

**Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to
Peterhead 400 kV Project**

Environmental Impact Assessment Report

Volume 5 | Appendices

**Appendix 12.2 – Native Woodland Management
Plan**



APPENDIX 12.2 – NATIVE WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

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1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Appendix presents information relevant to the Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400 kV Overhead Line (OHL) Project (the 'Proposed Development'). It should be read in conjunction with **Volume 2 of the EIA Report** specifically **Chapter 12: Forestry**. For full details of the Proposed Development see **Chapter 3: Project Description**.
- 1.1.2 Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc ('the Applicant'), operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission ('SSEN Transmission'), own, operate, develop and maintain the high voltage electricity transmission network across the north of Scotland and remote islands. Due to the growth in renewable electricity generation in the north and northeast of Scotland, an upgrade of the transmission network is required to provide the necessary increase in transmission capacity.
- 1.1.3 The Applicant is applying for consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to construct and operate a new double circuit steel structure 400 kV OHL, to connect into new substation sites at Beauly, New Deer and Peterhead. The location of the Proposed Development is shown in **Volume 3, Figure 1.1: Site Location Overview**.
- 1.1.4 This Native Woodland Management Plan sets out the methodology and process that will be followed to limit the removal of ancient and native woodland.
- 1.1.5 Areas of ancient and native woodland, as well as veteran trees and native mixed woodland, have been identified along the Proposed OHL Alignment, shown in **Figures 12.1.1b to 12.1.127b** of the Woodland Reports within **Volume 5, Appendices 12.1.1 to 12.1.127**. A commitment has been given to further assess these areas in relation to the OHL design and safety requirements, to identify possible woodland / tree retentions.
- 1.1.6 Prior to felling within the native woodland / tree areas, further mitigation measures will be assessed to identify if further native woodland / tree retention is possible, where safe and practical within the Operational Corridor (OC). During the assessment of further mitigation measures, emphasis will be placed on the native woodland / tree retention objective.
- 1.1.7 The Applicant's Forestry Manager will coordinate the native woodland assessments in liaison with the OHL project team and relevant stakeholders.

2 Purpose of Native Woodland Management Plan

- 2.1.1 As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, it was identified that the Proposed Development would cross a number of woodland areas within private or state-owned landholdings. The landholding property boundaries are identified in **Figures 12.1.1a to 12.1.127a** within the Woodland Reports in **Volume 5, Appendices 12.1.1 to 12.1.127**.
- 2.1.2 A commitment has been included in the EIA Report to assess the possible mitigation measures that can be established to minimise the felling of these areas. Assessment and prescription of any tree felling mitigation measures, such as retention, must ensure safety during OHL construction and also ensure that the subsequent operation and maintenance of the OHL is not compromised.
- 2.1.3 This report explains the management strategy that will be undertaken by the Applicant prior to and during the OHL construction phase, to assess what can be implemented to minimise the felling / removal of the Native Woodland areas within the OC. This document will be integrated into the **Appendix 3.3: Outline Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP)** supporting the protection of the areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland impacted by the Proposed Development.

3 Legislation

- 3.1.1 The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 (ESQCR, 2002)¹ specify safety standards to protect the general public and consumers from danger of overhead electricity powerlines. These standards outline minimum safety clearances and the Transmission Network Operator's (TNO's) duty to maintain these safety clearances.
- 3.1.2 The regulations also contain requirements on quality and continuity of electricity supply to ensure an efficient and economic service to customers and consumers.
- 3.1.3 Further legislation arrived in 2006 with the ESQCR, 2006; Amendments², which extended the above duties of the DNO to make their overhead powerlines resilient to the effects of major storms. This includes reducing the risk of falling trees (windblow) and branchwood of hitting the electricity network.
- 3.1.4 The result of this legislation is that the DNOs in addition to maintaining the vegetation to minimum safety clearances, now must seek to achieve further clearances for trees which may be affected by storm weather conditions.

4 Native Woodland Areas and Mitigation

- 4.1.1 The permanent loss of ancient semi-natural woodland areas as part of the Proposed Development has been mitigated by the appropriate assessment of these woodland / tree locations to ascertain the safe OC width required figures within the Woodland Reports in **Volume 5, Appendices 12.1.1 to 12.1.127** (Woodland Report **Figures 12.1.1b to 12.1.127b**).
- 4.1.2 Potentially and, subject to confirmation, the width of the OC could be further reduced through micro-siting within the Limit of Deviation (LoD) where a combination of factors (e.g. topography, tower height, tree species and height) may reduce the area of ancient semi-natural woodland defined as being within the OC.
- 4.1.3 Prior to the Proposed Development construction phase, these areas of high ecological value will be further assessed for selective felling to identify if greater tree retentions can be achieved.
- 4.1.4 There may also be opportunities to further retain or encourage natural regeneration of scrub / understorey layers in areas where existing tree cover does not breach safety clearances and allows for safe construction activity. It is anticipated these sites will present suitable locations to maximise the environmental benefits of this type of natural regeneration by providing important woodland linkage and habitat protection.
- 4.1.5 For Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS), there is an opportunity to restore these areas to native woodland in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) guidance³ on PAWS restoration. This approach aligns with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)⁴ objectives to maintain, enhance, or restore features and areas of high conservation value. This restoration work is to be carried out in accordance with the ESQCR, 2002.
- 4.1.6 The Proposed Development impacts a total combined area of 90.36 ha of ancient, native and native mixed woodland including native broadleaved and conifer plantations.
- 4.1.7 The identified woodland categories within the Proposed Development, including the OC, access tracks and construction compounds, are:
- ancient semi-natural woodland 3.61 ha, composed mainly of native broadleaves;

¹ ESQCR (2002). Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002. Available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2002/2665/contents/made

² ESQCR (2006). Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity (Amendment) Regulations 2006. Available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2006/1521/made

³ Forestry Commission (2003). Restoration of Native Woodlands on Ancient Woodland Sites

⁴ UKWAS (2024). 2024 UK Woodland Assurance Standard 5th Edition. Available at: <https://ukwas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/UKWAS-5.0-2024.pdf>

- native broadleaved plantation woodland 86.75 ha, 48.02 ha of which are classified as Native Woodland within the NWSS database;
- native conifer plantation woodland 6.28 ha classified within the NWSS database; and
- PAWS accounts for 2.17 ha.

4.1.8 The split between local authorities is shown in **Table 12.1** below.

Table 12.1: Woodland Felling Requirements by Local Authority Area

Council Area	Woodland Type		TOTAL
	Native	Ancient (1a & 2a)	
Highland	60.28	2.16	62.44
Moray	12.00	1.45	13.45
Aberdeenshire	14.47	0.00	14.47
TOTAL	86.75	3.61	90.36

4.1.9 Considering the native tree species relevant to the Proposed Development:

- Certain native tree species such as willow, hazel and alder usually coppice well, although success can be limited if large numbers of deer are present due to browsing and this should also be considered.
- The growth heights and structure of the native tree species Oak, Birch, bring an increased risk to overhead powerline safety. Generally, Oak is quite windfirm, dependent on ground conditions and tree health. Crown reduction is often possible, whilst maintaining a healthy tree.
- Rather than a blanket approach to fell all native trees within the OC, surveys will be conducted to identify possible greater tree retention. Tree pruning to reduce crown height will also be considered where appropriate and depending on tree species, it is generally accepted that tree species such as birch, aspen, Scots pine are not easily reduced aesthetically.

5 Construction Requirements and Native Woodland Survey

5.1.1 The construction phase of the Proposed Development requires various work zones of differing area dimensions to be devoid of tree and shrub vegetation to allow the safe access and undertaking of the construction works and provide the necessary land area to install the Proposed Developments infrastructure.

5.1.2 The work zone categories are:

- formation of access track corridors (permanent, temporary and upgrades to existing tracks);
- conductor winches worksite compounds (referred to as Equipotential Zones (EPZs)); and
- OC worksite zone.

5.1.3 Prior to tree felling operations, assessments will be conducted and documented of the native woodland / tree areas in relation to the construction phase works. Tree health, quality and habitat will be visually surveyed, and risk assessed in relation to the construction works and OHL dimensions. Where possible, further mitigation measures will be identified in the effort to achieve greater native woodland retention.

5.1.4 The assessment of mitigation measures may include:

- the minor re-routing within project parameters of new access track builds, to avoid the felling of mature native tree species where possible;
- identify the minimal requirements / width of the OHL wiring corridor and review work methods in relation to maximising native woodland retentions;
- the assessment of new build OHL heights across native woodland areas, to identify possible tree / woodland retentions and minimise tree felling through tree pruning and crown reduction where suitable; and
- investigating alternative stringing techniques (where practicable), to oversail woodland to install the OHL.

- 5.15 The Forestry Manager will co-ordinate the native woodland assessments in liaison with the OHL project team and relevant stakeholders.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1.1 The implementation of the management items as detailed in this report, will allow a balanced and practical approach to identifying further suitable mitigation measures in relation to native tree / woodland retention and the OHL construction, operation and maintenance.
- 6.1.2 Following completion of the Proposed Development, a set of plans will be produced and submitted to the Scottish Ministers. These plans will show the areas of ancient semi-natural and native woodland locations of the OC and detail any areas of greater woodland / tree retention that may have been achieved, with those areas that have been retained clearly delineated.