and forest plantation cloth the glen sides, whilst the floor comprises a mosaic of open improved farmland, woodland and areas of wetland. Glen Cassley to the north comprises a somewhat more enclosed glen with a more upland character, contained by rounded hills, with native woodlands and forest along much of the valley-sides whilst Achany Glen is typically more focussed, narrow and wooded. The glens provide important transport corridors through the surrounding hills and feature rural roads. OHL development is notably prominent around the confluence of Kyle of Sutherland and Achany Glen where various steel lattice towers of OHLs converge at the Shin substation. Settlement is typically strung along the upper valley-side of the Kyle of Sutherland but with concentrations on the lower glen floors at the meeting points of Glen Cassley (Rosehall) and Achany Glen (Invershin and Inveran). The upper part of Glen Cassley is more remote.

4.6.14 Key landscape characteristics comprise:

- River terraces and hummocky lower side slopes are a common feature;
- Water is a key characteristic with straths accommodating a central river meandering across the floodplain, often traced by clumps of birch and alder;
- Lochs in some straths, where a string of small lochs add to the scenic richness of the lower strath;
- Areas of wetland often present on the strath floors;
- Smooth and fairly large pastures are the predominant land cover on the floodplains of the straths, commonly enclosed by wire fences;
- Semi-improved pastures, heather and grass moorland and coniferous plantations covering lower side slopes;
- Increasing extent of moorland and woodland generally further up the straths, where the floodplain narrows and settlement is sparser;

- Smaller strip-fields present on often hummocky, lower side slopes and associated with croft houses arranged in linear groups raised on terraces above the floodplain and sometimes backed by woodland;
- Some crofts within the straths more randomly dispersed or staggered on lower hill slopes;
- Occasional small farms located in the broader and more fertile parts of the straths;
- Settlement generally denser within the lower reaches of many straths, especially at bridging points, on the coast and close to major roads;
- Many areas rich in archaeology with cairns, roundhouses, brochs and old field systems, usually found on side slopes;
- Abandoned crofts, particularly within the upper straths and in narrow side glens; and
- Focus in views from roads provided by a number of estate shooting lodges, and clustered, predominantly 19th century, often estate style buildings.

4.6.15 The landscape value is considered to be Medium. This LCT is not covered by any designations within the study area but is valued locally for its accessibility, as a setting for residential settlement, for views towards the wider backdrop of hills and mountains; the open, clearly defined, linear structure of Kyle of Sutherland and wooded and steep glens opening to floodplains and contrasting farmed and settled landscape.

Visual Receptors

4.6.16 Visual receptors within the study area include individuals occupying buildings and surrounding outdoor areas and using routes. Locations identified within the study area where visual receptors may gain views of the Proposed Development are outlined in **Table 4.6: Potential Visual Receptors** and shown on **Figure 4.4: Visual Receptor Locations**. Routes through woodland where views are unlikely have not been included in the visual appraisal.

Table 4.6: Potential Visual Receptors

Ref.	Building-based Visual Receptors	Nature of Existing View
B1	**Settlement areas to south of Kyle of Sutherland** Residents and visitors to a group of properties strung along the south side of Kyle of Sutherland.	North views across the valley, but some properties surrounded by trees filtering the view.
B2	**Glen Rossal** Residents, and visitors to an estate property within Glen Cassley.	Views generally contained by pine woodland surrounding the property.
B3	**Inveran** Residents, and visitors to small group of properties sited close to the Shin Power Station.	Open easterly and southerly views over the River Shin and Kyle of Sutherland, with prominent surrounding steel lattice towers in close proximity. Westerly and northerly views contained by woodland to the rear and side of properties.
B4	**Western Inveran** Residents, and visitors to group of properties situated to the west of the Shin substation.	Generally filtered views towards west and south over Kyle of Sutherland. Views to the east towards Shin substation mostly filtered by structure planting and trees surrounding the properties.
B5	**Linsidemore** Residents, workers and visitors to a range of residential, farm and recreational properties on north side of Kyle of Sutherland.	Mostly elevated views to the south over Kyle of Sutherland, occasionally filtered by hedgerows and trees. Views to the north contained by steep landform and woodland to the rear of the properties.

Ref.	Building-based Visual Receptors	Nature of Existing View
B6	**Netherton** Residents, workers and visitors to group of properties south of the A839.	Mostly open views of mixed orientation with some partially enclosed by tree groups around the properties. Existing wind turbine blades feature in northern views.
B7	**Durcha** Residents, workers and visitors to small group of residential and farm properties to north of A839.	Elevated, typically southerly views across undulating fields, woodland and commercial forest areas with rising forested hills to rear featuring existing wind turbines.
B8	**Tullich / Highland (Shooting Centre)** Residents, workers and visitors to a small group of residential properties and a commercial shooting centre.	Mixed orientation views from the properties which are somewhat contained by surrounding landform, focussed on local features of fields, areas of scrub and small lochans. More open elevated and panoramic views towards surrounding moorland and forested hills from some outdoor areas associated with the shooting centre.
B9	**House near Tullich** Visitors to a holiday home and farm building.	Elevated, open views across surrounding moorland and forest areas, mostly orientated to south and south-west with forest to the east. Rising moorland to rear with forested hills occupied by existing wind turbines.
B10	**Cnoc Solair** Residents and visitors to a 1.5 storey house and associated caravans.	Predominantly westerly view, slightly elevated across railway line and up Kyle of Sutherland. Existing wood poles and steel lattice towers feature within the view.
B11	**Invershin** Residents, workers and visitors to a range of residential properties, community hall and hotel.	Mixed orientation views, mostly enclosed or filtered by trees with glimpses of the surrounding forested hills. Existing steel lattice towers feature in some views.
Ref.	**Route-based Visual Receptors**	**Nature of Existing View**
R1	**Glencassley Minor Road** Travellers and recreational users on single-track through Glencassley.	Changing views, partially enclosed by surrounding woodland and forest with occasional clearings providing framed views up and down the valley and across steep open glen sides. Some turbine blades of Achany Wind Farm Extension would feature above the skyline in these views.
R2	**A837** Travellers on single-track road between Invershin and Rosehall.	Mostly enclosed by trees and landform, more open or filtered views towards eastern end, across undulating fields and Kyle of Sutherland to south and southwest featuring some existing steel lattice towers, OHLs, and Shin substation.
R3	**A836** Travellers on single-track road between Invershin and Lairg.	Views are mostly contained by woodland and landform on both sides of the road, with occasional glimpses across Kyle of Sutherland valley towards undulating hills further west and intervening steel lattice towers.
R4	**A839** Travellers on single-track road between Invercassley and Lairg.	Mostly enclosed by coniferous forestry and landform. Occasional views open up across undulating moorlands, with some widely dispersed settlements and crofts and coniferous forest as the backdrop. Existing OHL wood poles are seen in close proximity.

Ref.	Building-based Visual Receptors	Nature of Existing View
R5	**Core Path: Shin Falls Forest Walk** Walkers, and recreational users on circular, single track core path from Shin Falls Car Park through Shin Forest.	This walk is mostly enclosed by forest with some more open views revealed through clearing or areas of felling, to the west and south, down the glen.
R6	**Core Path: Sika Trail Cycle Route** Recreational users on a cycle route through forest plantation and following Rosehall Wind Farm main access track.	Lower parts of the route are mostly contained on both sides by dense coniferous forestry plantation. More open views from higher parts of the route where trees have been felled are elevated and panoramic across the surrounding landscape to the south and east with wind turbines being prominent in northern and western views.
R7	**Core Path: Rosehall Forest Walks, Deer Park and Wildwood Trail** Recreational users on woodland trails within forest areas around Rosehall.	Views are mostly contained by woodland and landform to the east and northeast, with more open glimpses through clearings.

4.7 Appraisal of Landscape and Visual Effects

The Characteristics of the Proposed Development

4.7.1 The Proposed Development comprises a 132 kV single circuit OHL to connect the proposed Achany Wind Farm Extension to the electricity transmission network at Shin substation. It would consist of approximately 1.2 km of UGC connecting the proposed Achany Wind Farm Extension on-site substation, and approximately 16 km of new trident H-wood pole OHL between a new Cable Sealing End (CSE) structure and the existing Shin substation.

4.7.2 The trident H-wood poles and conductors would comprise the key visible elements of the Proposed Development with potential to affect the landscape and visual resource, with poles ranging in height between approximately 10 m and 15 m depending on the ground terrain. The OHL alignment commences on high ground on the slopes above Glen Cassley, following the contour of the slope south towards forest plantations on the south-west side of Rosehall Wind Farm. The remainder of the route follows close to the edges or passes through areas of forest plantation, often taking advantage of existing cleared areas and forest tracks, within LCT 135 (Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland) and therefore following existing linear patterns within the landscape. The arrival at Shin substation would be through a wooded area, with the tie-in taking advantage of an existing redundant steel lattice tower.

4.7.3 There would be some requirement for localised forest removal to accommodate the Proposed Development (see **Chapter 9: Forestry** and **Figure 9.1: Forestry Operational Corridor**). However, over time this would be accommodated within the ongoing restructuring of the forest.

4.7.4 Access for the construction of the Proposed Development would be largely via existing tracks and temporary solutions such as trackway resulting in generally only short term effects. There would be two sections of new permanent track (approximately 0.1 km) from Achany Extension Wind Farm on-site substation to the CSE structure and (approximately 1.5 km) from Linsidemore to the OHL structure. Whilst construction works may form a temporary focus within some parts of the landscape, these works are likely to appear similar to forestry or farm works which already periodically take place within the study area.

Landscape Mitigation Measures

4.7.5 Mitigation measures are proposed for the Proposed Development in order to minimise landscape and visual effects, as well as to improve the visual appearance and assimilation of the Proposed Development into the landscape setting. Given the generally upland and forest setting of the Proposed Development and lack of longer-term significant effect, no specific mitigation planting is proposed, although ongoing restructuring of forest compartments is anticipated to accommodate the Proposed Development within the wider forest mosaic. Mitigation would therefore comprise the sensitive reinstatement of vegetation around permanent features, including the reinstatement of temporary tracks.

Restoration of Existing Vegetation Types

4.7.6 The construction methods for wood poles generally result in little disruption to the existing vegetation. However, where relevant, natural regeneration would be the preferred method for the restoration of any vegetated areas disturbed during the construction works. This would require the careful stripping, separation, storage and handling of turves and soil / peat prior to construction works commencing, and careful restoration in the correct horizons once works have completed. Should any seeding be required, this should be with an appropriate seed mix in agreement with the project ecologist. Further detail of methods for the peat handling are provided in the Peat Management Plan (see **Appendix 7.2: Peat Management Plan**).

Appraisal of Landscape Effects

LCT 135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland

4.7.7 The forest / moorland mosaic which characterises this LCT with ongoing forest management and restructuring is considered to be generally accommodating of the type development proposed, whilst existing grid infrastructure of varying sizes already provides some precedence for development of this type. Taking account of the Medium landscape value, sensitivity is considered to be Medium – Low for this LCT.

4.7.8 The Proposed Development would cross through this landscape, largely following the edge of forest plantation areas and compartments which form existing lines in the landscape and, towards the south, following the transition between this LCT and LCT 142. It would be unlikely to appear out of place within the majority of the LCT due to the mosaic of different land cover and land use which is present. Due to the rounded landform, there would be some areas where the poles would appear along the skyline and may be slightly more noticeable. However, they would appear generally distant and small in these instances. The Proposed Development may be slightly more prominent at its northern end where it crosses the open hill slopes. However, this area is already strongly influenced by the nearby wind turbines which would be further reinforced by the addition of the Achany Wind Farm Extension. The wood poles would appear less prominent than the existing and proposed wind turbines and would be unlikely to change the overriding character of the landscape to a noticeable degree.

4.7.9 The Proposed Development may be slightly more noticeable during construction when the additional movement of plant and people may draw more focus. However, these activities would be unlikely to appear very different from forestry or farming activities which periodically take place within the LCT.

4.7.10 The magnitude of change would be Low during construction and operation and the landscape effect is predicted to be **Minor Adverse** during both construction and operation.

LCT 142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland

4.7.11 This is a landscape which is valued in the local context, although some similar development is already present. This LCT is susceptible to developments which may break the linear composition of the straths, although in some areas of greater diversity of land cover there is greater potential to accommodate development of the type proposed without change to the intrinsic character. Sensitivity is therefore considered to be Medium.

4.7.12 The Proposed Development would follow the northern edge of this LCT to the north of Kyle of Sutherland for around 1.5 km and would descend into the strath through forest and woodland to Shin substation. These sections of the alignment are largely set within commercial forest and areas of young tree growth. Within the LCT the influence of the Proposed Development would be largely focussed around the Invershin area, where the wayleave through forest may be perceptible, and around Rhelonie and Inverhouse, on the opposite side of the strath, where distant poles may be perceived on the skyline. It would be seen within a context of forest areas where a pattern of clearfell is already present and in the context other larger OHLs around the Shin substation. The Proposed Development would be likely be largely concealed from most of the strath floor and on the final approach to the substation through woodland as it would use an existing steel lattice tower and wayleave to connect into the substation. This would lead to effects being very localised in this area. A slightly greater focus of activity may be perceived during the construction phase, but these would appear similar to forest works which already take place in this part of the landscape.

4.7.13 The magnitude of change during construction and operation would be Low, and the landscape effect is predicted to be **Minor Adverse** during both construction and operation.

Conclusions on Landscape Effects

4.7.14 The Proposed Development may lead to some limited effects on landscape character including localised skylining effects and a slightly greater focus of activities during construction. However, the managed mosaic of forest across the study area and setting of existing infrastructure around Shin substation would easily accommodate the Proposed Development which has been designed to take advantage of existing linear features through the landscape. Over time, the Proposed Development would be further accommodated within ongoing forest restructuring, and it is unlikely that there would be any noticeable change to the overall landscape character of the study area.

Appraisal of Visual Effects

4.7.15 The appraisal of predicted visual effects is detailed in **Table 4.7: Visual Receptor Appraisal** overleaf and uses the following key for appraisal ratings:

Key to Appraisal Ratings:
Sensitivity and magnitude:
H=High, M=Medium, L=Low, N=Negligible

Level of Effect:
Maj=Major, Mod=Moderate, Min=Minor, Neg=Negligible

Note: All effects ratings are Adverse

Table 4.7: Visual Receptor Appraisal

Ref.	Building-based Visual Receptors	Nature of Change to View	Sensitivity	Magnitude		Effect Rating	
				Construction	Operation	Construction	Operation
B1	**Settlement areas to south of Kyle of Sutherland**	Some distant poles possibly perceptible along the skyline on the opposite side of the strath, although these potentially would be hidden by coniferous forest on the hill.	M	L	L	Min	Min
B2	**Glen Rossal**	The Proposed Development is unlikely to be seen from this property due to surrounding woodland.	L	N	N	Neg	Neg
B3	**Inveran**	Possible filtered view from the side / rear of some properties but would be seen in the context of other infrastructure, likely to appear unremarkable in the view.	L	N	N	Neg	Neg
B4	**Western Inveran**	Possible limited easterly or north-easterly filtered views through trees, likely to be barely perceptible though there may be more evidence of construction activities including tree removal.	L	L	N	Min	Neg
B5	**Linsidemore**	The Proposed Development is to the rear of residential properties and is likely to be concealed by intervening landform, trees and scrub. Construction vehicles to the rear of some properties are unlikely to be visible due to woodland.	L	N	N	Neg	Neg
B6	**Netherton**	The Proposed Development may be perceptible on the skyline within northerly views, but would be filtered, and seen within the context of commercial forest and existing wind turbines.	M	L	L	Min	Min
B7	**Durcha**	The Proposed Development may feature in rear views along the skyline but would be small, seen within a forested backdrop and in the context of existing wind turbines.	L/M	L	L	Min	Min

B8	**Tullich / Highland Shooting Centre**	The Proposed Development may be perceptible in the skyline from the rear views of some parts of the property but likely to be hidden by landform and woodland.	L/M	L	L	Min	Min
B9	**House near Tullich**	The Proposed Development including tree felling, would feature in rear and side views within a commercial forest setting, filtered by retained trees. Construction access would also be seen within front main views.	L/M	L	L	Min	Min
B10	**Cnoc Solair**	The tops of some poles are likely to be visible in elevated westerly view, along with possible tree removal for the wayleave. They are unlikely to be very noticeable in the context of existing OHL structures in the view.	M	L	L	Min	Min
B11	**Invershin**	Views unlikely due to vegetation surrounding the village and commercial forestry around the Proposed Development.	L	N	N	Neg	Neg
Ref.	**Route-based Visual Receptors**	**Nature of Change to View**	**Sensitivity**	**Magnitude**		**Effect Rating**	
				Construction	**Operation**	**Construction**	**Operation**
R1	**Glencassley Minor Road**	The tops of some of the poles may be visible on the skyline but they are likely to be barely perceptible in the context of visible turbine blades.	M	N	N	Neg	Neg
R2	**A837**	Brief views as the Proposed Development crosses the road near to the Shin substation but seen in the context of the existing substation and overhead lines, forming a barely perceptible change to the visual amenity for road users.	L	L	L	Min	Min
R3	**A836**	There may be a few glimpsed views of the Proposed Development through roadside trees, but these would be limited and likely to be barely perceptible overall.	L	N	N	Neg	Neg

R4	**A839**	This road would be crossed by the Proposed Development with brief views in passing. Some glimpses of poles on the skyline to the north and within the forest may also be obtained but likely to be unremarkable within the context of visible wind turbines.	M	L	L	Min	Min
R5	**Core Path: Shin Falls Forest Walk**	Any views of the Proposed Development are unlikely due to the screening effects of surrounding woodland and landform.	L	N	N	Neg	Neg
R6	**Core Path: Sika Trail Cycle Route**	This route would be crossed by the Proposed Development which would also run alongside it for around 1.5 km where it follows the access track for Rosehall Wind Farm, potentially interrupting elevated views to the south. This part of the route would also be shared with construction traffic. Within the context of the wind farm, commercial forestry and felling operations, the Proposed Development is unlikely to have a very notable adverse effect on the visual amenity of the route in the long term.	M/H	L/M	L/M	Min – Mod	Min – Mod
R7	**Core Path: Rosehall Forest Walks, Deer Park and Wildwood Trail**.	Due to the surrounding commercial forest and rising topography to the north, views of the Proposed Development are considered unlikely from this route.	L	N	N	Neg	Neg

Conclusions on Visual Effects

4.7.16 The appraisal has determined that there would be likely to be a small number of adverse visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development, affecting residents, recreational users and travellers within the study area. The majority of these effects are predicted to be Minor in nature with one, affecting users of a recreational trail which already passes through the existing Rosehall Wind Farm (R6: Core Path SU21.02: Sika Trail Cycle Route), being Minor – Moderate. None of these effects are predicted to lead to any notable reduction to visual amenity within the study area.

Review of Cumulative Effects

4.7.17 A search has identified no other consented developments, or developments for which an application has been submitted and proposed within the study area that would be likely to affect the landscape character or visual amenity. Given the limited effects which are predicted in relation to the Proposed Development, the potential for any notable cumulative effects to occur in relation to any developments outwith the study area is unlikely.

4.7.18 No notable cumulative effects are therefore predicted in relation to the Proposed Development.

4.8 Summary

4.8.1 A small number of limited landscape and visual effects are predicted within 1.5 km of the Proposed Development, but in general, the Proposed Development is not likely to lead to any notable degree of change to the existing landscape and visual resource. The potential for cumulative effects with other developments proposed within the local area has been considered and is unlikely to lead to any increased levels of landscape or visual effect.