



Kintore to Tealing 400kV Connection Overhead Line

Planning statement

August 2025

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc ('the Applicant') who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission ('SSEN Transmission') has submitted an application under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 ('the 1989 Act') along with a request that Ministers issue a direction that planning permission is deemed to be granted under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 ('the 1997 Act') for consent to construct and operate a new double circuit 400 kilovolt ('kV') overhead line ('OHL') between Kintore and Tealing (hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development'). A full description of the components of the Proposed Development is set out in Chapter 2 of this Planning Statement and within **Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description** of the EIA Report.
- 1.1.2 The terms 'Applicant' and 'SSEN Transmission' are used interchangeably throughout the Planning Statement unless the context requires otherwise.
- 1.1.3 An Environmental Impact Assessment ('EIA') has been undertaken for the Proposed Development in accordance with the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 ('the EIA Regulations') to assess the likely significant effects of the Proposed Development. The findings of the EIA are presented in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report ('EIA Report') and referred to here, including the measures which would be taken to prevent, reduce and, where possible, offset predicted likely significant adverse effects.
- 1.1.4 This Planning Statement considers the case for approval in land use planning policy terms at the national (National Planning Framework 4 ('NPF4') and local (Angus and Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan ('LDP')) level, with reference to the statutory Development Plan and national planning and energy policy, all of which supports the delivery of electricity infrastructure that will assist in the delivery of the Government's legally binding net zero commitments and which will ensure security of supply to customers.
- 1.1.5 The Proposed Development is categorised as National Development under the provisions of NPF4, National Development 3 'Strategic Renewables Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure' (Scotland Wide). Furthermore, the need for the Proposed Development has been established through the National Electricity System Operator's¹ ('NESO') Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design², the British Energy Security Strategy³ and the Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment ('ASTI') framework. It therefore forms a vital element in the delivery of network and grid infrastructure to support net zero ambitions in the UK.

1.2 The Applicant

- 1.2.1 SSEN Transmission is the electricity transmission licence holder across the North of Scotland and has a duty under Section 9 of the 1989 Act to:
- > Develop and maintain an efficient, coordinated and economical system of electricity transmission and;
 - > To facilitate competition in the generation and supply of electricity.

1 Formerly National Grid Electricity System Operator ('ESO')

2 National Grid Electrical System Operator ('ESO'), 2022. Pathway to 2030 – A holistic network design to support offshore wind deployment for net zero. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nationalgrideso.com/document/262676/download> [Accessed: April 2025].

3 UK Government, (2022). Policy paper – British energy security strategy. [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/british-energy-security-strategy/british-energy-security-strategy> [Accessed: April 2025].

- 1.2.2 The Proposed Development is required to fulfil the statutory and licence obligations on the Applicant as the transmission licence holder. These obligations relate to developing the transmission network to provide adequate transmission capacity and to provide connections to customers who wish to connect to and use the transmission system to participate in the national wholesale electricity market.

- 1.2.3 SSN Transmission's aim is to provide an environmentally aware, technically feasible and economically viable solution which would cause the least disturbance to the environment.

1.3 Background to the Proposed Development

System Planning - Technical Requirement

- 1.3.1 In July 2022, National Grid ESO (now referred to as 'NESO') published the *Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design ('HND') (Pathway to 2030 HND)*, setting out the electricity transmission network infrastructure required to enable the forecasted growth in renewable electricity across Great Britain, in light of the UK and Scottish Government's 2030 offshore wind allocations of 50 gigawatt (GW) and 11 GW (through the Crown Estate and ScotWind leasing rounds) which are the main driver for these upgrades.
- 1.3.2 The Pathway to 2030 HND confirmed the need for a significant and strategic increase in the capacity of onshore and offshore electricity infrastructure to support the UK and Scottish Governments' commitments to meet legally binding net zero targets. The HND supplemented the Network Options Assessment ('NOA') Refresh, published in July 2022, which confirmed the requirement for the delivery of the onshore infrastructure to support 11 GW allocated by ScotWind to 2030 (in conjunction with the identified offshore infrastructure identified in the HND).
- 1.3.3 The extensive studies completed to inform the NESO's Pathway to 2030 HND and Networks Options Assessment 2021/22 Refresh⁴ confirmed the requirement to increase the power transfer capacity of the onshore corridor from Kintore to Tealing. This requires a new 400 kV connection between these locations to enable the significant power transfer capability needed to take power from onshore and large scale offshore renewable generation, which is proposed to connect at onshore locations on the East Coast of Scotland and transport it to areas of demand.
- 1.3.4 The Proposed Development is located within a place that has been identified by NESO as a key corridor for onshore electricity network reinforcement.
- 1.3.5 In 2024, the NESO further reviewed the onshore and offshore network reinforcements as part of their HND Follow Up Exercise ('HND FUE') called "Beyond 2030", to facilitate the connection of an additional 21 GW of offshore wind from the ScotWind leasing round. This reconfirmed that the onshore and offshore reinforcements identified as part of the 2022 HND and NOA Refresh were required.
- 1.3.6 As such, these studies set out the required onshore and offshore transmission works (including the Proposed Development) that support the large-scale delivery of electricity generated from offshore wind, taking the electricity from where it is generated to where it is needed across the UK.
- 1.3.7 To enable the delivery of the required transmission infrastructure for 2030, Ofgem established a regulatory framework for the Transmission Operators, including the Applicant, to obtain regulatory approval for the economic case for delivery (and funding) of qualifying infrastructure projects identified as part of the "Pathway to 2030" exercise. This process is known as the ASTI Framework.
- 1.3.8 The Proposed Development is within the scope of the ASTI Framework. In relation to these projects Ofgem observed, in their ASTI Framework decision, that "*By including projects within*

⁴ National Grid ESO, July 2022. Network Options Assessment 2021/22 Refresh. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.neso.energy/document/262981/download>.

the list of ASTI projects, we are accepting the needs case for these projects in terms of the technical capabilities reflected in the HND/NOA Refresh”.

- 1.3.9 There is a clear expectation from the UK and Scottish Government’s and the energy regulator, Ofgem, that this project will be delivered by 2030. More specifically, the project is needed to deliver Government’s 2030 renewable energy targets set out in the British Energy Security Strategy (‘BESS’) (2022) and the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan.
- 1.3.10 A detailed explanation of the technical need case for the Proposed Development is set out in **Volume 1, Chapter 2: Project Need** of the EIA Report.

The National Planning Policy System – Delivery of Major Transmission Proposals

- 1.3.11 The need for a high voltage electricity transmission network to support renewable energy and meet net zero, and to ensure energy security and supply is included within NPF4:
- “The electricity transmission grid will need substantial reinforcement including the addition of new infrastructure to connect and transmit the output from new on and offshore capacity to consumers in Scotland, the rest of the UK and beyond”.* (pg. 103)
- 1.3.12 NPF4 identifies 18 National Developments (‘ND’) described as *“significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy”*. National Developments are acknowledged as projects necessary for the delivery of the national spatial strategy and *“Their designation means that the principle for development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes.”*
- 1.3.13 The Proposed Development falls within ND3: ‘Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure’. Further detailed reference to NPF4 and ND3 is provided in Chapter 4 of this Planning Statement.
- 1.3.14 **Volume 1, Chapter 4: The Routeing Process and Alternatives** of the EIA Report provides detail on route and alignment options selection and alternatives examined (including undergrounding) for the Proposed Development, including an overview of how the Applicant has incorporated stakeholder feedback during the sequential stages of the design process.
- 1.3.15 In summary, there is a clearly established need for the Proposed Development in both national planning policy terms and also from a technical and economic need in terms of transmission system planning and associated regulatory approvals.

New Transmission Infrastructure

- 1.3.16 To achieve this connection, SSEN Transmission is proposing a new 400 kV OHL between Kintore and Tealing, which has been selected based on extensive studies, reported in **Volume 1, Chapter 4: The Routeing Process and Alternatives** of the EIA Report. The following Intra (Associated) developments are also required to achieve this connection and which are subject to separate planning applications:
- > A new 400 kV substation to be constructed at Tealing (approximately 5 km to the north of Dundee, known as the proposed Emmock substation, planning reference 24/00699/FULN)⁵; and
 - > A new 400 kV substation to be constructed at Fetteresso Forest (approximately 7 km west of Stonehaven, known as the proposed Hurlie substation, planning reference APP/2024/1951)⁶.

⁵ SSEN Transmission (November 2024) Emmock Substation Planning Application 24/00699/FULN. Available at: <https://planning.angus.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=SN6VOFCFMUA00>

⁶ SSEN Transmission (December 2024) Hurlie Substation Planning Application APP/2024/1951. Available at: <https://upa.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=documents&keyVal=SNUVKWCAJ2G00>

- 1.3.17 These substations are required to enable future connections to the electricity transmission network and export routes to areas of demand. As previously noted, the proposed Emmock and Hurlie substations are subject to separate applications for planning permission to Angus Council and Aberdeenshire Council respectively

Reconductoring Projects

- 1.3.18 In addition, there are two existing 275 kV OHLs, which require upgrades. These upgrades are to enable operation at 400 kV and to allow them to be connected to the proposed new Emmock 400 kV substation and are also subject to separate applications for Section 37 Consent and deemed planning permission:
- > Alyth to Tealing OHL (ECU Reference ECU00005167) ⁷; and
 - > Tealing to Westfield OHL (ECU Reference ECU00005168) ⁸.
- 1.3.19 An EIA Screening Report and Scoping Report were also produced to address tie-ins and tie-backs between the Emmock and Tealing substations and the Proposed Development. A Screening decision confirmed that the development would be EIA Development and a Scoping Opinion set out the detail and scope expected within the EIA (ECU Reference ECU00005204⁹). An application is anticipated to be submitted in the near future for this project.
- 1.3.20 These developments do not form part of the Proposed Development and are therefore not assessed as part of the EIA or within this Planning Statement, although the consideration of the potential for cumulative effects with the Proposed Development is considered, where relevant.
- 1.3.21 The proposals have been determined as critical to enable the delivery of the UK and Scottish Government's climate goals and renewable energy targets. These projects also contribute towards ensuring energy security and supporting Scottish and UK Government targets for a just transition to a net zero future.

1.4 The Statutory Framework

The Electricity Act 1989

- 1.4.1 As the Transmission Licence holder in the North of Scotland, the Applicant has a duty under Section 9(2) of the 1989 Act to facilitate competition in the generation and supply of electricity. The Applicant is obliged to offer non-discriminatory terms for connection to the transmission system both for new generation and for new sources of electricity demand.
- 1.4.2 The Applicant is also required under Section 9(2) of the 1989 Act to ensure that the transmission system is developed and maintained in an economical, coordinated and efficient manner in the interests of existing and future electricity consumers.
- 1.4.3 Separately, it is also the Applicant's duty to consider the possible environmental impacts of new overhead, underground and subsea electric lines and to do what can 'reasonably be done' to mitigate adverse impacts, in line with Section 38 of, and Schedule 9 to, the 1989 Act. In terms of its statutory duties and licence obligations, the Applicant must therefore balance technical, cost (economic) and environmental factors.

7 SSEN Transmission (November 2024) Alyth to Tealing OHL 400kV Upgrade (Reconductoring) Application for s37 consent. Available at: <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00005167>.

8 SSEN Transmission (November 2024) Tealing to Westfield OHL 400kV Upgrade (Reconductoring) Application for s37 consent. Available at: <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00005168>

9 SSEN Transmission, August 2024. LT455 Proposed Emmock and Tealing Overhead Line Tie-ins. [Online] Available at: <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00005204>

- 1.4.4 The application for the Proposed Development is made to the Scottish Ministers under section 37 of the 1989 Act together with a request that Ministers issue a direction confirming that the development benefits from deemed planning permission under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended).
- 1.4.5 The Scottish Ministers are obliged to consider whether the Applicant has demonstrated that it has complied with its duties under sub-paragraph 3(1) of Schedule 9 of the 1989 Act. The Scottish Ministers must also have regard to the desirability of the matters specified in Schedule 9 which relates to the preservation of amenity and fisheries.
- 1.4.6 Schedule 9, sub-paragraph 3(2) of the 1989 Act, requires a licence holder and the Scottish Ministers to have regard to:
- “(a) the desirability of the matters mentioned in paragraph (a) of sub-paragraph (1) above; and (b) the extent to which the person by whom the proposals were formulated has complied with his duty under paragraph (b) of the sub-paragraph.”*
- 1.4.7 The matters referred to in Schedule 9 sub-paragraph 3(1)(a) and (b) of the 1989 Act apply to the Applicant as a licence holder. The matters set out in sub-paragraph 3(1)(a) to which regard must be had are:
- “... the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest; “*
- 1.4.8 Sub-paragraph 3(1)(b) requires relevant parties to:
- “.....do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects”*
- 1.4.9 At sub-paragraph 3(3), the Applicant is [required to...] *“avoid, so far as possible, causing injury to fisheries or to the stock of fish in any waters.”*
- 1.4.10 In considering the overall statutory and regulatory framework within which the Proposed Development should be assessed, the statutory Development Plan is not expressly identified as a consideration within the 1989 Act (unlike, for example, Section 25 of the 1997 Act, considered below). Nevertheless, it is a material consideration which should be taken into account alongside all other relevant material considerations.
- The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997**
- 1.4.11 Section 57(2) of the 1997 Act provides that on granting a consent under Section 36 or 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 in respect of any operation or change of use that constitutes development, or any development ancillary to the operation or change of use to which the consent relates, the Scottish Ministers may direct that planning permission shall be deemed to be granted, subject to any conditions as may be specified in the direction.
- 1.4.12 Section 25 of the 1997 Act states that:
- “Where, in making any determination under the planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan, the determination is, unless material considerations indicate otherwise, to be made in accordance with that plan”.*
- 1.4.13 Section 57(2) of the 1997 Act makes no reference to the provisions of Section 25 which requires regard to be had to the provisions of the Development Plan. The Courts have confirmed that Section 57(2) does not apply Section 25 to a decision to make a direction to grant deemed planning permission pursuant to Section 57(2)¹⁰.
- 1.4.14 The Scottish Ministers will determine the application having regard to the statutory duties in Schedules 8 and 9 of the 1989 Act, and to material considerations. The statutory

¹⁰ William Grant & Sons Distillers Limited, Court of Session [2012] CSOH 98.

Development Plan and national policy are both important material considerations in the determination of applications under Section 37 of the 1989 Act.

1.4.15 Accordingly, the purpose of this Planning Statement is to provide an assessment of the Proposed Development in the context of relevant national and local planning and energy policies and other material considerations. As such it is important to establish:

- > What energy and national planning policy considerations are relevant to the Proposed Development?
- > What Development Plan policies (including local policy provisions) are relevant to the proposal which provide a policy framework for the consideration of environmental effects arising from the Proposed Development?

1.5 Key Facts

1.5.1 Key facts relevant to this application are:

- > The Proposed Development is identified as a National Development ('ND') under the provisions of NPF4 ND3 under the class of development noted at (b) as *"new and/or replacement upgraded on and offshore high voltage electricity transmission lines, cables and interconnectors of 132kV or more"*.
- > ND3 supports renewable electricity generation, repowering, and expansion of the electricity grid. The infrastructure proposed is designated as a National Development and explicitly supported by NPF4 under the provisions set out in Policy 11(a)(ii) (Energy).
- > The Statement of Need for the Proposed Development as contained in NPF4 is as follows:

"A large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets. Certain types of renewable electricity generation will also be required, which will include energy storage technology and capacity, to provide the vital services, including flexible response, that a zero-carbon network will require. Generation is for domestic consumption as well as for export to the UK and beyond, with new capacity helping to decarbonise heat, transport and industrial energy demand. This has the potential to support jobs and business investment, with wider economic benefits."

The electricity transmission grid will need substantial reinforcement including the addition of new infrastructure to connect and transmit the output from new on and offshore capacity to consumers in Scotland, the rest of the UK and beyond. Delivery of this national development will be informed by market, policy and regulatory developments and decisions."

Additional electricity generation from renewables and electricity transmission capacity of scale is fundamental to achieving a net zero economy and supports improved network resilience across Scotland".

- > There is an established technical and economic need for the Proposed Development as identified by the ASTI transmission systems planning exercise encompassing the National Grid as a whole (considering the upgrades necessary to accommodate the UK generation and demand requirements), and regulatory approval from Ofgem in principle of the need, as part of its ongoing assessment process.
- > The Proposed Development is for a critical reinforcement of the transmission network to ensure capability to transmit low carbon energy across the network on the key Kintore to Tealing corridor.
- > The Proposed Development will deliver nationally important network and grid infrastructure that would facilitate the UK and Scottish Governments meeting its legally binding targets for net zero emissions and renewable energy electricity generation targets and policy objectives.

- > The Proposed Development will be delivered in such a way that it is, on balance, environmentally acceptable and will include a co-ordinated scheme of environmental mitigation to ensure the long-term protection of the local and wider environment and to deliver development which is sustainable in nature.

1.6 Structure of Statement

1.6.1 This Statement seeks to address the pertinent land use planning policy matters relevant to the determination of the application, to aid decision makers in their assessment and conclusions on the proposal.

1.6.2 This Statement is structured as follows:

- > **Chapter 2** describes the Proposed Development;
- > **Chapter 3** sets out the up-to-date position with regard to the renewable energy policy and emissions reduction legislative framework and includes reference to the Scottish Government's Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan;
- > **Chapter 4** sets out the benefits of the Proposed Development;
- > **Chapter 5** appraises the Proposed Development against the most up to date element of the Development Plan, namely the relevant provisions of NPF4;
- > **Chapter 6** appraises the Proposed Development against the relevant provisions of the two applicable LDPs and related guidance; and
- > **Chapter 7** examines the planning balance and presents overall conclusions.

2. The Proposed Development

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This Chapter describes the various elements required to construct and operate the Proposed Development which in summary would comprise approximately 105.2 km of new 400 kV double circuit OHL between Kintore and Tealing, approximately 10.91 km OHL for the permanent realignment and reconductoring of other existing OHLs and associated temporary diversions comprising approximately 2.93 km, resulting in an overall total of 119.04 km of OHL.

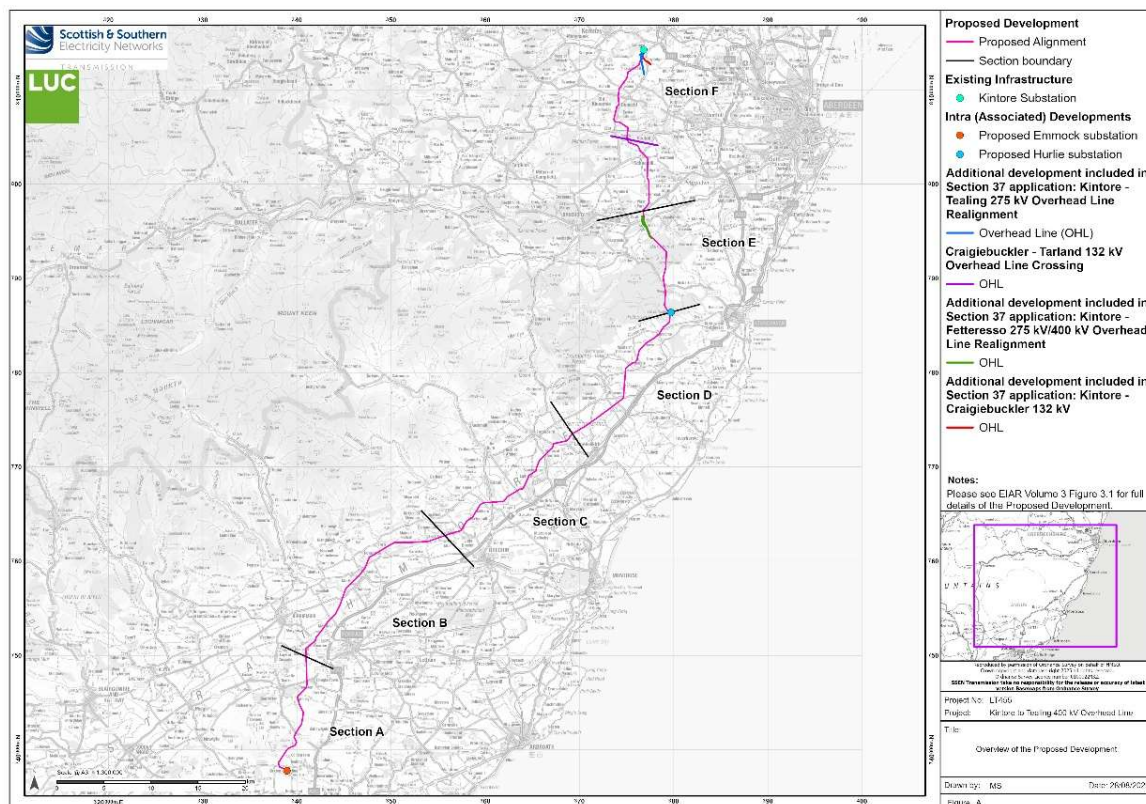
2.1.2 The Proposed Development described below, and assessed within **Volume 2, Technical Chapters** of the EIA Report is also presented in **Volume 3, Figures 3.1a-3.1f: Proposed Development for which Section 37 Consent is sought**.

2.1.3 Due to the length of the Proposed Development, the Route for the new 400 kV OHL has been split into six defined 'Sections' to more easily describe the Proposed Development and baseline environmental factors.

2.2 Site Location and Description

Proposed 400 kV OHL

Figure 2.1: Overview of Proposed Development



- 2.2.1 The location of the Proposed Development within each local authority area is displayed in **Volume 3, Figure 3.2: Overview of the Proposed Development and Local Authority Boundaries**, in the EIA Report and summarised as follows:

Aberdeenshire Council

- > New 400 kV double circuit OHL, tower numbers N1 to S82 (approximately 61 km of new 400 kV OHL).
- > Permanent realignment of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL south of Kintore Substation (including temporary diversion, reconductoring and removal of redundant OHL).
- > Permanent realignment of the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL south of Kintore Substation (including Cable Seating End Compound, termination tower and removal of redundant OHL).
- > Permanent realignment of the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV/400 kV OHL, southwest of Kirkton of Durris (including temporary diversion, reconductoring and removal of redundant OHL).
- > A crossing of the existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV OHL at Landerberry southeast of Echt (including temporary diversion, reconductoring and removal of redundant OHL).

Angus Council

- > New 400 kV double circuit OHL, tower numbers S206 to S83 (approximately 44.2 km of new 400 kV OHL).

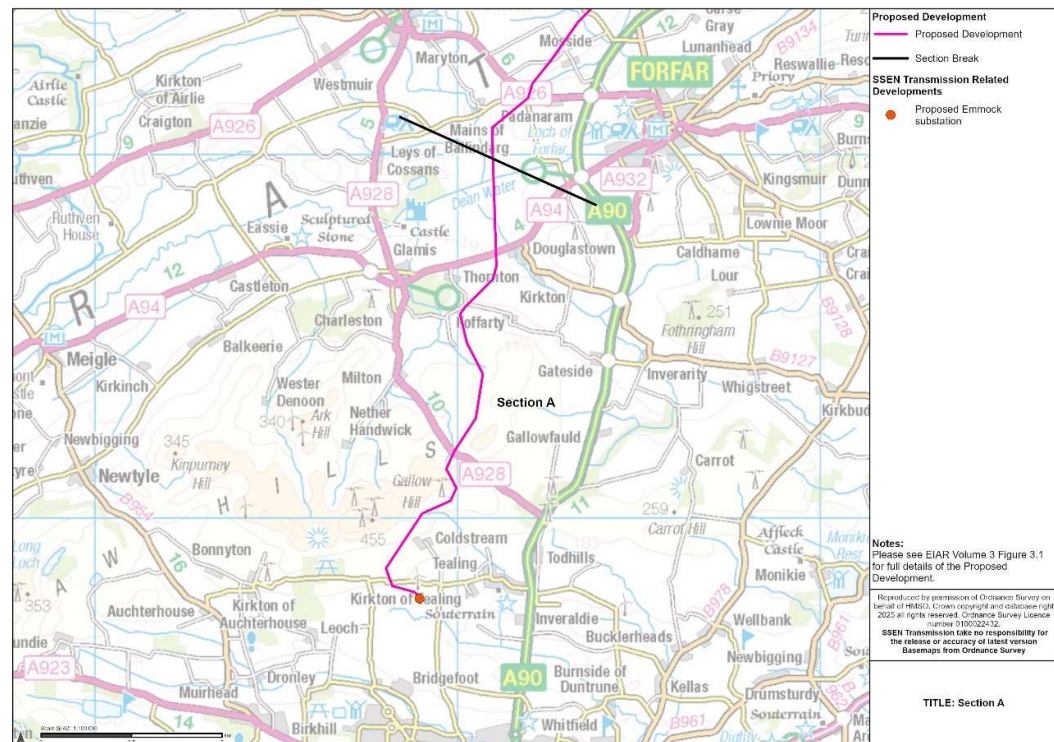
- 2.2.2 The Proposed Development connects to the proposed Emmock substation located near Tealing to the existing Kintore Substation, via the proposed Hurlie substation in Fetteresso Forest. The tower ranges of the Proposed Development from each substation location are as follows:

- > downleads into Kintore Substation to downleads into Hurlie substation: N1 to N96 (approximately 32.7 km); and
- > downleads into Hurlie substation to downleads into Emmock substation: S1 to S206 (approximately 72.5 km).

- 2.2.3 As noted, the description of the Proposed Development has been subdivided into six sections from south to north referenced as Sections A - F. These route sections are broadly defined as follows:

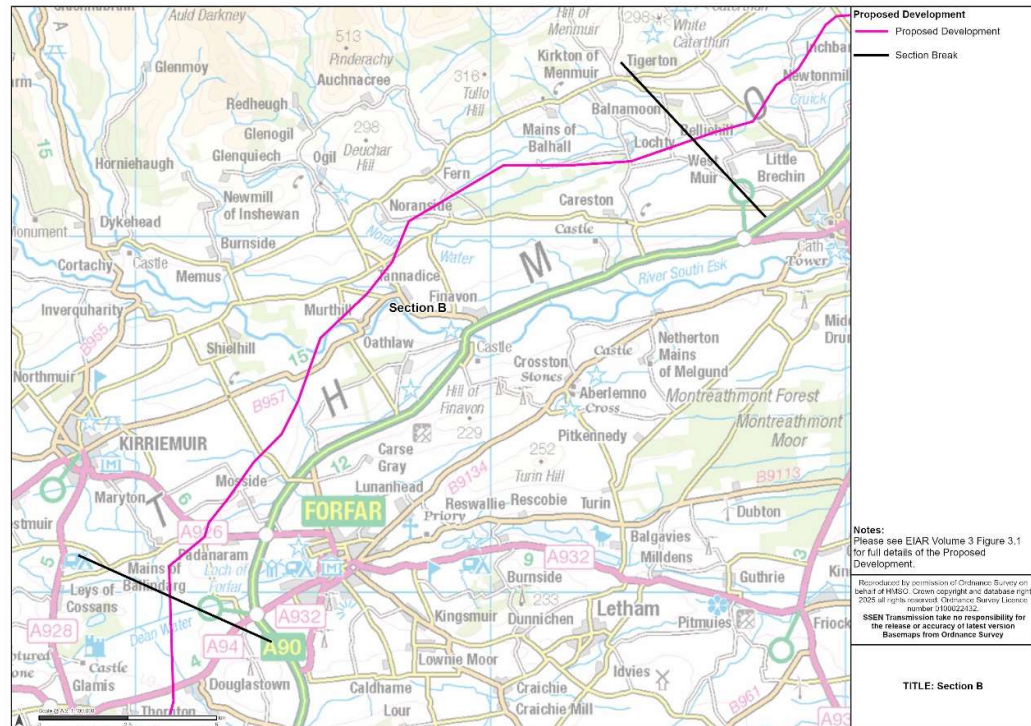
- > Section A: Emmock 400 kV substation to Forfar;
- > Section B: Forfar to Brechin;
- > Section C: Brechin to Laurencekirk;
- > Section D: Laurencekirk to Hurlie 400 kV substation;
- > Section E: Hurlie 400 kV substation to River Dee; and
- > Section F: north of the River Dee to Kintore Substation.
- >

Figure 2.2: Proposed Alignment of Section A: Emmock 400 kV substation to Forfar



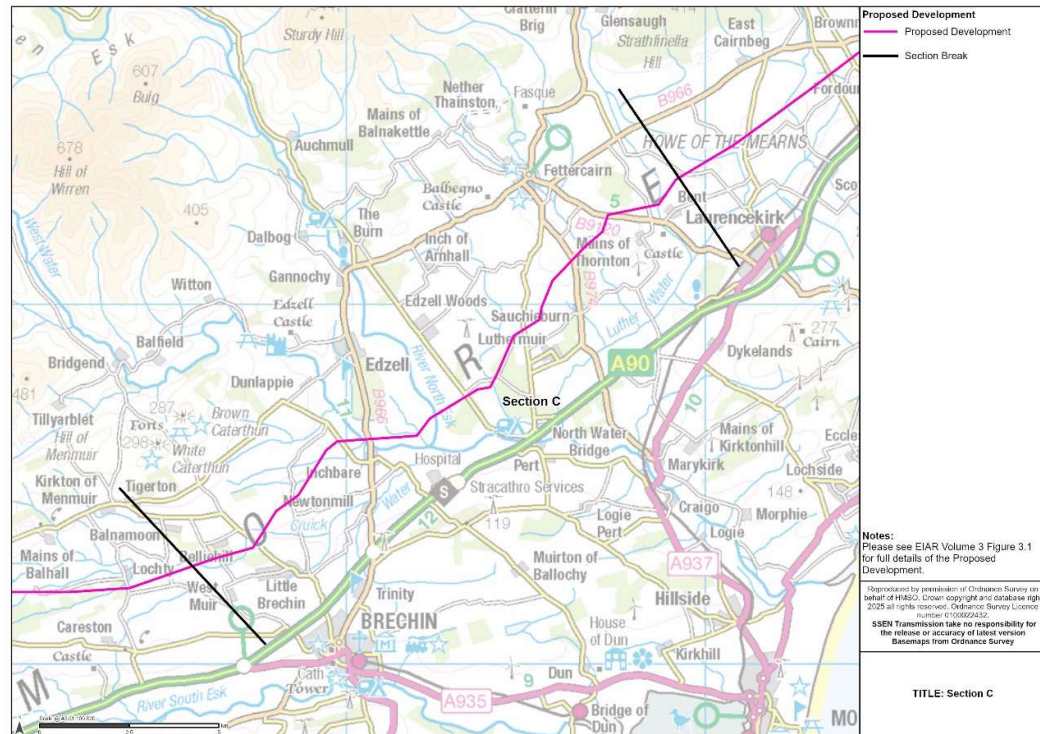
- 2.2.4 Section A comprises proposed towers with the alpha-numeric nomenclature S206 to S163 which starts at the new proposed 400 kV substation known as Emmock, near Tealing. It initially passes in a northwestern direction past scattered properties around Balkemback and Balluderon to the west of Balkemback Cottages Stone Circle (Scheduled Monument).
- 2.2.5 The Proposed Development then heads northeast over rising ground to the east of Craigowl Hill, before continuing northeast along the slopes of Ironside Hill, avoiding a communications mast located to the west.
- 2.2.6 The Proposed Development then crosses the A928 Glamis to Petterden public road to the west of Finlarg Hill, remaining in an upland area before returning to lower ground as it passes west of Hayston Hill across predominantly agricultural land.
- 2.2.7 The Proposed Development then follows in a northerly route, crossing the A94 Glamis to Forfar public road to the east of Hunters Hill and the village of Glamis, avoiding the Glamis Den and Hunter's Hill Local Nature Conservation Site ('LNCS'), and to the west of the small settlement of Douglastown.
- 2.2.8 The final part of Section A crosses low-lying and partly flood-prone agricultural land to the west of Forfar, intersecting with the Kerbet Water and Dean Water, which are both part of the River Tay Special Area of Conservation ('SAC').

Figure 2.3: Proposed Alignment of Section B: Forfar to Brechin



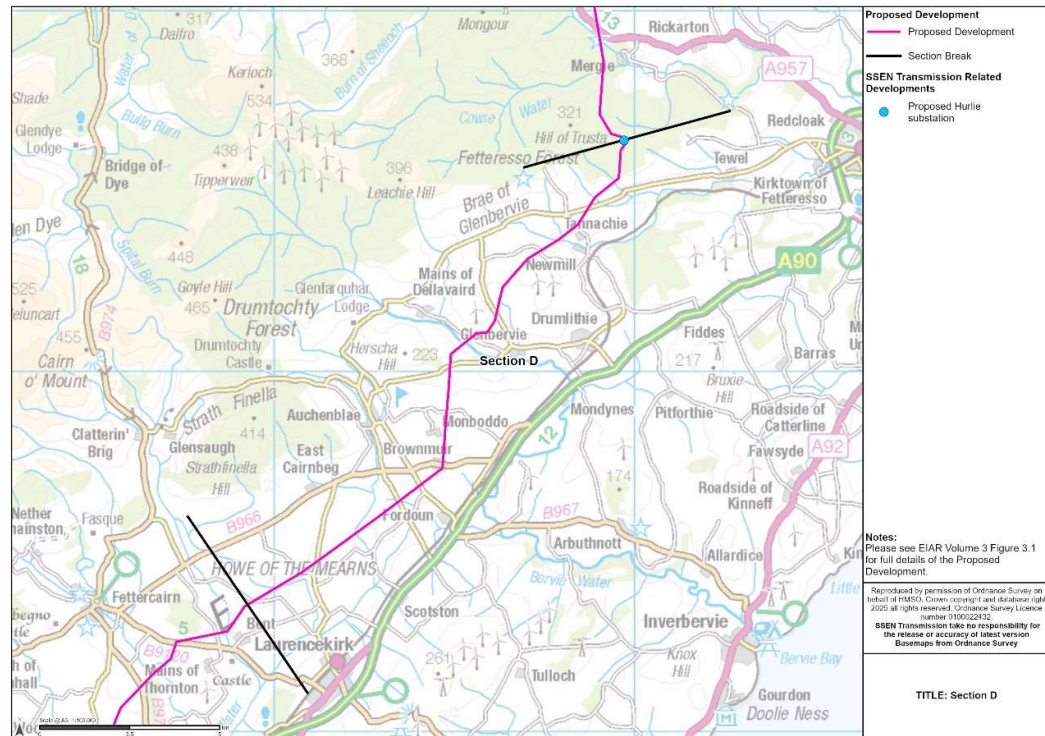
- 2.2.9 Section B comprises proposed towers with the alpha-numeric nomenclature S162 to S106, which starts to the west of Forfar, initially passing in a northeastern direction to the west of the settlement of Padanaram, and south of the Scheduled Monument at Ballinshoe Castle where the Proposed Development spans the Woodside LNCS at its narrowest point.
- 2.2.10 The Proposed Development then crosses the A926 and B957 public roads and spans the River South Esk to the west of Justinhaugh Bridge which is designated as a SAC. The Proposed Development also intersects with the River South Esk Local Landscape Area ('LLA') at this location.
- 2.2.11 The Proposed Development continues in a northeastern direction, passing approximately 1 km to the west of Tannadice village and the associated Conservation Area, and crosses the Noran Water to the west of the settlement of Wellford where it spans a strip of ancient woodland on the banks of the river.
- 2.2.12 The Proposed Development continues on a northeasterly route to the south of The Angus Glens LLA and to the north of Roughmount Wood and Weiris Wood, before following a southeastern route through Duns Wood and Lochty Wood past the settlement of Careston, located approximately 1.5 km to the south of the Proposed Development.
- 2.2.13 The Proposed Development continues in a northeastern direction across largely open agricultural land avoiding clusters of properties in the vicinity of Findowrie as it passes towards Little Brechin Wood.

Figure 2.4: Proposed Alignment of Section C: Brechin to Laurencekirk



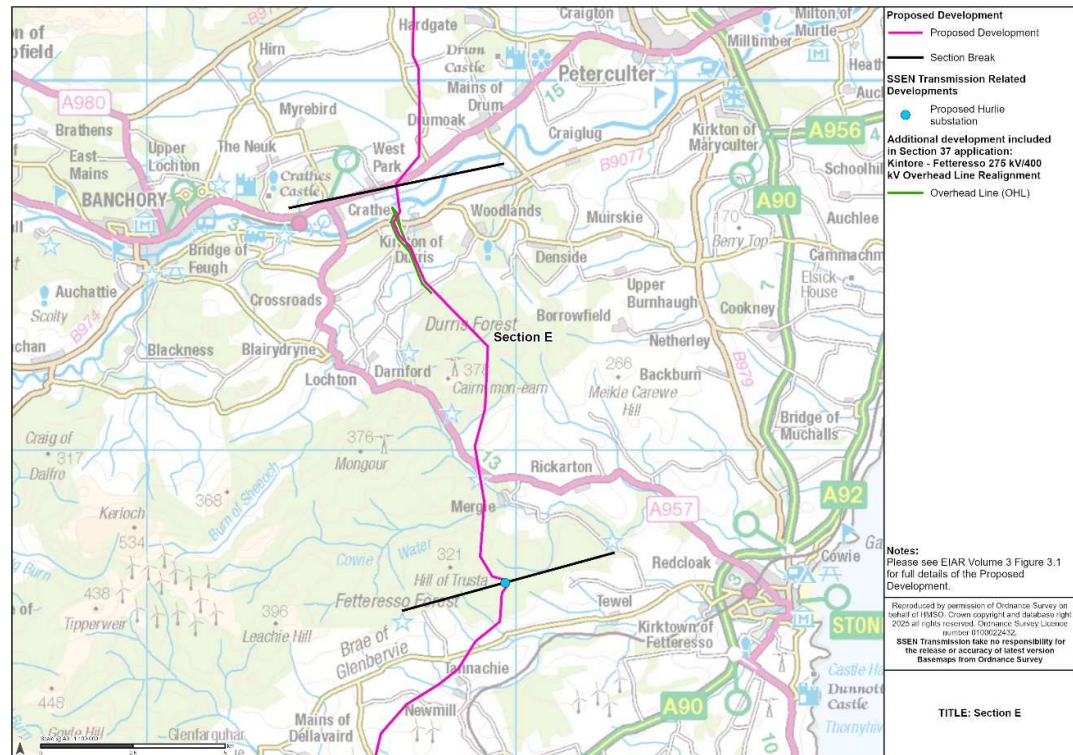
- 2.2.14 Section C comprises proposed towers with the alpha-numeric nomenclature S105 to S52 which starts to the northwest of Brechin and initially passes in a northeastern direction between Belliehill Wood and Little Brechin Wood, intersecting the western edge of Bankhead Wood LNCS, to Auchenreoch where the Proposed Development crosses the West Water.
- 2.2.15 South of Edzell Wood, the Proposed Development continues in an eastern direction, and crosses the B966 Brechin to Edzell public road between clusters of properties, where it then follows a northeastern direction across open agricultural land. Crossing the River North Esk to the southeast of the settlement of Edzell and south of the North Esk and West Water Palaeochannels Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and skirting the edges of woodland areas at Capo Plantation and Inverury Wood, the Proposed Development then passes to the south of the former Edzell Airfield site which is now being redeveloped with a range of different land uses.
- 2.2.16 Following a northeastern route, the Proposed Development passes approximately 1 km to the north of the small settlement of Luthermuir and to the south of Esleie Moss SSSI through gently rising agricultural land. It then crosses the B974 Fettercairn to Marykirk public road and through the northern edge of mixed woodland at Lady Jane's Plantation, continuing in a northeastern direction to the south of Greenbottom Wood, both of which are classified as Long-Established woodlands of Plantation Origin (LEPO) on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI).
- 2.2.17 The Proposed Development continues in a northeastern direction through the Howe of the Mearns to the south of the Braes of the Mearns LLA, to a point approximately 2 km northwest of the town of Laurencekirk.

Figure 2.5: Proposed Alignment of Section D: Laurencekirk to Hurlie 400 kV substation



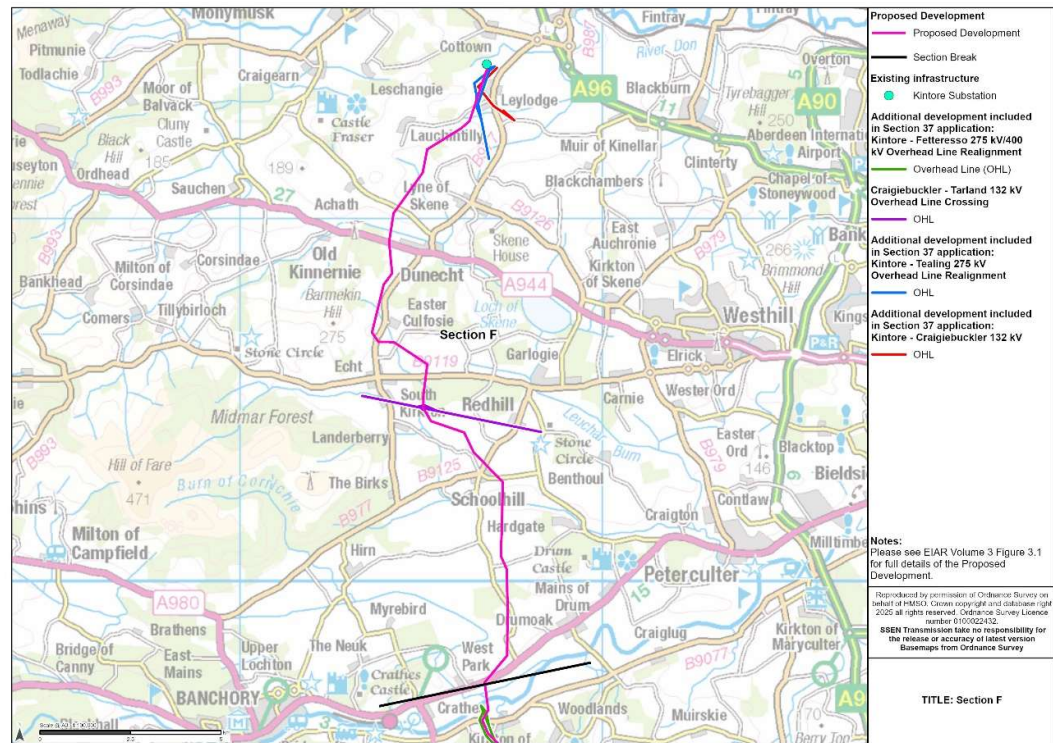
- 2.2.18 Section D comprises proposed towers with the alpha-numeric nomenclature S51 to S1 which starts to the northwest of the town of Laurencekirk, avoiding clusters of properties as it initially passes through gently undulating farmland. It crosses a number of minor roads in a generally northeastern direction towards Auchenzeoch where it passes between the settlement of Fordoun to the southeast and the village of Auchenblae to the northwest.
- 2.2.19 As the Proposed Development continues northeast, it also increases the distance from higher ground associated with the Braes of the Mearns Special Landscape Area (SLA). The alignment navigates a pinch point of properties to avoid Fordoun Airfield and being within key views of a Listed Building at House of Redhall.
- 2.2.20 The Proposed Development then crosses the B966 public road close to the location of commercial sites on land used for a Fordoun Airfield. It continues in a northern direction over more undulating topography past the settlement of Monboddoo. It then turns northeast, crossing the Bervie Water in a valley to the west of Glenbervie village, avoiding Glenbervie Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) and to the east of Droop Hill Cairns Scheduled Monument as well as two operational wind turbines.
- 2.2.21 The Proposed Development passes over steeply rising ground following the lower southern and eastern slopes of Droop Hill to avoid complex hydrology and a site with planning permission for a windfarm.
- 2.2.22 At Cotbank, the Proposed Development then follows a northeastern direction through an undulating landscape with several wind turbines, continuing uphill across a varied and undulating upland landscape with occasional woodland shelterbelts. It then traverses up steeply sloping ground, avoiding the Elfhill LNCS to the east, towards the site of the proposed 400 kV substation at Hurlie in Fetteresso Forest.

Figure 2.6: Proposed Alignment of Section E: Hurlie 400 kV substation to River Dee



- 2.2.23 Section E comprises proposed towers with the alpha-numeric nomenclature N96 to N61 which begins at the proposed 400 kV substation site at Hurlie in Fetteresso Forest and passes in a northern direction through Fetteresso Forest, crossing the Cowie Water to the west of Mergie LNCS.
- 2.2.24 It then crosses the A957 (Slug Road) Stonehaven to Banchory public road and continues over high ground at Craigneil Hill to the west of a consented application for an 11-turbine windfarm, which has since been redesigned for up to seven wind turbines. The Proposed Development continues north through Durris Forest, following the line of the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV/ 400 kV OHL to the immediate west of the Proposed Development. It then continues in a northern direction, crossing the Burn of Sheecho and Strathie Burn which are tributaries of the River Dee and form part of the River Dee SAC.
- 2.2.25 The route of the OHL then continues north to the west of the village of Kirkton of Durris before crossing the River Dee north of Wester Durris, designated as an SAC and an LNCS, as well as the Dee Valley SLA. The Proposed Development then crosses the A93 Aberdeen to Banchory road between West Park and Nether Park, and to the west of Park House GDL.

Figure 2.7: Proposed Alignment of Section F: North of the River Dee to Kintore Substation



2.2.26 Section F comprises proposed towers with the alpha-numeric nomenclature N60 to N1 which begins north of the River Dee following a northerly route of gently rising ground intersecting the southern-most edge of the Loch of Park LNCS and adjacent to the Loch of Park SSSI before continuing through to Coldstream Plantation, avoiding the village of Drumoak and Drum Castle GDL to the east.

2.2.27 It then follows a route in a north-northwestern direction, over the Gormack Burn, before crossing the B9125 public road to the west of the settlement of Schoolhill. The Proposed Development then crosses an existing 132 kV OHL south of the village Echt, before continuing in a northwestern direction, passing to the east of the village of Echt where it also crosses the B9119 public road.

2.2.28 Following a generally northeastern direction, the OHL routes to the east of the prominent high ground of Barmekin Hill Fort Scheduled Monument with its summit hilltop and Barmekin Wood LNCS, and parallel to Dunecht House GDL. The Loch of Skene Special Protection Area (SPA)/SSSI/Ramsar site is located further to the east of the Proposed Development.

2.2.29 The Proposed Development crosses the A944 Westhill to Alford public road across undulating ground to the west of Dunecht village and passes through an open agricultural landscape with occasional woodland plantations for approximately 5 km, before it connects with the existing Kintore Substation at the northern end of Section F.

Other required works to existing OHLs which form part of the Proposed Development

2.2.30 The permanent realignment of a section of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL approximately 0.65 km long is required to the south of the existing Kintore Substation. This section of OHL between South Leylodge and Kintore Substation would be realigned to the east to create a corridor of sufficient width for the Proposed Development to connect with the substation without needing to cross the existing OHL.

- 2.2.31 A permanent Cable Sealing End Compound ('CSE Compound') is required to facilitate the realignment and undergrounding of a section of the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL to the south of Kintore Substation (the underground cable works would be carried out as permitted development). The CSE Compound has a footprint of approximately 30 m by 45 m and is proposed to be located to the southeast of the existing Kintore Substation. The compound incorporates a terminal OHL tower and apparatus to connect the OHL conductors to the southern end of the new section of proposed underground cable. Approximately 440 m of permanent realignment of the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL is also required on the southern approach to the CSE Compound.
- 2.2.32 A crossing of the existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV OHL by the Proposed Development is required where the two OHLs would intersect at a location near Landerberry approximately 1.5 km southeast of Echt. This involves the modification of the existing 132 kV OHL into a diamond formation through the installation of two new low-profile towers and two new terminal towers. This allows for future maintenance activities to be undertaken under single circuit outages, reducing health and safety and network risk. The length of new OHL required for the formation of the diamond modification as shown on is approximately 350 m.
- 2.2.33 A permanent realignment of an approximate 1.2 km long section of the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV/400 kV¹¹ OHL is required in an area south of the River Dee, to the west and southwest of Kirkton of Durris. The OHL would be realigned westwards to provide sufficient width for the alignment of the Proposed Development to pass between residential properties and the existing OHL in this area.

2.3 Development for which Section 37 Consent and Deemed Planning Permission is sought

- 2.3.1 The Proposed Development would include the following works, for which Section 37 consent under the 1989 Act and deemed planning permission under the 1997 Act is sought to install, operate and keep installed:
- > construction of approximately 105.2 km of new 400 kV double circuit OHL between the existing Kintore Substation and new substation sites proposed at Fetteresso Forest (Hurlie 400 kV substation) and Tealing (Emmock 400 kV substation), including downloads into the substations (refer to **Volume 1, Chapter 1: Introduction and Background** for more information on proposed substations). This is known as the 'Proposed Alignment – for further detail see **Volume 1, Chapter 4: Alternatives and the Routeing Process**;
 - > permanent realignment of approximately 0.95 km of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL south of Kintore Substation;
 - > approximately 1.75 km of reconductoring of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL between towers 291 and 295R, and 298R and 299 as part of the permanent realignment;
 - > permanent realignment of approximately 440 m of the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL and termination tower;
 - > a crossing of the existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV OHL using a diamond crossing design (approximately 350 m of OHL) at Landerberry southeast of Echt;
 - > reconductoring of the existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV OHL between towers 27 – 44 (the approaches immediately east and west of the diamond crossing at Landerberry) (approximately 4.75 km);
 - > permanent realignment of approximately 1.2 km of the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV/400 kV OHL, southwest of Kirkton of Durris;

¹¹ The existing OHL at Fetteresso Forest is currently being upgraded to 400 kV. These works are expected to be completed by 2027 in advance of the Kintore to Tealing 400 kV OHL construction and commissioning

- up to approximately 1.47 km of reconductoring of the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV/400 kV OHL as part of the permanent realignment;
- > installation of temporary earthing to conductor / tower steelwork on the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV OHL, existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV OHL, and the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OH. Upon completion of the works the earthing would be removed;
- > construction of temporary OHL diversions to facilitate the permanent modifications to existing OHLs, as detailed above, which are required to construct the new 400 kV OHL. Temporary diversions are required for the following circuits:
 - temporary diversion of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL south of Kintore (approximately 1.10 km);
 - temporary diversion of the existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV OHL (approximately 0.62 km); and
 - temporary diversion of the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV / 400 kV OHL (approximately 1.21 km).
- > removal of the redundant section of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL south of Kintore Substation, following its realignment;
- > removal of the redundant section of the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL following its realignment underground;
- > removal of the redundant section of the existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV, following the diamond crossing; and
- > removal of the redundant section of the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV/400 kV OHL, southwest of Kirkton of Durris, following its realignment.

2.3.2 In summary, the Proposed Development would comprise approximately 105.2 km of new 400 kV double circuit OHL, approximately 10.91 km OHL for the permanent realignment and reconductoring of other existing OHLs and associated temporary diversions comprising approximately 2.93 km, resulting in an overall total of 119.04 km of OHL.

Ancillary Development for Which Deemed Planning Permission is Sought

- 2.3.3 The following works would be required as part of the Proposed Development, or to facilitate its construction and operation:
- > a CSE Compound of dimensions approximately 30 m by 45 m, southeast of Kintore Substation to facilitate the undergrounding of approximately 1.76 km the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL;
 - > the upgrade of existing, or creation of new, bellmouths at public road access points along the route;
 - > the formation of access tracks (permanent, temporary, and upgrades to existing access tracks) including a permanent access track to the CSE Compound and the installation of bridges and culverts to facilitate access along the route;
 - > temporary working areas around infrastructure to facilitate construction;
 - > formation of flat areas to site temporary plant from which the conductor would be pulled during construction, which would contain earthed metal working surfaces referred to as Equipotential Zones ('EPZs');
 - > vegetation clearance and management;
 - > other temporary measures required during construction, such as measures to protect road and water crossings during construction (erection of scaffolding etc.);

- > public road improvements ('PRI') including short sections of road widening; junction widening; passing places and bridge strengthening which would be required in multiple areas within the vicinity of the Proposed Development to facilitate the passage of construction traffic to access points along the route; and
- > removal of temporary works and site reinstatement, including replanting where required along the route.

Activities Covered Under Permitted Development under The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, Class 40 (1) (a)

- 2.3.4 The existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL would be reinstalled using underground cable (UGC) for a distance of approximately 1.76 km to allow space for realignment of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL and the Proposed Development.

2.4 Additional Associated Works

- 2.4.1 Other works are likely to be required to facilitate construction of the Proposed Development, or which would occur as a result of its construction and operation, and these are listed below. These works are not included in this application (as ancillary development for which deemed planning permission is sought) and do not form part of the description of the Proposed Development. On that basis they are not assessed in detail in the EIA Report or in this Planning Statement. These works include:

- > borrow pits and quarries to source stone for the construction of access tracks. The final location and design of any borrow pits and quarries that may be necessary for construction would be confirmed by the Principal Contractors and separate planning permissions would be sought as required. For the purpose of the assessment in **Volume 2, Chapter 14 Traffic and Transport** of the EIA Report it has been assumed that all stone would be imported as a worst case scenario;
- > temporary construction compounds would be required along the proposed OHL alignment to facilitate its construction. The final location and design of temporary site compounds would be confirmed by the Principal Contractors and separate planning permissions would be sought as required; and
- > modification of the existing electricity distribution network would be necessary in some areas to accommodate crossings of the proposed OHL. These works are likely to comprise short sections of undergrounding within the vicinity of the Proposed Development and would be undertaken by Scottish Hydro Electric Power Distribution (SHEPD). It is assumed that SHEPD would carry out those works under permitted development rights or appropriate development consents, as required.

2.5 Limits of Deviation

- 2.5.1 A Limit of Deviation ('LoD') defines the maximum extent within which a development can be built. An LoD is required for each of the key components of the Proposed Development i.e. each new steel lattice tower, access track routes and working areas, to enable micro-siting during construction to reflect localised land, engineering and environmental constraints.

- 2.5.2 Consideration is given to the following principles in defining the LoD for the Proposed Development:

- > presumption towards the proposed OHL alignment whilst providing flexibility for micro-siting during the detailed design phase;
- > a presumption towards avoiding sensitive environmental features (including but not limited to ancient woodland on the AWI (supplemented by site investigation), native woodland, SSSIs, GDLs and Scheduled Monuments) and minimising impacts on land use; and
- > presumption towards avoiding residential properties.

Horizontal LoD

2.5.3

In general, the horizontal LoD for which consent is sought is:

- > OHL infrastructure (steel lattice towers and access tracks and all temporary working areas, EPZs, conductors and Operational Corridor ('OC')¹²)
 - Suspension towers and OHL conductors: 100 m either side of alignment centre line (suspension towers would move a maximum of 55 m from their current position due to the OC).
 - Tension towers: 200 m LoD radius around the tower position (tension towers would move a maximum of 100 m from their current position).
 - all temporary working areas must remain within the LoD.
 - Access tracks outwith the OHL infrastructure LoD (distance refers to either side of the track centre line and includes bellmouths):
 - 100 m LOD for new temporary or permanent access tracks;
 - 25 m LOD for existing access tracks being upgraded and;
 - where access tracks are within the OHL infrastructure LoD, the LoDs would be merged.
- > For the cable sealing end compound, an LoD of 50 m north and 50 m west is being sought.

2.5.4

There are some areas within the horizontal LoDs described that would be varied, typically to exclude identified sensitive areas from the available micro-siting zone. An overview of the LoD variations is detailed in **Table 3.1: LoD Schedule** within **Volume 1, Chapter 3 Project Description** of the EIA Report.

Vertical LoD

2.5.5

A vertical LoD i.e. the maximum additional distance by which a tower can be varied from the design height above ground level is also sought to allow a height increase or decrease of 9 m on the proposed tower height presented in the EIA Report within **Volume 5, Appendix 3.1: Tower Schedule**.

2.5.1

Where there is a requirement to vary the location (or height) of infrastructure within the LoDs, the relevant environmental information within the EIA Report would be reviewed to establish any potential constraints or adverse change in effect. Further advice on LoD changes would be sought from environmental specialists, and where relevant consultation would be sought from Aberdeenshire Council or Angus Council (as local authorities) and any relevant statutory consultees as required.

2.5.2

Additionally, prior to any change being made to the Proposed Development within the LoD, a change control process would be undertaken, in line with the Applicant's internal change control process and procedures¹³ to ensure that there is no unacceptable increase in adverse impacts as a result of the change.

¹² An Operational Corridor is required for the entire length of the OHL, including through areas of woodland and commercial forestry to ensure the safe operation of the OHL. The Operational Corridor would never extend beyond the LoD. The Operational Corridor width would typically be 45 m either side of the OHL centreline, but this may vary in some instances, for example, depending on the type of woodland/forestry and local topography.

¹³ SSSEN Transmission 'Change Request Procedure for Project Design Parameters Controlled by Consent Limitations (PR-NET-ENV-503)'

2.6 Description of the OHL Infrastructure

2.6.1 A detailed description of each component of the OHL infrastructure is provided in **Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description** of the EIA Report. **Table 2.1** below provides a summary of the main components.

Table 2.1 Summary Description of OHL Infrastructure

Project Component	Description
Steel Lattice Towers – standard towers	Three basic standard tower types are proposed as OHL support structures within the Proposed Development. These include suspension towers; angle/tension towers; and terminal towers and all will be constructed from fabricated galvanised steel and grey in colour. Table 3.2 Tower Design Parameters within Chapter 3 Project Description of the EIA Report presents the tower designs which will be used for the proposed development.
Conductors and Span Length – Proposed 400kV OHL	The proposed steel lattice towers would support six conductor bundles on six horizontal cross arms. The span length will vary depending on topography, constraints and land usage however the current average span length is approximately 351 m with maximum span of 501 m along the OHL alignment. Some conductors will also include bird diverters which is required as part of the mitigation for Ornithology.
Cable Sealing End ('CSE') Compound	CSE compounds facilitate the transitions from underground cable to OHL. This will be required for the existing Kintore to Craigiebuckler 132 kV OHL which requires undergrounding. The undergrounding includes a new CSE compound and L4m terminal tower, to transition from OHL to underground cable. The works comprise constructing the new terminal tower a fenced compound area, a permanent access track and the dismantling of existing eight towers.
Existing Transmission OHL Realignment	These works relate to the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL and the existing Kintore to Fetteresso 275 kV/400 kV OHL. The works comprise constructing four new L8c support towers for the permanent realignment. Two temporary towers are required to complete the works. Four existing towers would be dismantled as part of the works.
Existing Transmission OHL Crossing	These works relate to the existing Craigiebuckler to Tarland 132 kV OHL which requires modification to achieve the required crossing arrangement to ensure safe operation of the 132 kV and 400 kV OHL. The works comprise constructing four new L4m SF60 structures in a diamond formation. Three temporary towers and removal of one existing tower is also required at this location.

Access Tracks and Public Road Improvements

2.6.7 Safe construction access would be required to each tower construction site for delivery of materials, plant, fittings, fixtures, working platforms and operatives. Access requirements to each tower depend on the tower type and the construction operations required at that tower.

2.6.8 Many individual tower sites would be accessible from public roads and existing farm/forestry tracks and where possible, existing accesses would be utilised, however access spurs from these existing tracks are required in some areas.

- 2.6.9 Many of the existing accesses have been identified as requiring upgrades to bring them to a standard required for delivery of the type of plant and volume of materials required to construct the Proposed Development. In some areas, two different accesses (either new or upgrades of existing track, including bell-mouths where applicable) have been identified to the same tower. These areas are where negotiations with landowners are ongoing and the final track to be used has not yet been agreed. Ultimately, following agreement with the landowners, only one of the two tracks (and bell-mouths where applicable) would be required in each of these cases but both have been assessed within the EIA Report to allow impacts to be determined.
- 2.6.10 Existing road junctions would be utilised where possible, where field, forestry or farm tracks exist; however, numerous new or upgraded access junctions (bell-mouths) would require formation in agreement with the respective local authority roads department to safely connect access tracks with the public road network.
- 2.6.11 **Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description** of the EIA Report alongside relevant figures should be referred to for further details on new and upgraded access tracks.
- 2.6.12 To enable larger construction heavy goods vehicles ('HGVs') and Abnormal Indivisible Load ('AIL') vehicles (where deemed required) to access the Site, numerous PRI works would need to take place in advance of formation of access tracks. The type of works include short sections of road widening; junction widening; passing places and bridge strengthening. Indicative location plans and indicative designs are provided within **Volume 3 Figures 3.8.1 to 3.8.19: Indicative Public Road Improvement Works**; and **Figures 3.9.1 to 3.9.3: Passing Places Indicative Design** of the EIA Report.

2.7 Construction Works and Programme

- 2.7.1 Full details of the typical construction activities are set out in Section 3.8 of Chapter 3 of the EIA Report. High voltage OHL construction typically follows a standard sequence of events as follows:
- > Phase 1 – enabling works;
 - > Phase 2 – construction works;
 - > Phase 3 – commissioning;
 - > Phase 4 – dismantling existing OHLs; and
 - > Phase 5 – reinstatement.
- 2.7.2 It is anticipated that construction of the Proposed Development would take place over a five-year period, although the detailed programming of works will be the responsibility of the Principal Contractors in agreement with SSEN Transmission. It is anticipated that construction will commence in 2026 (subject to consents and approvals being granted) with a proposed energisation date of late 2030.
- 2.7.3 The construction works are due to be delivered concurrently in two sections: Emmock to Hurlie (Sections A-D), and Hurlie to Kintore (Sections E-F). It is currently anticipated that Sections E to F may be completed in advance of sections A to D due to its relative length.
- 2.7.4 The construction phasing and programme is subject to change based upon progress with the necessary statutory consents being granted, and voluntary wayleaves being agreed or granted through the necessary wayleave process. The final decisions in relation to construction methods and phasing would be made by the appointed Principal Contractors, having regard to any conditions attached to the statutory consents.
- 2.7.5 It is envisaged that there would be a number of separate teams working at the same time at different locations along the Proposed Development. The resource levels would be dependent on the final construction sequence and would be determined by the Principal Contractors.

- 2.7.6 Construction working is likely to be during daytime periods only. Working hours are currently anticipated to be between approximately 07:00 to 19:00 during British Summer Time ('BST') and 07:00 to 18:00 during Greenwich Mean Time ('GMT'), seven days a week. Special measures and arrangements would be made for works in proximity to sensitive receptors. Any out of hours working would be agreed in advance with the relevant local planning authority.

Construction Traffic

- 2.7.7 Construction of the Proposed Development will give rise to regular numbers of staff transport movements, with small work crews travelling to and from work site areas. The construction compounds will have a safe area for parking away from public roads.
- 2.7.8 Vehicle movements will be required to construct temporary or upgraded access roads; deliver the foundation and tower components and conductor materials to the site and deliver and collect materials and construction plant from the main site compound and to individual tower locations.
- 2.7.9 The Principal Contractors will determine where access is required, and for which items of plant, and prepare Traffic Management Plans in consultation with the Applicant and the local authorities. Traffic Management Plans will describe all mitigation and signage measures that are proposed on the public road accesses based on access maps and subsequent site assessments. A Construction Traffic Management Plan ('CTMP') and an Enhanced CTMP would be secured by condition of consent. Measures which will be included in the final CTMP and Enhanced CTMP are presented in **Volume 2, Chapter 14 Traffic and Transport** and **Volume 5, Appendix 14.1: Transport Assessment** of the EIA Report.
- 2.7.10 Details of all traffic movements are presented in **Volume 2, Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** of the EIA Report including abnormal loads where applicable. For the purposes of the assessment, it has been assumed that all stone will be imported.

2.8 Land Take

- 2.8.1 The Proposed Development is located in a predominantly rural area with much of the land currently in agricultural use consisting primarily of a mix of arable and lowland and upland grazing. There are a number of small settlements and scattered properties along the route of the Proposed Development as well as recreational features, commercial forests and woodland areas.
- 2.8.2 **Table 3.3 of Chapter 3 Project Description** of the EIA Report sets out the Approximate Land Take for Construction and Operation of the Proposed Development and provides a summary of the overall land take associated with the Proposed Development. **Volume 2, Chapter 7 Land Use and Prime Agricultural Land** of the EIA Report provides further details on the extent of land take and associated impacts on prime agricultural land ('PAL') and **Volume 2, Chapter 8 Forestry** provides further details on the extent of land take and associated impacts on woodland and forestry including impacts on ancient woodland.

2.9 Environmental Management During Construction

- 2.9.1 All works would be carried out in accordance with industry best practice construction measures, guidance and legislation, together with the following documents and procedures:
- > A range of General Environmental Management Plans ('GEMPs') have been developed by the Applicant. Those considered relevant to the Proposed Development are detailed in **Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description** of the EIA Report.
 - > A range of Species Protection Plans ('SPPs') have been developed by the Applicant and have been agreed with NatureScot. These are detailed in **Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description** of the EIA Report.
 - > A Construction Environment Management Plan ('CEMP'): this will be a contractual management requirement of the Principal Contractors. This will detail how the Principal

Contractors would manage the Site in accordance with all commitments and mitigation detailed in the EIA Report, statutory consents and authorisations, and industry best practise and guidance. The CEMP will also reference the GEMPs and SPPs. An Outline CEMP is included at **Volume 5, Appendix 3.4** of the EIA Report. The CEMP will be monitored on site by a suitable qualified Environmental Clerk of Works ('ECoW').

- > Environmental Clerk of Works: Principal Contractors will each appoint a minimum of one Environmental Manager and two roles of Advisory EcoW during construction of the Proposed Development. The Advisory ECoWs will be on-site during construction and will provide advice on and monitor compliance with the CEMP, GEMPs and SPPs, the environmental requirements that the Applicant places upon the Principal Contractors and relevant legislation.

2.10 Biodiversity Enhancement and Habitat Restoration

2.10.1 Principles of biodiversity enhancement and habitat restoration are provided in **Appendix 11.5: Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Plan ('OBEP')** of the EIA Report. The OBEP is supported by **Annex 11.5.1 Biodiversity Net Gain ('BNG') Assessment Report** and **Annex 11.5.2: SSEN Transmission's Biodiversity Net Gain and Irreplaceable Habitat Off-Site Strategy for Kintore to Tealing 400kV OHL**. These principles have been applied to the development of the **Outline Landscape Mitigation Design Guide (Appendix 9.6 of the EIA Report)**.

2.10.2 The OBEP presents a qualitative assessment of the proposed mitigation (in terms of avoidance, reduction, restoration and compensation) and, further, outlines principles and proposals for the delivery of biodiversity enhancement. A summary of the Applicant's commitments with respect biodiversity enhancement are set out in Chapter 4 in relation to compliance with Policy 3 of NPF4.

2.11 Operation and Maintenance

2.11.1 In general, OHLs require very little maintenance. Regular inspections are undertaken to identify any unacceptable deterioration of components, so that they can be replaced.

2.11.2 The OC of the OHL is also monitored through periodic inspection to identify growth of trees which may compromise the resilience of the OHL. Works may be required to fell trees or remove vegetation where necessary to ensure the safe operation of the line.

2.11.3 If conductors are damaged, due to inclement weather, short sections may have to be replaced. Insulators and conductors are normally replaced after about 40 years, and towers may require painting as part of maintenance.

2.11.4 In the event of a fault on the line, delivery of working platforms may be required to tension towers to allow the towers to be safely worked on.

2.12 Decommissioning

2.12.1 The Proposed Development would not have a fixed operational life. The effects associated with the construction phase can be considered to be representative of worst-case decommissioning effects.

3. The Renewable Energy Policy & Legislative Framework

3.1 Introduction

- 3.1.1 This Chapter refers to the renewable energy policy and emissions reduction legislative framework with reference to relevant international, UK and Scottish provisions. The framework of international agreements and obligations, legally binding targets and climate change global advisory reports is the foundation upon which national energy policy and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) reduction law is based. This underpins what can be termed the need case for renewable energy and associated transmission infrastructure from which the Proposed Development can draw a high level of support.
- 3.1.2 The Proposed Development requires to be considered against a background of material UK and Scottish Government energy and climate policy and legislative provisions, as well as national and local planning policy and advice.
- 3.1.3 There is clear and consistent policy support at all levels, from international to local, for the deployment and transmission of renewable energy generally, to combat the global climate crisis, diversify the mix of energy sources, achieve greater security of supply, and to attain legally binding emissions reduction targets.
- 3.1.4 The Proposed Development, reinforcing grid and increasing capacity and security of supply, would make a valuable contribution to help Scotland and the UK meet its renewable energy and electricity production targets, while supporting emissions reduction to combat climate change in the current Climate Emergency.
- 3.1.5 UK and Scottish Government renewable energy policy and associated renewable energy and electricity targets are important considerations. In the sections to follow, the context of international climate change commitments by way of policy and targets is set out. This is followed by reference to key UK level statutory and policy provisions and then a detailed description of relevant Scottish Government statutory and policy provisions is set out.

3.2 International Commitments

The Paris Agreement (2015)

- 3.2.1 In December 2015, 196 countries adopted the first ever universal, legally binding global climate deal at the Paris Climate Conference ('COP21'). The Paris Agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change sets out a global action plan towards climate neutrality with the aim of stopping the increase in global average temperature to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5°C.
- 3.2.2 An outcome of the Paris Agreement is that moving to a low carbon economy is a globally shared goal and will require absolute emission reduction targets. The UK Government's commitment under the Paris Agreement links to the Climate Change Committee's ('CCC') advice to both the UK and Scottish Governments on 'net zero' targets which have now, at both the UK and Scottish levels, been translated into new legislative provisions and targets for both 2045 (Scotland) and 2050 (UK).
- 3.2.3 The Paris Agreement does not represent Government policy in the UK or Scotland. However, it sets the general context to domestic policy and renewable energy and GHG reduction targets to meet the UK's commitment in the Paris Agreement.

United Nations - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

- 3.2.4 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ('IPCC') is the United Nations Body for assessing the science related to climate change.
- 3.2.5 The IPCC prepares comprehensive assessment reports regarding the state of scientific, technical, and socio-economic knowledge on climate change and its impacts and future risks and options for reducing the rate at which climate change is taking place. IPCC reports are commissioned by the member Governments and are an agreed basis for COP¹⁴ negotiations.
- 3.2.6 The IPCC's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C, published in 2018, was a key piece of evidence for the CCC's recommendation to the UK Government for a 2050 net zero greenhouse gas emission target. The IPCC's reports since 2018 have provided an up-to-date estimate of how close global temperatures are to 1.5°C of warming above pre-industrial levels and the remaining volume of global cumulative carbon dioxide that could be emitted to be consistent with keeping global warming below thresholds (such as the 1.5°C and 2°C levels referred to in the Paris Agreement).
- 3.2.7 The IPCC's 6th Assessment Report was published in March 2023. The Summary for Policymakers Report¹⁵ at page 10 states that it is likely that warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st Century and make it harder to limit warming to 2°C. It states (page 12):
- "Continued greenhouse gas emissions will lead to increasing global warming, with the best estimate of reaching 1.5°C in the near term in considered scenarios and modelled pathways. Every increment of global warming will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards (high confidence). Deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions would lead to a discernible slowdown in global warming within around two decades, and also to discernible changes in atmospheric composition within a few years (high confidence)".*
- 3.2.8 Page 24 of the Summary states *"There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence)".*

COP 28, Dubai 2023

- 3.2.9 The United Nations Climate Change Conference (Conference of the Parties - COP28) closed on 13 December 2023. The UN press release of the same date states that the agreement reached *"Signals the 'beginning of the end' of the fossil fuel era by laying the ground for swift, just and equitable transition, underpinned by deep emissions cuts and scaled up finance."*
- 3.2.10 The statement adds:
- "The stocktake recognises the science that indicates global greenhouse gas emissions need to be cut 43% by 2030, compared to 2019 levels, to limit global warming to 1.5°C. But it notes parties are off track when it comes to meeting their Paris Agreement goals.*
- The stocktake calls on parties to take actions towards achieving, at a global scale, a tripling of renewable energy capacity and doubling of energy efficiency improvements by 2030. The list also includes accelerating efforts towards the phase down of unabated coal power, phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, and other measures that drive the transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, with developed countries continuing to take the lead."* (underlining added)

UN Emissions Gap Report (2024)

- 3.2.11 The UN Emissions Gap Report (October 2024) and its 'key messages' summary provides the annual independent science-based assessment of the gap between the pledged GHG reductions, and the reductions required to align with the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.

¹⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Conference of the Parties (COP).

¹⁵ A Summary of the main 6th Assessment Report.

3.2.12 The Report states that against the background of GHG emissions reaching new highs and climate impacts intensifying globally, nations are preparing what are termed Nationally Determined Contributions ('NDCs') for submission in early 2025, ahead of COP30 in Brazil.

3.2.13 The Report states that in order to avoid the present trajectory of temperature increase far beyond 2°C over the course of this century:

"Nations must use COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, as the launch pad to increase ambition and ensure the NDCs collectively promise to almost halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. They must then follow up with rapid delivery of commitments, building on actions taken now. If they do not do so, the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C will be gone within a few years and the 2°C target will be in danger".

3.2.14 The Report states (on page 1) that there must be *"unprecedented cuts to greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to keep 1.5°C alive"*.

3.2.15 In order to put the challenge of emissions reduction in context, the key messages document (on page 2), sets out that if only current NDCs are implemented and no further ambition is shown in the new pledges to come, *"the best we could expect to achieve is catastrophic global warming of up to 2.6°C over the course of the century"*.

COP 29, Baku 2024

3.2.16 The 29th UN Climate Conference hosted in Baku, Azerbaijan concluded on November 24 2024. New financial goals at COP 29 will build on the progress made on global action at COP 27, where a historic Loss and Damage Fund was agreed, and COP 28, which delivered a global agreement to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a swift and fair manner as well as triple renewable energy and boost climate resilience. Unlike COP 27 and 28 however, COP 29 reached an agreement on carbon markets which will help countries deliver their respective climate plans on a quicker and cheaper basis, as well as make faster progress in halving global emissions.

3.3 UK Climate Change & Energy Legislation & Policy

The Climate Emergency

3.3.1 A critical part of the response to the challenge of climate change was the Climate Emergency which was declared by the Scottish Government in April 2019 and by the UK Parliament in May 2019. The declaration of Climate Emergency needs to be viewed in the context in which it was declared (advice from the CCC) and in response to commitments under the Paris Agreement and what followed from it as a result of the declaration (new emissions reduction law).

The Climate Change Act 2008 & Carbon Budgets

3.3.2 The Climate Change Act 2008 ('the 2008 Act') provides a system of carbon budgeting. Under the 2008 Act, the UK committed to a net reduction in GHG emissions by 2050 of 80% against the 1990 baseline. In June 2019, secondary legislation was passed that extended that target to at least 100% against the 1990 baseline by 2050, with Scotland committing to net zero by 2045.

3.3.3 The 2008 Act also established the CCC which advises the UK Government on emissions targets, and reports to Parliament on progress made in reducing GHG emissions.

3.3.4 The CCC has produced seven four yearly carbon budgets, covering 2008 – 2042. These carbon budgets represent a progressive limitation on the total quantity of GHG emissions to be emitted over the five-year period as summarised in **Table 3.1** below. Essentially, they are five yearly caps on emissions.

3.3.5 These legally binding 'carbon budgets' act as stepping-stones toward the 2050 target. The CCC advises on the appropriate level of each carbon budget and once accepted by Government, the respective budgets are legislated by Parliament.

Table 2.1: Carbon Budgets and Progress¹⁶

Budget	Carbon budget level	Reduction below 1990 levels	Progress on Budgetary Period
1 st carbon budget (2008 – 2012)	3,018 MtCO ₂ e	26%	-27%
2 nd carbon budget (2013 – 2017)	2,782 MtCO ₂ e	32%	-42%
3 rd carbon budget (2018 – 2022)	2,544 MtCO ₂ e	38% by 2020	-50% ¹⁷
4 th carbon budget (2023 – 2027)	1,950 MtCO ₂ e	52% by 2025	n/a
5 th carbon budget (2028 – 2032)	1,725 MtCO ₂ e	57% by 2030	n/a
6 th carbon budget (2033 – 2037)	965 MtCO ₂ e	78% by 2035	n/a
7 th carbon budget (2038 – 2042)	535 MtCO ₂ e	87% by 2042	n/a
Net Zero Target	100%	By 2050	

Source: CCC

- 3.3.6 The Sixth Carbon Budget ('CB6') requires a reduction in UK greenhouse gas emissions of 78% by 2035 relative to 1990 levels. This is considered as a world leading commitment, placing the UK *"decisively on the path to net zero by 2050 at the latest, with a trajectory that is consistent with the Paris Agreement"* (CB6, page 13).
- 3.3.7 Page 23 of CB6 refers to the devolved nations and sets out that UK climate targets cannot be met without strong policy action across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Key points from CB6 include:
- > The CCC is clear in setting out that new demand for electricity will mean that electricity demand will rise 50% to 2035 and doubling or even trebling by 2050.
 - > CB6 needs to be met and that will need more and faster deployment of renewable energy developments than has happened in the past.
 - > The related 'Methodology Report' from the CCC advice, states that in all scenarios for the carbon budget and looking ahead to 2050, the CCC sees new onshore wind generation being deployed by 2050. They set out that their modelling reflects this by almost doubling onshore wind capacity to 20-30 GW in all scenarios by 2050.
- 3.3.8 Following the Sixth Carbon Budget, the UK Government announced on 20 April 2021 that it would set the world's most ambitious climate change target into law (by the Carbon Budget Order 2021 ('the Order')¹⁸) to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels. This effectively brings forward the UK's previous commitment of an 80% reduction by 2050 by 15 years.
- 3.3.9 The Seventh Carbon Budget ('CB7') was published by the CCC in February 2025. The CCC's recommended level for CB7, namely a limit on the UK's GHG emissions over the five-year period 2038 to 2042 is 535 including emissions from international aviation and shipping.
- 3.3.10 Page 12 of the CB7 states:

¹⁶ Source: CCC.

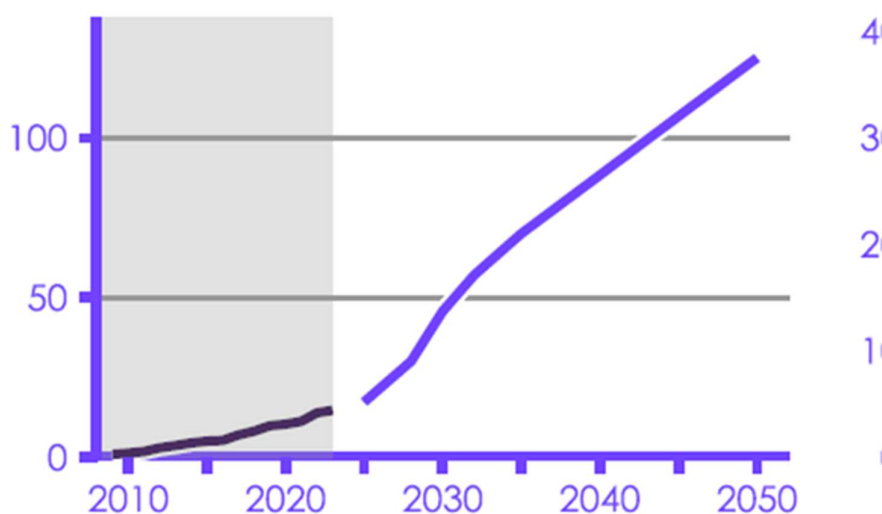
¹⁷ Confirmed by CCC in 'Final Statement for the Third Carbon Budget' May 2024. By the end of the period in 2022, UK net GHG emissions were 50% lower than the base year emissions.

¹⁸ The Order sets the carbon budget for the 2033-2037 budgetary period at 965 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. The net UK carbon account is defined in section 27 of the Climate Change Act 2008.

“By the middle of the Seventh Carbon Budget on our pathway, emissions in the UK will be only a quarter of the level they are today, and 80% lower than levels in 1990 (90% lower excluding emissions from international aviation and shipping.) Achieving this will require a significant reduction in emissions across sectors including surface transport, buildings, industry and agriculture.”

- 3.3.11 It sets out (page 12) that achieving CB7 will mean that UK based renewable energy provides the bulk of generation and this will replace oil and gas across most of the economy. It adds that *“this requires twice as much electricity as today by 2040”*.
- 3.3.12 In relation to the electricity grid, CB7 states (page 106) that in relation to the increase in renewable technology deployment that *“these technologies need to be accompanied by investment in network infrastructure, including rapidly building out the transmission grid and speeding up the grid connection process, which currently poses a barrier to electrifying industry.... Steep growth is needed from today out to 2040.”*
- 3.3.13 In relation to offshore, capacity increases from 15 GW in 2023 to reach 88 GW by 2040. It is stated on page 106 that this will *“require a rapid ramp up this decade”*. The anticipated growth of offshore wind capacity is shown in the Report (page 109) and illustrated in **Figure 3.1** below.

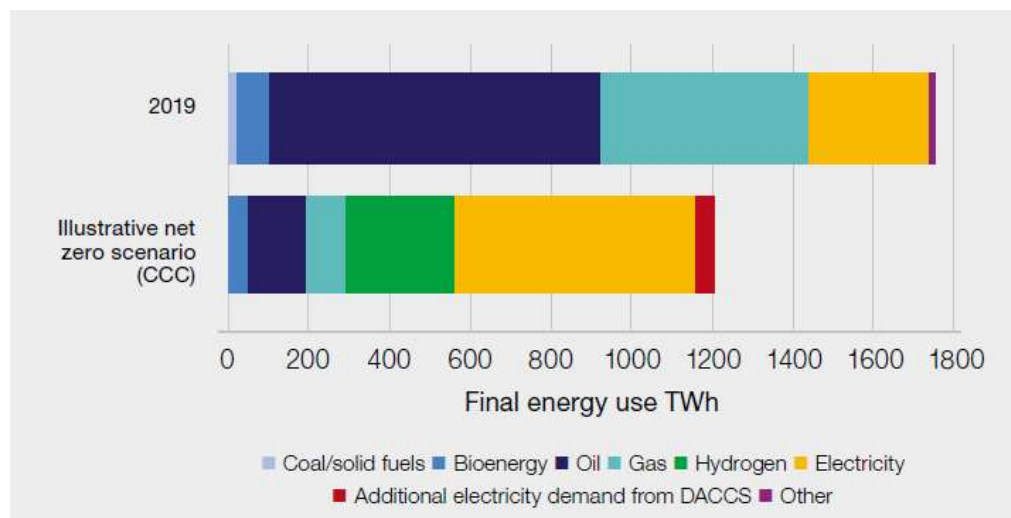
Figure 3.1: Offshore Wind Operational Capacity (GW) in CCC ‘Balanced Pathway’



The UK Energy White Paper (December 2020)

- 3.3.14 The Energy White Paper ‘Powering our Net Zero Future’ (‘the White Paper’), published on 14 December 2020, represents a sea change in UK policy, and highlights the importance of renewable electricity.
- 3.3.15 It sets out that *“electricity is a key enabler for the transition away from fossil fuels and decarbonising the economy cost-effectively by 2050”*. A key objective is to *“accelerate the deployment of clean electricity generation through the 2020s”* (page 38).
- 3.3.16 Electricity demand is forecast to double out to 2050, which will *“require a four-fold increase in clean electricity generation with the decarbonisation of electricity increasingly underpinning the delivery of our net zero target”* (page 42).
- 3.3.17 This anticipated growth of renewable electricity is illustrated in the graph below – **Figure 3.2**.

Figure 3.2: Illustrative UK Final Energy Use in 2050¹⁹



3.3.18 Whilst offshore renewables are expected to grow significantly, the White Paper also sets out that “onshore wind and solar will be key building blocks of the future generation mix, along with offshore wind. We will need sustained growth in the capacity of these sectors in the next decade to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions in all demand scenarios” (page 45).

3.3.19 The Proposed Development is an important element in enabling the connection of 11GW of offshore wind projects associated with Scotwind.

The British Energy Security Strategy (April 2022)

3.3.20 The British Energy Security Strategy (“the Strategy”) was published by the UK Government on 7 April 2022. The Strategy focuses on energy supply and states that in the future nuclear will have an expanded role and that renewables have an important role. The foreword states, *inter alia*:

“this government will reverse decades of myopia and make the big call to lead again in a technology the UK was the first to pioneer, by investing massively in nuclear power....

Accelerating the transition away from oil and gas then depends critically on how quickly we can roll out new renewables....

The growing proportion of our electricity coming from renewables reduces our exposure to volatile fossil fuel markets. Indeed, without the renewables we are putting on the grid today, and the green levies that support them, energy bills would be higher than they are now. But now we need to be bolder in removing the red tape that holds back new clean energy developments and exploit the potential of all renewable technologies.”

3.3.21 Reducing Scotland’s and the wider UK’s dependency on hydrocarbons has important security of supply, electricity cost and fuel poverty avoidance benefits. Those actions already urgently required in the fight against climate change are now required more urgently for global political stability and insulation against dependencies on rogue nation states.

3.3.22 The need for the Proposed Development and network reinforcements is underlined within the Strategy, which recognises the significant impact on the cost of living from rising gas prices

¹⁹ Source: Energy White Paper page 9 (2020). Energy white paper: Powering our net zero future - GOV.UK

and sets out a plan to increase the supply of electricity from zero-carbon British sources to deliver affordable, clean, and secure power in the long term.

Climate Change Committee Report to UK Parliament (2024)

- 3.3.23 The CCC published the report 'Progress in Reducing Emissions 2024 Report to Parliament' in July 2024 ('the CCC Report'). The Executive Summary (page 8) states:
- "the previous Government signalled the slowing of pace and reversed or delayed key policies. The new Government will have to act fast to hit the country's commitments.*
- The cost of key low-carbon technologies is falling, creating an opportunity for the UK to boost investment, reclaim global climate leadership and enhance energy security by accelerating take-up. British-based renewable energy is the cheapest and fastest way to reduce vulnerability to volatile global fossil fuel markets. The faster we get off fossil fuels, the more secure we become."*
- 3.3.24 The CCC Report makes it clear that urgent action is needed to get on track for the UK's 2030 emissions reduction target. In this regard it states (page 8):
- "The UK has committed to reduce emissions in 2030 by 68% compared to 1990 levels, as its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement. It is the first UK target set in line with Net Zero. Now only six years away, the country is not on track to hit this target despite a significant reduction in emissions in 2023. Much of the progress to date has come from phasing out coal generated electricity, with the last coal-fired power station closing later this year. We now need to rapidly reduce oil and gas use as well."*
- 3.3.25 And further (page 9):
- "Our assessment is that only a third of the emissions reductions required to achieve the 2030 target are currently covered by credible plans. Action is needed across all sectors of the economy, with low carbon technologies becoming the norm."*
- 3.3.26 The UK should now be in a phase of rapid investment and delivery, however the CCC notes in the CCC Report that all indicators for low carbon technology roll out are "off track, with rates needing to significantly ramp up." In this regard in terms of renewable technologies it states (page 9):
- > Annual offshore wind installations must increase by at least three times;
 - > Onshore wind installations will need to double; and
 - > Solar installations must increase by five times.
- 3.3.27 Chapter 2 of the CCC Report confirms that the third Carbon Budget was met (covering the period 2018 to 2022), however "future carbon budgets will require an increase in the pace and breadth of decarbonisation. It is imperative that an ambitious path of emissions reduction is maintained towards Net Zero" (Page 33).
- 3.3.28 Section 2.3 of the CCC Report addresses emissions reductions required for future Carbon Budgets. Paragraph 2.3.1 states that:
- "emissions reductions across most sectors will need to significantly speed up to be on track to meet the UK's climate targets in the 2030s, and therefore the long term target of Net Zero by 2050. Emissions reductions will need to outperform the legislated Fourth Carbon Budget for the UK to be on a sensible path to achieve its 2030 NDC, the Sixth Carbon Budget and Net Zero."*
- 3.3.29 Chapter 3 of the CCC Report examines indicators of current delivery progress and at page 50 it references a number of key points including *inter alia*:
- "Required pace – substantial progress is needed on a range of key indicators over the rest of this decade, to get the UK on track to meet its 2030 emissions targets. Low carbon technologies need to quickly become the default options in many areas..."*

Renewable energy capacity has been growing steadily. However, roll-out rates will need to increase, compared to those since the start of this decade, to deliver the capacity needed by the end of the decade. Annual installations of offshore wind will need to more than treble, onshore wind more than double and solar increase by a factor of five."

- 3.3.30 With regard to the Fourth Carbon Budget (2023-2027) it states (page 70) that although credible plans cover almost all of the emissions reductions required to meet it, *"this budget was set before the UK's Net Zero target was legislated. The UK will need to reduce emissions by double the amount implied by the target to be on a sensible path to Net Zero...."*
- 3.3.31 With regard to the 2030 NDC and Sixth Carbon Budget (for the period 2033 to 2037) the CCC Report states that credible plans cover only around a third of emissions reductions needed to meet the UK's 2030 NDC and a quarter of those needed to meet the Sixth Carbon Budget. It adds (page 70) *"that 2030 NDC is now only six years away. While our assessment of the policies and plans to deliver it has improved slightly, there remains significant risks to achieving these goals."*

Labour Government & Commitment to Renewables (2024)

- 3.3.32 The UK Government change at Westminster in 2024 and a Labour administration for the UK is of relevance in terms of the new UK Government policy approach to net zero.
- 3.3.33 Energy policy is reserved to Westminster and therefore, although the Scottish Government has progressed its own energy policy in parallel with its full devolved authority over the planning system in Scotland, UK Government policy is an important material consideration.

UK Government: Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (2024)

- 3.3.34 In addition, a key new material consideration is the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, issued by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero ('DESNZ') in December 2024. It sets out (page 9) that Britain needs to install *"clean sources of power at a pace never previously achieved"*.
- 3.3.35 It further adds (page 10):
"clean power by 2030 will herald a new era of clean energy independence and tackle three major challenges: the need for secure and affordable energy supply, the creation of essential new energy industries supported by skilled workers in their thousands, the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit our contribution to the damaging effects of climate change. Clean power by 2030 is a sprint towards these essential goals".
- 3.3.36 The document adds that
"Meeting the clean power 2030 goal is key to accelerating to net zero, not only in eliminating emissions that currently come from electricity generation, but also via the application of clean power in the buildings, transport and industry sectors... The shift to a clean power system by 2030 forms the backbone of the transition to net zero, as we move to an economy much more reliant on electricity".
- 3.3.37 Page 74 of the Action Plan states that *"Meeting the renewable capacity set out in the DESNZ 'clean power capacity range' is achievable but will require deployment at a sharply accelerated scale and pace"*.

3.4 Climate Change & Renewable Energy Policy: Scotland

The Scottish Energy Strategy (2017)

- 3.4.1 The Scottish Energy Strategy ('SES') was published in December 2017. The SES preceded the important events and publications referred to above but nevertheless sets out that onshore wind is recognised as a key contributor to the delivery of renewable energy targets – specifically 50% energy from renewable sources to be attained by 2030. The SES did not and

could not take account of what may be required in terms of additional renewable generation capacity to attain the new legally binding 'net zero' targets so it is out of date in that respect.

- 3.4.2 The SES refers to "Renewable and Low Carbon Solutions" as a strategic priority (page 41) and states *"we will continue to champion and explore the potential of Scotland's huge renewable energy resource, its ability to meet our local and national heat, transport and electricity needs – helping to achieve our ambitious emissions reduction targets"*.

- 3.4.3 It is worth highlighting a key extract from the recent Kendoon to Tongland 132kV Reinforcement Decision (ECU00002124-2128) where Scottish Ministers at para 116 make specific reference to the SES as follows:

"The Energy Strategy states that 'Scotland should have the capacity, the connections, the flexibility and resilience necessary to maintain secure and reliable supplies of energy to all of our homes and businesses as our energy transition takes place'.

It adds that 'Scotland needs a balanced and secure electricity supply. That means a system and a range of technologies which provide sufficient generation and interconnection to meet demand. It means an electricity network which is resilient and sufficiently secure against any fluctuations or interruptions to supply'."

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019

- 3.4.4 The Scottish Government has set legal obligations to decarbonise and reduce emissions. Most notably, the Scottish Government has a statutory target to achieve 'net zero' by 2045. It is clear that to have any hope of achieving the net zero target, significant expansion of renewable generation capacity is required.

- 3.4.5 When it was enacted, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 set world leading greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, including a target to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050. The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 amended the 2009 Act and has set more ambitious targets.

CCC Report to Scottish Parliament – Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland (March 2024)

- 3.4.6 The CCC produced a report to the Scottish Parliament entitled 'Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland' in March 2024. The related press release of the same date states that Scotland's 2030 climate goals are no longer credible. It states:

"Continued delays to the updated Climate Change Plan and further slippage in promised climate policies mean that the Climate Change Committee no longer believes that the Scottish Government will meet its statutory 2030 goal to reduce emissions by 75%. There is no comprehensive strategy for Scotland to decarbonise towards Net Zero.

The Scottish Government delayed its draft Climate Change Plan last year despite the 2030 target being only six years away. This has left a significant period without sufficient actions or policies to reach the target; the required acceleration in emissions reduction in Scotland is now beyond what is credible."

- 3.4.7 The related press release states that there is a path to Scotland's post-2030 targets, but stronger action is needed to reduce emissions across the economy.

- 3.4.8 Page 18 of the report addresses electricity supply, and it states that there has been some progress in delivering renewable electricity generation in Scotland. Reference is made to the Government's aim to develop 8-11 GW of offshore wind and 20 GW on onshore wind capacity, both by 2030. The report notes that *"The growth in onshore wind capacity has slowed, however, and is slightly off track to deliver its 2030 target, which will require operational capacity to more than double."*

- 3.4.9 Page 40 states that in terms of onshore wind, Scotland must increase the deployment rate by more than a factor of 4 to an average annual rate of 1.4 GW.

- 3.4.10 In light of this CCC Report, the Scottish Government stated it remained committed to achieving net zero but would move to a multi-year carbon budget approach to measuring emissions reduction (instead of annual targets) which would bring the Scottish Parliament in line with the Welsh and UK approaches.

The Climate Change (Emission Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2024

- 3.4.11 The Climate Change (Emission Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent on 22 November 2024. The Act repealed the annual and interim emissions reduction target framework that was established under the 2009 Act and establishes a carbon budget approach to target setting, with budgets to be set through secondary legislation using the latest advice from the CCC, to replace the concept of statutory annual and interim targets. The Act also makes provision for a new Climate Change Plan to be published that reflects the carbon budgets.
- 3.4.12 As explained, the Act followed advice from the CCC that Scotland's interim emissions reduction target for 2030 could not be achieved. The Act does not change the existing statutory target of net zero emissions by 2045.

3.5 The Draft Energy Strategy & Just Transition Plan

- 3.5.1 The Scottish Government published a new Draft 'Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan' entitled 'Delivering a fair and secure zero carbon energy system for Scotland' (the 'draft Strategy') on 10 January 2023. The draft Strategy is to replace the one previously published in 2017. The consultation period ended in April 2023. As a draft document it can only be afforded limited weight. The draft Strategy is however consistent with the adopted policy set out in NPF4 and the identification of the 2020s as a crucial decade for the large-scale delivery of renewable energy projects supporting urgent transition to net zero.
- 3.5.2 The Ministerial Foreword states:
- "The imperative is clear: in this decisive decade, we must deliver an energy system that meets the challenge of becoming a net zero nation by 2045, supplies safe and secure energy for all, generate economic opportunities, and builds a just transition..."*
- The delivery of this draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan will reduce energy costs in the long term and reduce the likelihood of future energy cost crises....*
- It is also clear that as part of our response to the climate crisis we must reduce our dependence on oil and gas and that Scotland is well positioned to do so in a way that ensures we have sufficient, secure and affordable energy to meet our needs, to support economic growth and to capture sustainable export opportunities....*
- For all these reasons, this draft Strategy and Plan supports the fastest possible just transition for the oil and gas sector in order to secure a bright future for a revitalised North Sea energy sector focused on renewables."*
- 3.5.3 The Foreword adds that the draft Strategy sets out key ambitions for Scotland's energy future including:
- > More than 20 GW of additional renewable electricity on and offshore by 2030.
 - > Accelerated decarbonisation of domestic industry, transport and heat.
 - > Generation of surplus electricity, enabling export of electricity and renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe.
 - > Energy security through development of our own resources and additional energy storage.
 - > A just transition by maintaining or increasing employment in Scotland's energy production sector against a decline in North Sea production.

- 3.5.4 The draft Strategy states (page 7, Executive Summary) that the vision for Scotland's energy system is:
- "...that by 2045 Scotland will have a flourishing, climate friendly energy system that delivers affordable, resilient and clean energy supplies for Scotland's households, communities and business. This will deliver maximum benefit for Scotland, enabling us to achieve a wider climate and environmental ambitions, drive the development of a wellbeing economy and deliver a just transition for our workers, businesses, communities and regions.*
- In order to deliver that vision, this Strategy sets out clear policy positions and a route map of actions with a focus out to 2030".*
- 3.5.5 The draft Strategy specifically addresses energy networks (page 36) and states *"Significant infrastructure investment in Scotland's transmission system is needed to ameliorate constraints and enable more renewable power to flow to centres of demand."*
- 3.5.6 It states that National Grid has identified the requirement for over £21 billion of investment in British electricity transmission infrastructure to meet 2030 targets and that over half of this investment will involve Scottish transmission owners SPEN and SSEN Transmission (the Applicant).
- 3.5.7 The draft Strategy adds that: *"the Scottish Government is working closely with network companies to support timely delivery of this infrastructure"*.
- 3.5.8 Reference is made to the ambitious business plans of transmission businesses which *"reflect the scale and pace of delivery required to meet Scottish Government ambitions"*.
- 3.5.9 Chapter 5 of the Strategy refers to 'creating the conditions for a net zero energy system'. It states (page 125) that *"As we transition to a net zero energy system, renewables and other zero carbon technologies... will need to provide all the services required to ensure a secure energy system"*.
- 3.5.10 The Chapter goes on to reference in this regard energy markets and network regulation and with regard to network investment (page 126), it states that the Government is working closely with the network companies *"to support timely delivery of required electricity network infrastructure"*.
- 3.5.11 It further adds with regard to constraint costs that the Government will continue to work with National Grid ESO (now NESO), transmission owners and Ofgem *"to explore opportunities to accelerate planned network investment to relieve constraints"*.
- 3.5.12 Therefore, a key aspect of the draft Strategy in terms of network investment is the need for speed of delivery of infrastructure to ensure not only that need can be met, but that there can be energy security and resilience within the wider energy system.

3.6 The Green Industrial Strategy

- 3.6.1 The Scottish Government published a Green Industrial Strategy ('GIS') in September 2024. The Executive Summary sets out the mission of the GIS, namely:
- "This Green Industrial Strategy's mission is to ensure that Scotland realises the maximum possible economic benefit from the opportunities created by the global transition to net zero".*
- 3.6.2 The GIS sets out five opportunity areas for Scotland where identified strengths are most likely to lead to growth and the potential to grow Scotland's exports. The sectors relate to Scotland's wind economy, carbon capture and storage, supporting the green economy by way of professional and financial services, growing the hydrogen sector and establishing Scotland as a competitive centre for clean energy intensive industries of the future.
- 3.6.3 Point 4 of their "onshore wind" approach states
- "work with UK Government, Ofgem and the National Energy System Operator to ensure that the interests of Scotland are best represented. Markets, policies, and regulation affecting the*

electricity sector are largely reserved to the UK Government under the UK Electricity Act (1989). We are working with the UK Government to enable a faster, more efficient, and strategic approach to designing and regulating the net zero energy system, in particular for accelerating grid connections and network build.”

- 3.6.4 Availability of grid connections is further referenced as a barrier to tackle as part of the decarbonisation of industrial processes.
- 3.6.5 The GIS confirms that *“timely grid connections and strengthened grid infrastructure will be key to securing renewables project delivery and investor and supply chain confidence in Scotland.”*
- 3.6.6 The Government's objectives clearly support the delivery of grid expansion and strengthened grid infrastructure. This support is not only critical towards attaining net zero targets but will also help deliver the Government's clean green industry mission.

3.7 CCC Report, Scotland's Carbon Budgets, Advice for the Scottish Government

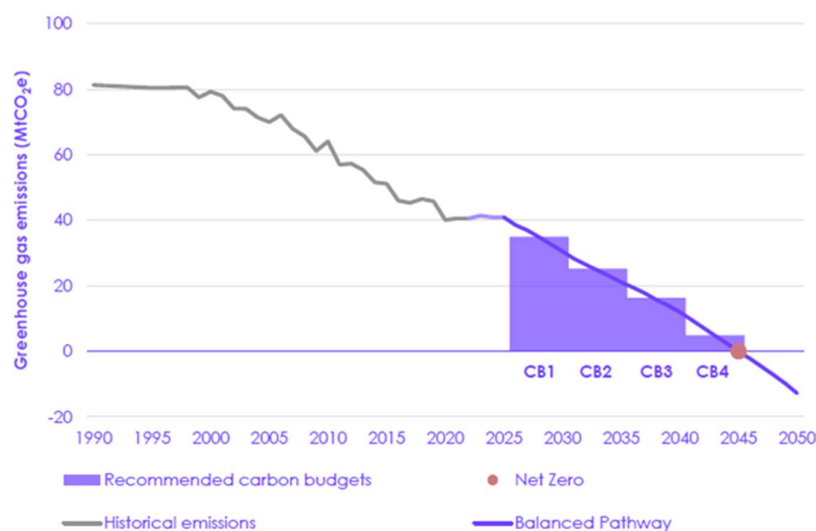
- 3.7.1 The CCC Report Scotland's Carbon Budgets was published in May 2025 (the 'CCC 2025 Report'), and it sets out the CCC's advice on the level of Scotland's four proposed carbon budgets, covering the period 2026 to 2045. It recommends that the Scottish Government sets its carbon budgets, at annual average levels of emissions that are:

- > 57% lower than 1990 levels for the First Carbon Budget (2026 to 2030);
- > 69% lower than 1990 levels for the Second Carbon Budget (2031 to 2035);
- > 80% lower than 1990 levels for the Third Carbon Budget (2036 to 2040); and
- > 94% lower than 1990 levels for the Fourth Carbon Budget (2041 to 2045).

- 3.7.2 The report sets out that the CCC's advice *“shows that the proposed carbon budgets are deliverable and Scotland can achieve its 2045 Net Zero target.”* (page 8)

- 3.7.3 The recommended carbon budgets are illustrated in **Figure 3.3** below.

Figure 3.3: CCC Recommended Carbon Budgets for Scotland²⁰



²⁰ CCC (May, 2025). The Report states that the 'Balanced pathway' sets the recommended level of Scotland's carbon budgets

- 3.7.4 It states that getting to net zero by 2045 will require immediate action, at pace and scale and adds that decisions on the exact pathway and policies are for the Scottish Government to determine.
- 3.7.5 The CCC 2025 Report explains that progress to date has largely come from electricity decarbonisation, reflecting Scotland's abundant renewable resources. It goes on to state (page 9) that:
- "Action will increasingly be required in predominantly devolved policy areas to hit the Net Zero 2045 target and the proposed carbon budgets. Now that the framework for climate action has been reset, the Scottish Government has the opportunity to use its powers to match its ambitions with action."*
- 3.7.6 The CCC 2025 Report identifies priority actions, which over the period of the first two carbon budgets will be the remaining decarbonisation of electricity generation as well as further electrification of key technologies, particularly the roll-out of EVs and heat pumps.
- 3.7.7 The CCC 2025 Report identifies the sources of future emissions reductions and notes that in the next decade, over the next two carbon budgets, they are predominantly met by the electrification of key technologies across the economy and measures to reduce demand for high-carbon activities.
- 3.7.8 Specifically in relation to electricity and low carbon supply the Executive Summary explains (page 12) that in the Balanced Pathway set out by the CCC:
- "the capacity of variable renewables in Scotland (including offshore and onshore wind and solar) more than triples from 15 GW in 2023 to 49 GW by 2035, increasing to 66 GW by 2045. This provides 98% of electricity generation in Scotland in 2035 and caters for increasing demand in Scotland and the rest of Great Britain (GB). Grid storage, use of storable fuels on the GB-wide network, and smart demand flexibility ensure a reliable supply of electricity even in adverse weather years. These technologies need to be accompanied by rapidly expanding the transmission grid, upgrading the distribution network, and speeding up the grid connection process. To deliver clean electricity, the planning process to approve large electricity infrastructure projects in Scotland needs to be urgently improved."*
- 3.7.9 Scotland currently has approximately 17.6 GW²¹ of renewable energy operating capacity, therefore, to achieve the Balanced Pathway figure of 66 GW by 2045 will require an additional 48.4 GW to be deployed.
- 3.7.10 The CCC 2025 Report sets out in more detail the key actions to deliver the Balanced Pathway in electricity supply. At page 94 it refers to the key action for the Scottish Government which is to *"Urgently improve the planning process to approve large electricity infrastructure projects in Scotland, such as transmission lines and onshore wind farms."* citing that it can currently take up to four years to approve large electricity infrastructure projects in Scotland.
- 3.7.11 The Report makes reference to the Scottish Government and the UK Government's commitment to reform the energy consents system in Scotland, including through measures in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. It states that *"Both governments should ensure that these reforms are now implemented at pace. All bodies involved in the planning and consenting process must also be adequately resourced and skilled."*
- 3.8 Conclusions on the Renewable Energy Policy & legislative Framework**
- 3.8.1 The Proposed Development is strongly supported by the current renewable energy policy and legislative framework.
- 3.8.2 The trajectory, in terms of the scale and pace of action required to reduce emissions, grows ever steeper than before and it is essential that rapid progress is made through the 2020s.

²¹ Scottish Government (March 2025) Energy Statistics for Scotland – Q4 2024

The rate of emission reductions must increase otherwise the legally binding target of net zero by 2045 will not be met.

- 3.8.3 It is clear from the UK Energy White Paper and the forecasts by the CCC that electricity demand is expected to grow substantially (scenarios vary but potentially by a factor of three or four) as carbon intensive sources of energy are displaced by electrification of other industry sectors, particularly heat and transport.
- 3.8.4 Whilst there has been a move away from annual emission reduction targets in Scotland the overall target of net zero remains unchanged for both the UK and Scottish Governments.
- 3.8.5 Decisions made by the planning system must be responsive to the climate change policy imperative. Decision makers can do this by affording significant weight to the energy policy objectives, articulated above, in the planning balance.
- 3.8.6 In the most recent renewable energy policy documents referred to, there is a consistent and what might be termed a 'green thread' which ties a number of related policy matters together: namely the urgent challenge of net zero and the need to substantially increase renewable energy capacity.
- 3.8.7 Overall, the Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan forms part of the new policy approach alongside NPF4. These documents confirm the Scottish Government's policy objectives and related targets, reaffirming the crucial role that new electricity infrastructure will play in response to the climate crisis which is at the heart of all these policies.
- 3.8.8 By way of illustration, this was demonstrated recently in the decision by Scottish Ministers on 9th June 2025 to approve the Applicant's Skye Reinforcement Overhead Line Project, in the Highland Council area, where it is stated in the Ministers' Decision Letter at paragraph 137 that:
- "Scotland faces a real challenge in building an electricity grid which will allow Scotland to harvest and export its vast resources of clean energy. The Scottish Ministers recognise that to achieve the dual aims of maintaining a resilient electricity network for businesses and consumers and enabling renewable ambitions to be realised, the need for grid reinforcement is greater than ever. The installation, and keeping installed, of the proposed OHL would allow the Company to comply with its statutory duty to develop and maintain an efficient, coordinated, and economical system of electricity distribution and delivery and major electricity transmission system reinforcement".*
- 3.8.9 Paragraph 138 continues further reinforcing the importance of energy and planning policies:
- "Scotland's energy policies and planning policies are all material considerations when weighing up the proposed Development. NPF4 makes it clear that low carbon energy deployment, maintaining security of electricity supply, and electricity system resilience remain a priority of the Scottish Government. These are matters which should be afforded significant weight in favour of the proposed Development. The Scottish Ministers conclude, for the reasons set out above, that the proposed Development is supported by Scottish Government policies".*

4. The Benefits of the Proposed Development

4.1 The Benefits: Summary

4.1.1 This Chapter summarises the benefits that would arise from the Proposed Development:

Renewable Energy Transmission

- > The Proposed Development will assist the Scottish Government to meet its net zero targets which require the strategic reinforcement of the transmission grid to enable connections to transmit renewable energy development. This is consistent with the core aims of NPF4 ND 3 which seeks to deliver additional generation from renewables and delivery enhanced transmission capacity to achieve a net zero economy and support network resilience in rural areas.
- > In July 2022 NESO published the Pathway to 2030 HND which identified a need to significantly increase the capacity of the on and offshore transmission infrastructure in response to the UK and Scottish Government's 2030 offshore wind allocations of 50 GW and 11 GW respectively (through the Crown Estate and ScotWind leasing rounds).
- > In 2024 NESO further reviewed network reinforcement requirements in a follow up exercise to the HND in order to facilitate an additional 21 GW of offshore wind from the 2024 ScotWind leasing round. New transmission infrastructure is necessary to unlock this new wind resource.

Security of Supply

- > The British Energy Security Strategy has been referenced in Chapter 3, and the recent Clean Power 2030 Action Plan. They provide an increase to the requirements for both the scale and the urgency of delivery of new low carbon generation capacity, by refocussing the requirement for low-carbon power for reasons of national security of supply and affordability, as well as for decarbonisation.
- > With this context, the delivery of grid infrastructure improvements to deliver significant benefits to consumers through decarbonisation, security of supply and enhanced capacity to transmit renewable energy is clear.
- > The Proposed Development, if consented, would provide a valuable contribution to security of supply for Scotland and for the wider Great Britain (GB) area. The Proposed Development would enhance the grid network to enable transmission of existing and future renewable energy efficiently to the grid, safely and consistently.

Economic & Community Socio - Economic Benefits / Local Supply Chain Opportunities

- > The Applicant has in place Sustainable Procurement Codes to oblige suppliers and contractors to maximise local employment, economic gain and social benefits as a result of the investment in new energy infrastructure in their area. This includes measures to be put in place to maximise opportunities for local people and businesses close to the site and in the wider region.
- > A further obligation enforced by the Applicant is that suppliers and contractors are expected to *"have in place education and employability programmes which promote the development of employee skills as well as local employment..."*
- > The Applicant's guidance as a basic commitment in this regard requires 'decent work and economic growth' alongside addressing environmental obligations, with a key objective to ensure the economic value is shared with particular focus on local supply chains.

- > A detailed Socio-Economic Assessment of the Kintore – Tealing 400 kV Overhead Line has been undertaken which is submitted²² in support of the Section 37 application. This should be referred for its detail. The Proposed Development is expected to support significant employment and economic activity during its development and construction. Under the ‘core scenario’²³, it was estimated that the total investment by SSEN Transmission in the Proposed Development during development and construction could generate:
 - **£20.2 million GVA** and **201 years** of employment across the Regional Area;
 - **£218.1 million GVA** and **2,214 years** of employment across Scotland; and
 - **£562.6 million GVA** and **5,556 years** of employment across the UK.
- > SSEN Transmission is actively engaged in the delivery of SSE’s Just Transition Strategy, which outlines initiatives such as prioritising local procurement, investing in skill development, and increasing the contracts awarded to businesses within the regional and Scottish economies. As part of its broader Community Wealth Building (CWB) approach, SSEN Transmission seeks to ensure that the benefits of its investment are retained and reinvested locally. This includes support for fair work, local supply chains, and inclusive ownership models through its Supplier Diversity Strategy. As such, the scale of the economic impacts from the Proposed Development could be maximised, under the ‘ambition scenario’²⁴, which assumes a high level of local supply chain involvement, increasing the proportion of the economic benefits that would be retained within these economies and could generate:
 - **£43.1 million GVA** and **430 years** of employment across the Regional Area;
 - **£255.3 million GVA** and **2,627 years** of employment across Scotland; and
 - **£708.3 million GVA** and **7,006 years** of employment across the UK.
- > The Applicant launched a Community Benefit Fund in September 2024 with an initial value of £10 million. The fund is designed to support projects that create a positive impact on communities. It is anticipated that significant funding will be available through the fund to support local economic development, community and wellbeing economy projects. A Regional Fund has been created to support strategic projects focusing on the themes of ‘People’, ‘Place’ and ‘Alleviating Fuel Poverty’.
- > The Applicant published a housing strategy in relation to the delivery of the Pathway to 2030 projects (November 2024). The strategy focuses on capturing opportunities to create public benefit from the investment efficiently and with a strong balanced between cost and benefit. As a result, they are committed to creating housing legacies from worker accommodation investments associated with this and other ASTI projects.

Biodiversity Enhancement

- > Climate change is the biggest threat to Scotland’s wildlife and habitats²⁵, and delivering an enhanced grid transmission network, with enhanced capacity for renewable energy is a critical step to meet net zero, and in doing so, reduce that threat.

²² Biggar Economics (2025) Socio Economic Impact Assessment of the Kintore to Tealing Overhead Line 400 kV Connection

²³ Core Scenario: based on the minimum level of supply chain content that could realistically be achieved locally. This can be considered as a worst-case scenario.

²⁴ Ambition Scenario: the potential local economic benefits that could be realised from the full implementation of a local supply chain development plan. Under this scenario, a greater proportion of expenditure is retained within the Regional and Scottish economies, reflecting higher levels of local business participation.

²⁵ Scottish Government, ‘Climate Change Scottish National Adaptation Plan 2024-2029’ (2024) pg 19

- > The Proposed Development is consistent with the Applicant's commitment in all projects to deliver 10% net biodiversity gain. This is further addressed below with regard to relevant NPF4 policy. The measures being proposed as part of the Proposed Development include hedgerow reinstatement and creation, where possible; scrub/heath regeneration and woodland compensation.

5. Appraisal against NPF4

5.1 Introduction & Approach to Appraisal

- 5.1.1 This Chapter provides an appraisal of the Proposed Development against NPF4.
- 5.1.2 As identified in Chapter 1, given the extent of the Proposed Development, it has been subdivided into six sections from south to north (Sections A-F).
- 5.1.3 The policy assessment has been undertaken following review of the EIA Report and other documentation supporting the application. Reference is made to the assessment of likely significant effects provided within the accompanying EIA Report and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment Report.

5.2 NPF4

- 5.2.1 NPF4 was approved by resolution of the Scottish Parliament on 11 January 2023 and was adopted by Scottish Ministers and came into force on 13 February 2023.
- 5.2.2 A Chief Planner's Letter was issued on 8 February 2023 entitled 'Transitional Arrangements for National Planning Framework 4'. It contains advice intended to support consistency in decision making ahead of new style Local Development Plans being in place.
- 5.2.3 Section 13 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 Act (the '2019 Act') amends Section 24 of the 1997 Act regarding the meaning of the statutory Development Plan, such that for the purposes of the 1997 Act, the Development Plan for an area is taken as consisting of the provisions of:
- > The National Planning Framework; and
 - > any Local Development Plan ('LDP').
- 5.2.4 Therefore, the statutory Development Plan against which the Proposed Development must be assessed consists of NPF4 and:
- > Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan ('ABLDP') (January 2023) and associated Supplementary Guidance; and,
 - > Angus Local Development Plan ('ALDP') (September 2016) and associated Supplementary Guidance.
- 5.2.5 The publication of NPF4 coincided with the implementation of certain parts of the 2019 Act. A key provision (set out in section 24(3) of the 1997 Act) is that in the event of any incompatibility between a provision of NPF4 and a provision of an LDP, then whichever of them is the later in date will prevail. That will include where an LDP is silent on an issue that is now provided for in NPF4.
- 5.2.6 The Chief Planner's Letter states with regard to Supplementary Guidance associated with LDPs which were in force before 12 February 2023 (the date on which Section 13 of the 2019 Act came into force) that they will continue to be in force and be part of the Development Plan.

How NPF4 is to be used

- 5.2.7 Annex A (page 94) of NPF4 explains how it is to be used. It states:

"The purpose of planning is to manage the development and use of land in the long-term public interest ... Scotland in 2045 will be different. We must embrace and deliver radical change so we can tackle and adapt to climate change, restore biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing, reduce inequalities, build a wellbeing economy and create great places."

- 5.2.8 Annex A states that NPF4 is required by law to set out the Scottish Ministers' policies and proposals for the development and use of land. It adds:
- "It plays a key role in supporting the delivery of Scotland's national outcomes and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals²⁶. NPF4 includes a long-term spatial strategy to 2045."*
- 5.2.9 NPF4 contains a spatial strategy and Scottish Government development management policies to be applied in all consenting decisions, and it identifies national developments which are aligned to the strategic themes of the Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan²⁷ (IIP).
- 5.2.10 NPF4 therefore for the first time, introduces centralised development management policies which are to be applied Scotland wide. It also provides guidance to Planning Authorities with regard to the content and preparation of LDPs.
- 5.2.11 Annex A adds that NPF4 is required by law to contribute to six outcomes. These relate to meeting housing needs, health and wellbeing, population of rural areas, addressing equality and discrimination and also, of particular relevance to the Proposed Development, *"meeting any targets relating to the reduction of emissions of greenhouses gases, and, securing positive effects for biodiversity"*.
- The National Spatial Strategy – Delivery of Sustainable Places**
- 5.2.12 Part 1 of NPF4 sets out the Spatial Strategy for Scotland to 2045 based on six spatial principles which are to influence all plans and decisions. The introductory text to the Spatial Strategy starts by stating (page 3):
- "The world is facing unprecedented challenges. The global climate emergency means that we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the future impacts of climate change."*
- 5.2.13 The principles are stated as playing a key role in delivering the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework²⁸.
- 5.2.14 The Spatial Strategy is aimed at supporting the delivery of:
- > 'Sustainable Places': *"where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity"*;
 - > 'Liveable Places': *"where we can all live better, healthier lives"*; and
 - > 'Productive places': *"where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy"*.
- 5.2.15 Page 6 of NPF4 addresses the delivery of sustainable places. Reference is made to the consequences of Scotland's changing climate, and it states, *inter alia*:
- "Scotland's Climate Change Plan, backed by legislation, has set our approach to achieving net zero emissions by 2045, and we must make significant progress towards this by 2030...Scotland's Energy Strategy will set a new agenda for the energy sector in anticipation of continuing innovation and investment."*
- 5.2.16 The new Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan for Scotland (as referenced in NPF4) was published as a consultative draft on 10th January 2023 (see below).

²⁶ The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals are set out at page 95 of NPF4 and include *inter alia* 'affordable and clean energy' and 'climate action'.

²⁷ The Scottish Government's five-year Infrastructure Investment Plan (2021-22 to 2025-26) was published in February 2021. It set out a vision for Scotland's future infrastructure in order to support and enable an inclusive net zero emissions economy.

²⁸ The Scottish Government National Performance Framework sets out 'National Outcomes' and measures progress against a range of economic, social and environmental 'National Indicators'.

- 5.2.17 The National Spatial Strategy in relation to 'sustainable places' is described (page 7) as follows:
- "Scotland's future places will be net zero, nature-positive places that are designed to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change, whilst protecting, recovering and restoring our environment.*
- Meeting our climate ambition will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society. This means ensuring the right development happens in the right place.*
- Every decision on our future development must contribute to making Scotland a more sustainable place. We will encourage low and zero carbon design and energy efficiency, development that is accessible by sustainable travel, and expansion of renewable energy generation."*
- 5.2.18 Six National Developments (NDs) support the delivery of sustainable places, one being 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure'.
- 5.2.19 A summary description of this ND is provided at page 7 of NPF4 as follows:
- "Supports electricity generation and associated grid infrastructure throughout Scotland, providing employment and opportunities for community benefit, helping to reduce emissions and improve security of supply".*
- 5.2.20 Page 8 of NPF4 sets out 'Cross-cutting Outcome and Policy Links' with regard to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It states:
- "The global climate emergency and the nature crisis have formed the foundations for the spatial strategy as a whole. The regional priorities share opportunities and challenges for reducing emissions and adapting to the long-term impacts of climate change, in a way which protects and enhances our natural environment."*
- 5.2.21 A key point in the statement above is that the climate emergency and nature crisis are expressly stated as forming the foundations of the national spatial strategy, recognising that tackling climate change and the nature crisis is an overriding imperative which is key to the outcomes of almost all policies within NPF4.

5.3 National Developments & National Planning Policy

Overview

- 5.3.1 Page 97 of NPF4 sets out that 18 National Developments have been identified. These are described as:
- "significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy ... National development status does not grant planning permission for the development and all relevant consents are required".*
- 5.3.2 It adds that:
- "Their designation means that the principle of the development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes, providing more certainty for communities, businesses and investors. ... In addition to the statement of need at Annex B, decision makers for applications for consent for national developments should take into account all relevant policies".*
- 5.3.3 Annex B of NPF4 sets out the various NDs and related Statements of Need and it is explained that NDs are significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy. It states (page 99) that:
- "The statements of need set out in this annex are a requirement of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and describe the development to be considered as a national development for consent handling purposes".*

National Development 3 “Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure”

5.3.4 Page 103 of NPF4 describes ND3 and it states:

"This national development supports renewable electricity generation, repowering, and expansion of the electricity grid.

A large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets. Certain types of renewable electricity generation will also be required, which will include energy storage technology and capacity, to provide the vital services, including flexible response, that a zero carbon network will require. Generation is for domestic consumption as well as for export to the UK and beyond, with new capacity helping to decarbonise heat, transport and industrial energy demand. This has the potential to support jobs and business investment, with wider economic benefits.

The electricity transmission grid will need substantial reinforcement including the addition of new infrastructure to connect and transmit the output from new on and offshore capacity to consumers in Scotland, the rest of the UK and beyond. Delivery of this national development will be informed by market, policy and regulatory developments and decisions."

5.3.5 The location for ND3 is set out as being all of Scotland and in terms of need it is described as:

"Additional electricity generation from renewables and electricity transmission capacity of scale is fundamental to achieving a net zero economy and supports improved network resilience in rural and island areas."

5.3.6 The designation of classes of development confirms that the Proposed Development is National Development being of a scale or type that otherwise would have been classified as major by the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009. That is, paragraph (b) *New and/or replacement upgraded on and offshore high voltage electricity transmission lines, cables and interconnectors of 132kV or more*".

5.3.7 The Proposed Development will further the delivery of the national Spatial Strategy. The Strategy requires a *"large and rapid increase"* in electricity generation from renewable sources and the delivery of an substantially reinforced transmission network to enable this. It is recognised (NPF4, page 6) that *"we must make significant progress"* by 2030. This is further supported by the NESO studies (2022 and 2024) for Pathway to 2030 HND and follow up review, which identify the strategic transmission needs across GB which identifies the Proposed Development as being part of the required onshore transmission work that will supports the large-scale delivery of electricity generated from offshore wind, taking electricity from where it is generated to where it is needed across GB.

5.3.8 The Proposed Development is of national importance to Scotland to enable it to achieve its targets within this key timescale and that is a very important and material consideration.

National Planning Policy

5.3.9 Part 2 of NPF4 (page 36) addresses national planning policy by topic with reference to three themes formulated with the aim of delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places.

5.3.10 In terms of planning, development management and the application of the national level policies, NPF4 provides the following guidance of page 98 in relation to national planning policy within Part 2 of NPF4:

"The policy sections are for use in the determination of planning applications. The policies should be read as a whole. Planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is for the decision maker to determine what weight to attach to policies on a case by case basis. Where a policy states that development will be supported, it is in principle, and it is for the decision maker to take into account all other relevant policies".

- 5.3.11 In terms of “sustainable places” the relevant policies which apply to the Proposed Development include the following:
- > Policy 1: Tackling the climate and nature crises;
 - > Policy 3: Biodiversity;
 - > Policy 4: Natural places;
 - > Policy 5: Soils;
 - > Policy 6: Forestry, woodland and trees;
 - > Policy 7: Historic assets and places; and
 - > Policy 11: Energy.
- 5.3.12 In terms of “liveable” places, the relevant policies of the Proposed Development include the following:
- > Policy 22: Flood risk and water management.
- 5.3.13 These policies are addressed in greater detail below.
- 5.3.14 The Chief Planner’s Letter of 8th February 2023 provides advice in relation to applying NPF4 policy. It states that the application of planning judgement to the circumstances of an individual situation remains essential for all decision making, informed by principles of proportionality and reasonableness. It states:
- “It is important to bear in mind NPF4 must be read and applied as a whole. The intent of each of the 33 policies is set out in NPF4 and can be used to guide decision making. Conflicts between policies are to be expected. Factors for and against development will be weighed up in the balance of planning judgement.”* (underlining added)
- 5.3.15 The Chief Planner adds the following in his letter:
- “It is recognised that it may take some time for planning authorities and stakeholders to get to grips with the NPF4 policies, and in particular the interface with individual LDP policies. As outlined above, in the event of any incompatibility between the provision of NPF and the provision of an LDP, whichever of them is the later in date is to prevail. Provisions that are contradictory or in conflict would be likely to be considered incompatible”.*

5.4 NPF4 Policy 1: Tackling the climate and nature crises

Policy 1 & Principles

- 5.4.1 The intent of Policy 1 is “to encourage, promote and facilitate development that addresses the global climate emergency and nature crisis”.
- 5.4.2 **Policy 1** directs decision makers that “When considering all development proposals significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises.”
- 5.4.3 This is a radical departure from the usual approach to policy and determining what weight to attach to a policy objective, and clearly denotes a step change in planning policy response to climate change. The matter of weight is no longer left entirely to the discretion of the decision maker. Significant weight should therefore be attributed to the Proposed Development’s ability to provide essential nationally significant electricity grid reinforcements.
- 5.4.4 The term “Tackling” the respective crises in Policy 1 is also important – this means that decision makers should ensure an urgent and positive response to these issues and take positive action. Furthermore, NPF4 (page 8) refers to cross cutting outcomes and states with regard to Policy 1 that the policy gives significant weight “to the global climate emergency in order to ensure that it is recognised as a priority in all plans and decisions”.

The Application of Policy 1

- 5.4.5 Given the nature of the Proposed Development, i.e. the installation of new electricity 400 kV overhead line, to extend and reinforce the grid, it would make a valuable contribution in relation to targets for achieving net zero. It will directly further the policy intent and outcomes of Policy 1 and should be afforded significant positive weight in terms of tackling the climate and nature crises.
- 5.4.6 The publication of the Pathway to 2030 detailed the onshore and offshore electricity transmission network infrastructure required to enable the forecasted growth in renewable electricity across GB, specifically the UK and Scottish Government's 2030 offshore wind allocations of 50GW and 11GW (through the Crown Estate and ScotWind leasing rounds) which are the main driver for this and other upgrades. This confirmed the need for a significant and strategic increase in the capacity of onshore and offshore electricity transmission infrastructure to deliver 2030 targets and support the pathway to net zero across GB and Scotland and both the UK and Scottish Governments commitments to meet legally binding net zero targets by 2050 and 2045 respectively.
- 5.4.7 The Proposed Development is consistent with the intent of Policy 1 and would make a positive contribution by helping to attain its outcome of net zero.
- 5.4.8 The Chief Planner's Letter of 8th February 2023 refers to Policy 1. It states:
- "This policy prioritises the climate and nature crises in all decisions. It should be applied together with the other policies in NPF4. It will be for the decision maker to determine whether the significant weight to be applied tips the balance in favour for, or against a proposal on the basis of its positive or negative contribution to the climate and nature crises."*
- 5.4.9 This statement from the Chief Planner confirms that the decision maker must apply significant weight to the policy, but ultimately it is for the decision maker to decide if it is for or against the proposal. The Proposed Development's contribution is positive and is a critical element of the infrastructure required to help attain targets, therefore, applying significant weight in this case would be in favour of the Proposed Development.
- 5.4.10 A further important point is the need to recognise that a clear threat to biodiversity is climate change. The principal and essential benefit of the Proposed Development is enabling the connection of a significant level of renewable energy developments, to facilitate the earliest possible decarbonisation of the energy system and the achievement of net zero no later than 2045, in accordance with the objectives of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 (as amended). A key purpose of net zero is to protect biodiversity and the earlier it can be achieved, the greater the benefits to biodiversity.
- 5.4.11 The Reporter's comments on this particular policy in the Sanquhar II Wind Farm Inquiry Report²⁹ are informative. At paragraph 2.48 of the Supplementary Report, the Reporter addresses NPF4 Policy 1 and states that:
- "tackling the nature crisis is required to be given significant weight alongside the climate crisis. There is no indication that one strand should be given greater priority over the other. That does not necessarily mean that an individual proposal must be shown to respond to both crises in equal measure, however. The two matters are also inextricably linked, with the nature crisis being, in part, exacerbated by climate change."*
- 5.4.12 Furthermore, as explained below with reference to NPF4 Policy 3, biodiversity enhancement measures are proposed as part of the Proposed Development and will be satisfied through the Applicant's commitment to a 10% net gain across all Proposed Developments. The approach to achieving this is set out within the EIA Report at **Appendix 11.5 Outline Biodiversity Enhancement Plan**.

²⁹ Sanquhar II Wind Farm, Section 36 Decision dated 31 August 2023, Supplementary Report of Inquiry dated 20 February 2023 (Case Reference WIN-170-2006) and Scottish Ministers' Decision dated 31 August 2023.

5.5 NPF4 Policy 11: Energy

Policy 11 & Principles

- 5.5.1 For the consideration of energy transmission proposals, Policy 11 'Energy' (page 53) is the lead policy. Policy 11's intent is set out as:
- "to encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, **new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure** and emerging low carbon and zero emission technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage."* (emphasis added)
- 5.5.2 Policy Outcomes are identified as: *"expansion of renewable, low carbon and zero emission technologies"*.
- 5.5.3 Policy 11 is in the following terms:
- "a) Development proposals for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies will be supported. These include:*
- i. wind farms including repowering, extending, expanding and extending the life of existing wind farms;*
 - ii. enabling works, **such as grid transmission and distribution infrastructure**;*
 - iii. energy storage, such as battery storage and pumped storage hydro;*
 - iv. small scale renewable energy generation technology;*
 - v. solar arrays;*
 - vi. proposals associated with negative emissions technologies and carbon capture; and*
 - vii. proposals including co-location of these technologies.*
- b) Development proposals for wind farms in National Parks and National Scenic Areas will not be supported.*
- c) Development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities.*
- d) Development proposals that impact on international or national designations will be assessed in relation to Policy 4.*
- e) In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:*
- i. impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise and shadow flicker;*
 - ii. significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable;*
 - iii. public access, including impact on long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes;*
 - iv. impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording;*
 - v. impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised;*
 - vi. impacts on road traffic and on adjacent trunk roads, including during construction;*

- vii. impacts on historic environment;*
- viii. effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk;*
- ix. biodiversity including impacts on birds;*
- x. impacts on trees, woods and forests;*
- xi. proposals for the decommissioning of developments, including ancillary infrastructure, and site restoration;*
- xii. the quality of site restoration plans including the measures in place to safeguard or guarantee availability of finances to effectively implement those plans; and*
- xiii. cumulative impacts.*

In considering these impacts, significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

Grid capacity should not constrain renewable energy development. It is for developers to agree connections to the grid with the relevant network operator. In the case of proposals for grid infrastructure, consideration should be given to underground connections where possible.

f) Consents for development proposals may be time-limited. Areas identified for wind farms are, however, expected to be suitable for use in perpetuity”.

- 5.5.4 The intent and desired outcome of the policy is expressly clear – the expansion of renewable energy, through encouragement, promotion and facilitation, all of which the Proposed Development will help to deliver.
- 5.5.5 In summary, Policy 11 Paragraph (a)(ii) makes it clear that the policy supports new and replacement grid transmission and distribution infrastructure. Proposals are required to demonstrate that project design and mitigation has addressed impacts on a range of environmental receptors as per Policy 11 (e) through appropriate approach to impact management via avoidance and mitigation which has been demonstrated through the EIA Report.

The application of Policy 11

- 5.5.6 **Paragraph c) of Policy 11** references socio-economic benefits being maximised.
- 5.5.7 It is relevant to note with regard to community benefit, guidance was issued via the Chief Planner’s letter of 20 September 2024 which provides clarity on the application of Policy 11(c) and the role of community benefits alongside policy considerations on maximising economic impact. The Chief Planner states explicitly that *“We are, however, clear that these are voluntary agreements that sit independent of our planning and consenting systems, and NPF4 Policy 11 (c) does not alter this”.*
- 5.5.8 With regard to maximising socio-economic benefits, the Applicant has adopted a ‘Sustainable Procurement Code’ and this is relevant to take into account. The Supplier Guidance is applied to development projects that the Applicant progresses, and its principal purpose is to ensure that the Applicant’s key values are supported, managed and where possible improved.
- 5.5.9 The Code sets out various obligations on suppliers and contractors covering climate action and in relation to providing affordable clean energy. The Code also addresses environmental obligations and sets out a clear commitment to “decent work and economic growth” (page 10). A key objective is to ensure that economic value is shared. Amongst the various specific obligations on the Applicant and suppliers is reference to local supply chains. In that regard, page 10 sets out that:

“SSE has committed to being a global leader for a just energy transition to net zero, with a guarantee of fair work and commitment to paying fair tax and sharing economic value”.

- 5.5.10 Furthermore, within the obligations on suppliers and contractors are provisions that require the formation of *“constructive local relationships so that communities have the opportunity to directly benefit from significant capital investments... and to have measures in place to maximise opportunities for local people and businesses close to SSE sites and the wider region”.*
- 5.5.11 A further obligation is that suppliers and contractors are expected to *“have in place education and employability programmes which promote the development of employee skills as well as local employment, including graduate programmes and apprenticeships”.*
- 5.5.12 As regards local supply chains *“SSE is committed to ensuring that real economic and social benefits flow to local businesses as a result of its investment in new energy infrastructure. It aims to promote sustainable domestic employment, increased local content and more competitive domestic supply chains. It does this through engagement with its suppliers as well as government regulators and trade unions”.*
- 5.5.13 The related Supplier Guidance document sets out with specific regard to local supply chains that suppliers and contractors are:
- > Required to have measures in place to maximise opportunities for local people, supply chains and economies surrounding SSE sites. There may be a requirement to provide evidence of site-specific plans to SSE;
 - > Encouraged to work closely with SSE to promote and support the development of competitive domestic and local supply chains;
 - > Required to provide details of spend with local suppliers and subcontractors, when requested by SSE (“local” is defined as either, within a 50-mile radius of the site or the Local Authority area, unless otherwise defined);
 - > Required to provide reporting of attributed spend with Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs).
- 5.5.14 Specific reference to the Code and the Guidance and these obligations would be set out in any invitation to tender for construction works for the Proposed Development. Therefore, there is clear evidence that beyond the capital spend for the Proposed Development and the direct, indirect and induced employment and economic benefits that would result, that the Applicant has policies and measures in place that seek to maximise the opportunity for socio-economic benefits as a result of the Proposed Development.
- 5.5.15 It should also be noted that, under the terms of the Code, appointed contractors are required to inform the Applicant of the supply chain engaged, within the local area and further afield.
- 5.5.16 The Applicant launched a Community Benefit Fund in September 2024 with an initial value of £10 million. The fund is designed to support projects that create a positive impact on communities. It is anticipated that significant funding will be available through the fund to support local economic development, community and wellbeing economy projects. A Regional Fund has been created to support strategic projects focusing on the themes of ‘People’. ‘Place’ and ‘Alleviating Fuel Poverty’.
- 5.5.17 In addition, the Applicant published a housing strategy in relation to the delivery of the Pathway to 2030 projects (November 2024). The strategy focuses on capturing opportunities to create public benefit from the investment efficiently and with a strong balance between cost and benefit. As a result, they are committed to creating housing legacies from worker accommodation investments associated with this and other ASTI projects.
- 5.5.18 A Socio-Economic Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Proposed Development and indicates that significant economic benefits will be delivered as a result of the proposal. This relates to the significant capital expenditure and associated employment years which will result from the Proposed Development. A summary of the assessed benefits of the Proposed Development of is contained within Chapter 4 of this Planning Statement.

5.5.19 Critically the installation of the Proposed Development will ensure the delivery of the wider socio-economic benefits and commitments through the substantial reinforcement of this part of the electricity transmission system that will have the capacity to deliver the significant amount of renewable energy to be generated by offshore and onshore wind farms.

5.5.20 **Paragraph d) of Policy 11** states that development proposals that impact on international and national designations “*will be assessed in relation to Policy 4*”. Policy 4 also deals with impacts in relation to local landscape designations. Therefore, the matter of the impacts of the Proposed Development in relation to international, national and local designations is examined further below with specific regard to the provisions of Policy 4. In summary, there would be no significant effects in relation to internationally or nationally important designations as a result of the Proposed Development.

5.5.21 **Paragraph e) of Policy 11** states that project design and mitigation “will demonstrate how” impacts are addressed. These are listed in the quotation of the policy above and are addressed in turn below. For initial reference, however, it is instructive to note the **Schedule of Mitigation** at **Chapter 17** of the EIA Report, which sets out how the relevant impacts are to be addressed (cross-referenced with the applicable EIA technical chapters).

Policy 11 (e) (i) - Communities and Individual Dwellings

5.5.22 In addition to the LVIA, a separate Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (‘RVAA’) has been prepared which considers whether the visual effects of the Proposed Development, as seen from residential properties, are so great as to affect the ‘living conditions’ experienced by residents at those properties. The RVAA is provided in **Volume 5, Appendix 9.3: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment** within the EIA Report.

5.5.23 The RVAA includes consideration of the changes in views and visual amenity from all properties up to 225 m from the proposed Kintore to Tealing 400 kV Alignment at suspension towers and 270 m from the Alignment at angle towers. The assessment was undertaken in accordance with the Landscape Institute’s Technical Guidance Note 02/19 (TGN02/19) Residential Visual Amenity Assessment and is supported by representative wireline visualisations, desk studies, and site surveys.

5.5.24 It is stated in the assessment that there are 122 habitable residential buildings within the 225-270 m study area (of which 78 have been formed into 19 groups). The assessment identified that 84 out of the 122 properties would experience a high magnitude of change, with the remainder experiencing a medium or low magnitude of change. The visual amenity at each of the properties experiencing a high magnitude of change was assessed for a potential breach in the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold (‘RVAT’). Out of the 84 properties, none were identified to experience a breach of the RVAT.

Policy 11 (e) (i) - Noise

5.5.25 **Volume 2, Chapter 15: Noise and Vibration** of the EIA Report examines the potential effects from noise on of the Proposed Development.

5.5.26 A study area of 500m from the centreline of the Proposed Development has been applied to assess noise and vibration during the construction and operational phases. The noise study area comprises 522 noise sensitive receptors (‘NSRs’).

5.5.27 Significant adverse effects are predicted at a number of NSRs at different stages of the construction programme³⁰ in the absence of additional mitigation. Additionally, significant adverse effects are predicted in terms of cumulative impacts.

5.5.28 Mitigation proposed includes equipment curtailment to reduce cumulative machinery noise within each phase of the construction period which would reduce impacts to a not significant level at 96% of receptors. For the remaining properties where a moderate significant adverse effect is predicted a Construction Noise Management Plan (‘CNMP’) would ensure best

³⁰ Vegetation Clearance and Felling; Access and Enabling; Piling; Foundations; Tower Erection; Stringing; Downleads; Scaffold/Yard; Dismantling

practice so that noise levels are minimised and it would also consider NSRs predicted to experience significant impacts in more detail. Mitigation actions would include measures to reduce active time of noisiest equipment over working hours, reduction of quantity of simultaneous equipment, prioritisation of noisiest activity in daytime, and increased levels of community engagement. Chapter 15 concludes that with these proposed additional mitigation measures in place, the predicted residual construction effects would be not significant.

- 5.5.29 No significant adverse effects are predicted during the operational phase of the Proposed Development.

Policy 11 (e) (ii) - Landscape and Visual Considerations

- 5.5.30 Before examining the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development, Part e(ii) of Policy 11 makes it clear and recognises that in terms of significant landscape and visual impacts, such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy and transmission infrastructure. This is a very different starting point compared to the position in the former SPP and there is a very clear steer that significant effects are to be expected, and where localised and/or subject to appropriate design mitigation, they should generally be acceptable.

Overview of Routeing

- 5.5.31 **Volume 1, Chapter 4: Alternatives and the Routeing Process** of the EIA Report provides detail on route selection and alternatives examined for the Proposed Development and it explains how the proposed alignment was arrived at. It should be referred to for its detail.
- 5.5.32 The work undertaken during the route and alignment stages of the project has enabled a rigorous consideration of reasonable alternatives with respect to the Proposed Development to be undertaken.
- 5.5.33 It is explained in the EIA Report that the consideration of alternatives continued throughout the later stages of the design for the Proposed Development with further consideration of tower positions and the siting of infrastructure such as access tracks. This was informed by detailed environmental and engineering information as it became available through fieldwork.
- 5.5.34 The design was modified where possible whilst meeting the technical requirements for the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. There has therefore been a detailed process which resulted in appropriate project design and mitigation, as required by NPF4 Policy 11 e).
- 5.5.35 This section of the Planning Statement cross refers to summary information within the landscape and visual impact assessment ('LVIA') which is reported in Chapter 9 of the EIA Report as well as the accompanying Appendices³¹.
- 5.5.36 A detailed description of the baseline landscape character for each geographical Section of the Proposed Development is provided within **Volume 2, Chapter 9 Landscape and Visual Amenity** of the EIA Report.
- 5.5.37 For the purposes of the visual assessment, visual receptors (e.g. residents, road users, recreational users etc) have been grouped into geographical areas across the study area which are referred to as visual receptor areas ('VRAs').

Mitigation

- 5.5.38 In formulating the Proposed Development, the Applicant has given careful consideration to the mitigation of any adverse effects and has considered its statutory duties and relevant policy in doing so. In particular, regard has been had to its duties under the 1989 Act to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, and to do what it reasonably can to mitigate any effect on the natural beauty of the countryside and the need under Policy 11 e)

³¹ Volume 5, Appendix 9.1: Landscape Assessment; Appendix 9.2: Visual Assessment; Appendix 9.3: Residential Visual Amenity Assessment; and Appendix 9.4: Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment

of NPF4 to demonstrate how project design and mitigation has addressed significant landscape and visual impacts.

5.5.39 Topic specific embedded mitigation has been identified within the EIA Report. In relation to landscape and visual matters the following **embedded design mitigation** has been applied:

- > **LV 1:** The LVIA process has informed modifications and refinements to the detailed design of the Proposed Development, including consideration of individual tower locations and access tracks during the design and assessment process. The Holford Rules³² were used to inform the siting and design of the alignment to minimise potential landscape and visual effects. The alignment design sought to apply the following principles:
 - Avoid hill summits and elevated ridgelines where possible to reduce the prominence of the proposed development on elevated skylines and its influence on landscape character and views, including from local landscape designations, settled areas, and key recreational locations (Rule 4);
 - Where possible utilise opportunities to backcloth the Proposed Development against areas of woodland and forestry and or higher landform to reduce the Proposed Developments prominence and position along open skylines (Rule 4).

5.5.40 Additional embedded design principles were developed to reflect the sensitivity of the local landscape of the LVIA study area, including:

- > Avoid key landscape features such as locally distinctive landforms and areas of broadleaved and coniferous woodland that contribute to landscape character.
- > Avoid routeing over the prominent hill summits and ridgeline of the Sidlaw Hills in the south, instead using the landform to provide backclothing where possible and minimise how much of the Proposed Development would be seen against the elevated skyline.
- > Avoid localised and sensitive landform features within the study area, notably the locally prominent ridgeline at Hilton of Fern/ Careston and the locally distinctive undulating land near Battledykes.
- > Avoid routeing along higher parts and across key hill summits on the scarp of the prominent Highland Boundary Fault. Route across lower and less prominent parts to reduce the prominence of the Proposed Development and to take advantage of any backclothing this landform can provide.
- > When crossing higher or undulating land, route across the low points of ridgelines for example between Herscha Hill and Knock Hill and around Droop Hill.
- > Where possible parallel existing OHLs (e.g. around Fetteresso and Durris Forest) to assist in concentrating landscape and visual effects, and reducing the amount of forestry felling which would be required.
- > Cross important linear features, such as the River Dee, perpendicularly so as to reduce effects in these sensitive areas.
- > Seek to construct the majority of access tracks on a temporary basis and ensure that any land disturbed is reinstated to its original land use following construction to minimise landscape and visual effects.

5.5.41 In addition to the embedded mitigation, applied mitigation (**LV2-LV4**) will also be provided, this will take the form of standard good practice measures being implemented during construction and operation of the Proposed Development as well as the application of SSN Transmission's GEMPs and SPPs, as detailed in **Volume 2, Chapter 17 Schedule of**

³² SSN Transmission (2023) Procedures for Routeing Overhead Lines and Underground cables of 132kV and above, Annex 1: Holford Rules: Guidelines for the Routeing of New High Voltage Overhead Transmission Lines with NGC 1992 and SHETL 2003 Notes

Mitigation and Volume 5, Appendix 9.6 Outline Landscape Mitigation Design Guide
within the EIA Report.

- 5.5.42 Additionally, a CEMP would be produced prior to the commencement of the construction of the Proposed Development. Nine key features of the CEMP are set out in Chapter 9 of the EIA Report, with the following features noted as forming the key design objectives set out in the Outline Landscape Mitigation Design Guide:
- > 1. Existing landscape features such as hedgerows, woodland, tree belts and stone dyke field enclosures will be retained as far as practical.
 - > 2. Any temporary disturbance to or temporary removal of existing field boundaries (e.g. hedgerows or fences) will be undertaken sensitively to ensure successful reinstatement of these features following completion of construction activities.
 - > 3. Following the introduction of the main components of the Proposed Development, construction works (e.g. construction working areas, access tracks) and previously disturbed areas will be restored and revegetated during the reinstatement phase.
 - > 7. Stored topsoil will be used for the progressive restoration of disturbed areas. Soft materials will be used to regrade slopes prior to promotion of natural recolonisation of vegetation.
 - > 8. Seeding will be undertaken using locally native species of plants, and to tie in with adjacent vegetation types, where considered appropriate and essential to prevent erosion.
- 5.5.43 Further measures over and above any embedded and applied mitigation within the OC (**LV5**) are set out at a high level within **Volume 5, Appendix 9.6: Outline Landscape Mitigation Design Guide** in the EIA Report as part of additional mitigation. These measures seek to provide guidance for the restoration and enhancement of landscape features within the OC that would be altered by the construction and operational requirements of the Proposed Development.
- 5.5.44 The application of these additional mitigation measures would assist in integrating the Proposed Development into the surrounding landscape and would help the landscape accommodate the Proposed Development. However, these additional mitigation measures are not considered to reduce the level of significance of landscape and visual effects identified within the LVIA.
- Landscape and Visual Policy Assessment*
- 5.5.45 The following sections of the Planning Statement provide a short summary of the key landscape and visual matters relating to each Section of the Proposed Development. This includes **Tables 5.1 – 5.6** which set out in summary form the significant landscape and visual effects including those relating to landscape designations and cumulative effects. **Volume 2, Chapter 9 Landscape and Visual Amenity** of the EIA Report and its associated appendices should be referred to for the detail.
- 5.5.46 Cumulative effects have been considered within each Section of the Proposed Development. These have been separated into Intra Developments (Associated SSEN Transmission Developments) and Inter Developments (Other SSEN Transmission Developments and Third-Party Developments). The projects considered for the purposes of the LVIA cumulative assessment are listed in **Table 9.4.1 of Volume 5, Appendix 9.4: Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment**.
- 5.5.47 In addition, the LVIA addresses sequential visual effects as experienced from key routes. This is set out in detail at **Section 9.8 of Volume 2, Chapter 9 Landscape and Visual Amenity** of the EIA Report. These routes include A roads within the study area; B roads where these would have substantive interaction with the Proposed Development (e.g. following the route, or multiple crossings); Railway lines within the study area; National Cycle Network ('NCN') routes within the study area; and promoted walking routes within the study area.

- 5.5.48 Significant adverse effects are predicted for users along some short stretches of the routes assessed where the Proposed Development would be in close proximity to the routes assessed, with the majority of the overall routes experiencing no significant effects.
- 5.5.49 Where significant effects are identified, they are adverse unless indicated otherwise.
- Section A: Emmock 400 kV Substation to Forfar*
- 5.5.50 The following are considered to be the key landscape and visual considerations within Section A:
- > The Sidlaw Hills as a landmark hill range, forming a distinctive backdrop to lower lying areas to the north and south;
 - > The elevated and panoramic views afforded from hill summits within the Sidlaw Hills, including the promoted viewpoint at Balkello Hill;
 - > Effects on road users of the A928 at Lumley Den where open elevated views across Strathmore are afforded; and
 - > Effects on residents at Tealing, Glamis, Jericho and Douglastown, and elsewhere along Section A.

Table 5.1 Section A: Emmock 400 kV Substation to Forfar: Summary Landscape & Visual Effects

Section A:	
Landscape Character	The majority of Section A is located in LCT 382: Lowland Hill Ranges where the landscape largely comprises a series of lowland hills. These hills subside into productive agricultural lowland. Pockets and lines of broadleaf trees are limited to hill slopes, field boundaries and watercourses. Blocks of commercial forestry are also scattered across hill slopes A small area in the south of Section A sits within LCT 387: Dipslope Farmland. The northern end of Section A extends into LCT 386: Low Moorland Hills, as well as LCT 384: Broad Valley Lowlands – Tayside. <u>Construction Effects</u> Significant adverse effects on landscape character would occur within 1 km from the Proposed Development, around Tealing, Balkello and Myreton of Claverhouse within LCT 387 and between North Balluderon and Jericho within LCT 382 as a result of physical changes to landscape features. Beyond 1 km of the construction works, effects on landscape character would reduce and would not be significant due to the decreased perceptibility of construction activity. <u>Operational Effects</u> Significant adverse effects on landscape character would occur within 1 km from the Proposed Development, within the area between Kirkton of Tealing, Myreton of Claverhouse, Balkemback, Prieston and Balluderon within LCT 387 and between the slopes of Craigowl Hill and Hayston Hill within LCT 382 as a result of physical changes to landscape features including the introduction of large scale vertical infrastructure into the landscape and loss of coniferous woodland and broadleaved trees. Significant adverse effects are also predicted within LCT 386: Low Moorland Hills.

	Beyond 1 km of the Proposed Development, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of the Proposed Development.
Landscape Designations	Section A does not pass through any landscape designations. Angus Council's Sidlaw LLA is located approximately 1 km to the west of the Proposed Development at its closest point in Section A. <u>Construction</u> Construction effects were not assessed as the Proposed Development does not pass directly through the LLA and given the temporary nature of construction effects. The LVIA concludes that as a result construction work would not significantly affect the special qualities of the LLA to an extent that it would affect the integrity of the LLA. <u>Operation</u> Given that the Proposed Development would be seen largely backclothed and in the context of existing OHL infrastructure, it is considered that effects on the special qualities of the LLA are judged to be not significant, and the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of this local landscape designation.
Visual Effects	A number of concentrated settlements and communities within Section A are considered within the assessment as well as smaller groups of properties and scattered individual dwellings and farmsteads across the landscape. The A90, A928 and the A94 are located within Section A as well as an extensive network of B-roads and minor roads. A number of Core Paths also run through this Section. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect receptors within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development (e.g. VRA A6 (Balkemback), A8 (Ark Hill, Balkello, Craigowl and Gallow Hills), A13 (Meikle Kilmundie to Arniefoul Mill), and A18 (Douglstown and Kirkton) where close-to-middle distance views of construction activity would be available. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would occur within 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close-to-middle distance views of the Proposed Development would be available, for example from VRAs A6 (Balkemback), A12 (Upper Hayston Farm to Nether Hayston) and A20 (Haughs of Cossans).
Cumulative Effects	Significant localised cumulative effects are predicted on both landscape and visual receptors in combination with Intra Developments and Inter Developments. <u>Intra Developments</u> The overlap of the construction phases at the Emmock substation site, and along the proposed overhead line would affect the key characteristics of LCTs 382 and 387, including their rural character and open views, in the area between Tealing Substation and the lower slopes of Craigowl Hill. Cumulative landscape effects would be moderate and significant during construction, but in a localised area between Tealing Substation and the lower slopes of Craigowl Hill. Beyond this cumulative landscape effects would reduce to not significant. During operation the vertical prominence of the Proposed Development and the spatial scale of Emmock substation would combine to affect the

	key characteristics of LCT 387, in particular its rural character. Moderate and significant effects to landscape character would occur in a localised area around and immediately north of the proposed Emmock substation. Beyond this area, the influence of Emmock substation would reduce, and cumulative landscape effects would reduce to not significant. Due to distance, there would be very limited change to the special qualities of the Sidlaw LLA, and cumulative effects on the LLA would therefore be negligible and not significant both during construction and operation. In terms of visual effects, during construction due to the overlapping activities affecting combined and sequential views from residential properties and road users there would be major and significant cumulative visual effects for nearby receptors within the localised area of VRA A6. The cumulative effect at more distant receptors would be not significant. During operation, due to the Proposed Development and Emmock substation being adjacent nearby receptors in VRAs A3 and A6 would experience combined and successive views. A major and significant cumulative effect would occur over the localised area of VRA A6. For receptors within the localised area of VRA A3 the effect would reduce to moderate and significant due to increased distance and screening. More distant receptors would experience more limited change and cumulative effects would reduce to not significant. <u><i>Intra and Inter Developments</i></u> There would be a large area of active construction works due to the intra and inter developments (with exception of Fithie Energy Park), between Myreton BESS in the south, and the Proposed Development in the north overlapping. There would be a cumulative effect on landscape character across a localised area between Tealing Substation and the lower slopes of Craigowl Hill, affecting key characteristics of LCTs 382 and 387. Cumulative landscape effects during construction would be moderate and significant. Significant effects on the key characteristics of LCTs 382 and 387 would be experienced during operation particularly their rural character and openness. The cumulative effect would be moderate and significant occurring across a localised area between Tealing Substation and the lower slopes of Craigowl Hill. Beyond this area, the influence of the Intra and Inter Developments would reduce, and cumulative effects would reduce to negligible and not significant. Further north are two projects that would interact with the Proposed Development, but not with each other or with other Intra and Inter Developments. There would be no significant effects as a result of the Ark Hill Wind Farm Extension, however moderate and significant effects are predicted in combination with Cossans Solar and BESS within a localised small area around the solar and BESS development. In terms of visual effects, major and significant cumulative effects are predicted during construction for receptors in the localised areas of VRAs A2, A3, A6, and A9 based on a worst case of simultaneous construction where multiple infrastructure projects would be visible to people in these areas, affecting combined and sequential views. The greater distance to receptors in other VRAs is predicted to result in an effect that is not significant. During operation of the Proposed Development, the Intra and Inter Developments around Emmock substation would result in a cluster of infrastructure being visible in the area northwest of the existing Tealing Substation, and affecting combined and sequential views. Receptors
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	within VRAs A3 and A6 would experience a major and significant cumulative visual effect, while receptors within VRAs A2, A7, A8 and A9 would experience moderate and significant cumulative visual effects. Receptors in a very localised area around the Cossans Solar Farm would also experience a moderate and significant cumulative visual effect. The contribution of the Proposed Development to these cumulative effects is considered to be significant, as the Proposed Development would be larger and more extensive than most of the Intra and Inter Developments, and would have greater landscape and visual effects.
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Section B: Forfar to Brechin

5.5.52

The following are considered to be the key landscape and visual considerations within Section B:

- > River South Esk LLA and its “strong rural character” and the “River South Esk and its tributaries” as a “focal feature in views”;
- > Meandering watercourses and the bands of woodland and scrub that follow these, which break up the otherwise geometric field pattern;
- > Small yet locally distinctive undulations and ridgelines, including around King’s Seat, Battledykes and Hilton of Fern;
- > Wide, expansive views across the floor of Strathmore, offering long distance views towards the rising forms of the braes of angus, the more distant cairngorms, and glimpses of the rising forms of the Grampians in the north; and
- > Effects on residents, recreational receptors and road users along the length of the proposed development around and between Padanaram, Foreside of Cairn, Craigeassie, Duns Wood And Lochty Wood.

Table 5.2 Section B: Forfar to Brechin: Summary Landscape & Visual Effects

Section B:	
Landscape Character	Section B is located within LCT 384: Broad Valley Lowlands – Tayside with smaller extents located within LCT 379: Foothills Tayside, and LCT 386: Low Moorland Hills. The landscape pattern throughout this area is generally large-scale, and comprises mainly regular arable fields except for meandering bands of woodland and scrub along the watercourses which break up the otherwise geometric field pattern. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on landscape character would occur within 1 km from the Proposed Development over an area between Jericho and west of Tannadice within the Forfar Unit of LCT 384 and over an area between Finavon and Inveriscandye (near Stracathro) in the Brechin Unit of LCT 384 as a result of physical changes to landscape features. Beyond 1 km from the construction works, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of construction activity. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on landscape character would occur within 1 km from the Proposed Development within LCT 384: Broad Valley Lowlands and LCT 379 Foothills Tayside.

	Beyond 1 km effects on landscape character would reduce and be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of the Proposed Development.
Landscape Designations	Angus Council's River South Esk LLA stretches east-west across the study area in Section B. The Angus Glens LLA is located approximately 0.8 km from the Proposed Development to the northwest. Transport corridors comprise the A90, A926 as well as a minor road network connecting smaller communities and properties. <u>Construction</u> The Proposed Development would result in localised impacts on the special qualities of the River South Esk LLA during construction, and would have a significant effect on the "<i>sweeping meanders lined with trees</i>" and the "<i>strong rural character</i>" special qualities, within the area between Inshewan, Quarryhill and Craigeassie. These effects would be localised and temporary and would not affect the integrity of the LLA. No significant effects are predicted on the Angus Glens LLA, and the construction of the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of the LLA. <u>Operation</u> Approximately 2.3 km of the Proposed Development would be located within the River Esk LLA. The extent of woodland loss within the LLA would be small and localised, and the towers would have a local influence on meander between Inshewan and Craigeassie. It is considered that the Proposed Development would have localised significant effects on the "<i>sweeping meanders lined with trees</i>" and the "<i>strong rural character</i>" special qualities. These effects would be localised to the area between Cairn Farm, Inshewan, Craigeassie and East Murthill. Effects on other special qualities would be not significant, and the wider LLA would be largely unaffected. The Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of this local landscape designation. Despite the visibility of the Proposed Development from the Angus Glens LLA, in views as close as 0.8 km, the lower elevation of the Proposed Development in views and the backclothing provided by distant landform beyond reduces the prominence of the Proposed Development in the setting of the LLA. No significant effects are predicted on the Angus Glens LLA, and the operation of the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of the landscape designation.
Visual Effects	Settlements within Section B are primarily concentrated within the larger towns east of the Proposed Development at Forfar and Brechin, and west of the Proposed Development at Kirriemuir. Core Paths within Section B are limited, with short sections near Forfar and Brechin. Informal footpaths are primarily concentrated along the northern edge of Kirriemuir and across the southern slopes of the Angus Glens LLA. Forfar Loch Country Park is located along the western edge of Forfar. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors, within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close views of construction activity would be available e.g. from receptors in VRAs B9 (Redford to Woodside), B18 (Meikle Coull to Knowehead), and B29 (Montboy to Mill of Cruick). In views from some more distant locations beyond 1 km where higher sensitivity receptors experience open expansive views across Strathmore (e.g., VRA B22 (Noranbank to

	Careston)), construction activity would be visible in the middle distance and would result in some localised significant effects. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would be generally widespread across the study area, including on both views within close proximity of the Proposed Development (within approximately 1 km) e.g. from VRAs B9 (Redford to Woodside), B18 (Meikle Coull to Knowhead), and B29) Montboy to Mill of Cruick) and some more distant locations beyond 1 km where open views across Strathmore are experienced by receptors. From some more distant and elevated VRAs, including but not limited to, around Hillbarns (within VRA 21) to the southeast the Proposed Development, and around Mains of Balhall in VRA 27 to the northwest, the Proposed Development would not form prominent features in views due to the intervening distance and the backclothing provided by distant landform which would reduce the perceptibility of the Proposed Development. Effects on these more distant and elevated views are considered to be not significant. In addition, in some views throughout Section B, visibility would be reduced by intervening features such as pockets of broadleaved woodland, commercial forestry and roadside vegetation, that would partially or fully screen the Proposed Development.
Cumulative Effects	There are no Intra Developments or Inter Developments that would interact with Section B of the Proposed Development, and therefore no cumulative effects would arise.

Section C: Brechin to Laurencekirk

5.5.53

The following are considered to be the key landscape and visual considerations within Section C:

- > The elevated and panoramic views afforded from the southern fringes of Braes of Angus, including White and Brown Caterthun;
- > Effects on the rolling wooded and settled farmland of Strathmore;
- > Views from the low-lying floor of Strathmore and the Mearns towards the steep moorland slopes of the Mount, marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault and forming a prominent backdrop in views to the north and northwest; and
- > Effects on residents, recreational receptors and road users along the length of the Proposed Development around and between Little Brechin Wood, Inchbare, Inverury Wood and Haughhead.

Table 5.3 Section C: Brechin to Laurencekirk: Summary Landscape & Visual Effects

Section C:	
Landscape Character	Section C extends across LCT 384: Broad Valley Lowlands – Tayside in the southwest and LCT 22: Broad Valley Lowlands – Aberdeenshire in the northeast. A small extent of the northwestern edge of the study area extends into LCT379 Foothills Tayside and a small extent of the southeastern fringes extend into LCT 387: Dipslope Farmland and a small extent of western fringes extends into the LCT 371: Mid Upland Glens. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on LCT 384: Broad Valley Lowlands - Tayside (as described in Table 5.2 above in Section B) and LCT 22: Broad Valley Lowlands - Aberdeenshire are predicted as a result of construction of the

	Proposed Development. These would occur within 1 km from the Proposed Development over an area between Inveriscandye and Burnhead of Monboddoo as a result of physical changes to landscape features. Beyond 1 km of the construction works, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of construction activity. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on landscape character are predicted on LCT 384: Broad Valley Lowlands – Tayside and LCT 22: Broad Valley Lowlands - Aberdeenshire during operation within 1 km of the Proposed Development, particularly over an area between the River North Esk and Auchenblae as a result of physical changes to landscape features including the introduction of large scale vertical structures into the landscape. There would be the loss of areas of broadleaved woodland and commercial forestry, including southeast of Edzell and at Lady Jane's Plantation. The introduction of a large scale OHL would contribute towards perceptual effects, however it is unlikely that the Proposed Development would diminish the perceived scale of the landscape. Beyond 1 km of the Proposed Development, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of the Proposed Development.
Landscape Designations	Section C does not fall within any landscape designations. Aberdeenshire Council's Braes of the Mearns SLA lies approximately 1.4 km northwest. <u>Construction</u> Construction effects were not assessed as the Proposed Development does not pass directly through the Braes of Mearns SLA and given the temporary nature of construction effects. The LVIA concludes that as a result construction work would not significantly affect the special qualities of the LLA to an extent that it would affect the integrity of the LLA. <u>Operation</u> There would be no significant effects on the Braes of Mearns SLA during operation. Effects would be localised to a small number of views, where it would be seen partially backclothed by the landform of the Mounth, or potentially breaking the skyline. Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of this local landscape designation.
Visual Effects	Concentrated settlements and communities within this Section include small towns and villages such as Laurencekirk and Luthermuir to the east of the Proposed Development, Inchbare and Little Brechin to the south and Edzell, Edzell Woods and Fettercairn to the northwest. The A90 lies in the southeast of the Proposed development there is an extensive network of B roads and minor roads. Core Paths within Section C are limited, with short sections near Little Brechin, Edzell, Laurencekirk and Fettercairn. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors, within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close views of construction activity would be available. For example, from receptors in VRAs C2 (Belliehill to Balrownie), C17 (Westside Edzell), and C26 (North of Lady Jane's Plantation). Views from some more distant locations beyond 1 km would be experienced by higher sensitivity receptors where open expansive views across Strathmore are available (e.g., VRA C22

	(Black Burn and Craigmoston Burn)), construction activity would be seen in the middle distance, resulting in some localised significant effects. The perceptibility of construction activity would reduce as the distance between the Proposed Development and receptors increases, with many more distant views limited to the erection of steel lattice towers and therefore are expected to be not significant. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would be generally widespread across the study area, including on both views within close proximity of the Proposed Development (within approximately 1 km). For example, from receptors in VRAs C2 (Belliehill to Balrownie), C17 (Westside Edzell), and C35 (North of Lady Jane's Plantation). In addition, views from some more distant locations beyond 1 km where receptors experience open expansive views across Strathmore (e.g. VRA C22 (Black Burn and Craigmoston Burn)) would have views of the Proposed Development in the middle distance, resulting in some localised significant effects. From some more distant and elevated VRAs e.g. in Braes of Angus to the northwest of the Proposed Development, as illustrated by VP18: White Caterthun in VRA C13 and further north in the Braes of the Mearns, as illustrated by VP23: Minor road, west of Mains of Balnakettle in C24 (beyond 1 km) effects are considered to be not significant as the Proposed Development would not form prominent features in views due to the intervening distance and the backclothing provided by distant landform which would reduce the perceptibility of the Proposed Development. In addition, some views throughout Section C, visibility would be reduced by intervening features such as pockets of broadleaved woodland, commercial forestry and roadside vegetation, that would partially or fully screen the Proposed Development.
Cumulative Effects	There are no Intra Developments or Inter Developments that would interact with Section C of the Proposed Development, and therefore no cumulative effects would arise.

Section D: Laurencekirk to Hurlie 400 kV Substation

5.5.54

The following are considered to be the key landscape and visual considerations within Section D:

- > the undulating landform comprising smoothly rolling ridges, lowland hills and shallow valleys;
- > views from the low-lying Howe of the Mearns towards the steep moorland slopes of the Mounth, marking the line of the Highland Boundary Fault and forming a prominent backdrop in views to the north and northwest;
- > long-ranging views from areas of higher land and hill summits such as Hill of Garvock, Droop Hill and Carmont Hill as well as the southwestern fringes of the Grampians; and
- > effects on residents, recreational receptors and road users along the length of the Proposed Development around and between north of Laurencekirk, Woods of Redhall, Droop Hill and Fetteresso Forest.

Table 5.4 Section D: Laurencekirk to Hurlie 400 kV Substation

Section D:	
Landscape Character	Section D of the Proposed Development passes through LCT 22: Broad Valley Lowlands – Aberdeenshire and LCT 24: Coastal Farmed Ridges and Hills – Aberdeenshire. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects are predicted on LCT 22 within Section D as discussed above for Section C. Within LCT 24 – Coastal Farmed Ridges and Hills, significant effects on landscape character are predicted within 1 km from the Proposed Development, over an area between Burnhead of Monboddo and Elf Hill as a result of physical changes to landscape features. Beyond 1 km of the construction works, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of construction activity. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects both physical and perceptual are predicted on both LCT 22 (as discussed above in Section C) and LCT 24 during operation. Within LCT 24 these would occur no more than 1 km from the Proposed Development, particularly over an area between Burnhead of Monboddo and Elf Hill due to physical changes to landscape features including the introduction of large scale vertical infrastructure into the landscape, and loss of areas of woodland including riparian woodland along the Bervie Water. The Proposed Development would also increase the influence of vertical infrastructure within LCT 24. Beyond 1 km of the Proposed Development, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of the Proposed Development.
Landscape Designations	Aberdeenshire Council's Braes of the Mearns SLA is located approximately 1.4 km to the northwest of the Proposed Development in Section C and Section D. <u>Construction</u> As the Proposed Development does not pass through the SLA, and construction effects would be temporary, construction effects on the Braes of the Mearns SLA were not assessed. Any effects would be perceptual and would not be expected to significantly affect the special qualities to an extent that it would affect the integrity of the SLA. <u>Operation</u> The Proposed Development would be located within the setting of the SLA to the southeast and would affect the “<i>strong contrast</i>” between the flat agricultural land of the Howe in the south, and the “<i>ridge of the Mounth</i>” in the north, however these effects are considered to be Not Significant. The Proposed Development is considered to have Not Significant effects on the “<i>highly visible ridge...from across the landscape to the southeast</i>” as the effect would be localised to a small number of such views, where it would be seen partially backclothed by the landform of the Mounth, or potentially breaking the skyline. Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of this local landscape designation.
Visual Effects	Concentrated settlements and communities include small towns and villages such as Laurencekirk to the south of the Proposed Development, Fordoun, Glenbervie and Drumlithie to the east, and West Cairnbeg and

	Auchenblae to the west. There are smaller groups of properties and individual dwellings across the landscape. The A90 lies to the east of the Proposed Development. There is an extensive network of B roads and minor roads within the study area. The East Coast Railway broadly follows the A90 and enters the study area at Laurencekirk travelling northwards before existing the study area to the west of Stonehaven. There are a number of Core Paths within the study area, as well as some unclassified routes typically associated with the uplands and forests. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors, within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close views of construction activity would be available, for example in VRA D4 around Westerton, and VRA D7 around Woods of Redhall. Some significant adverse effects are predicted beyond 1 km where higher sensitivity receptors experience more expansive and elevated views, such as from around Carmont Hill in VRA D23 however these effects would still be localised. Due to the more undulating landform within Section D, visibility would be reduced in some areas due to intervening landform, for example, around Drumlithie and Glenbervie. Generally, the perceptibility of construction activity would reduce as the distance between the Proposed Development and receptors increases, with many more distant views expected to experience limited and not significant effects. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors, within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close views of the Proposed Development would be available, for example in VRA D5 along the minor roads and properties northwest of Cammackmuir Plantation and VRA D16 between Auchtochter and Saw Mill. As per construction effects, there would be some locations beyond 1 km which would experience localised significant effects such as around Carmont Hill in VRA D23, illustrated for example by VP26: Glenbervie Road, west of Glenbervie in VRA D16. In some views to the northwest, however the Proposed Development would be partially or fully backclothed by the foothills of the Braes of Angus and Mounth Range, reducing the prominence of the steel lattice towers, illustrated by VP24: Minor road, northwest of Fordoun in VRA D9. Visual effects on such views are considered not significant.
Cumulative Effects	Sections D and E are assessed together given the concentration of Intra and Inter Developments around the Section boundary at Hurlie. Significant localised cumulative effects are predicted on both landscape and visual receptors in combination with Intra Developments and Inter Developments for Section D and Section E. <u>Intra Developments</u> The scale of construction activities will affect the key characteristics of LCTs 24 and 29. Cumulative effects would be moderate and significant during construction, within a localised area in Fetteresso Forest and in a localised area to the south between Hurlie substation and Carmont Hill, and north around Slug Road. Beyond these areas, construction of Hurlie

	substation would have limited influence, and cumulative effects would reduce to not significant. Similarly, operational cumulative landscape effects would be significant around Hurlie substation and immediately to the south. Beyond this area the influence of the substation would reduce and cumulative effects would be not significant. In terms of visual effects, cumulative effects would be major and significant during construction, for nearby receptors within the localised areas of VRAs D23, D26 and E2. More distant receptors would experience more limited change, and effects would be not significant. During operation, the Proposed Development will comprise prominent vertical structures, while the Hurlie substation will be relatively contained behind intervening commercial forestry in Fetteresso Forest. Major and significant cumulative visual effects would be experienced by receptors within the localised area of VRA E2. Receptors within VRA D23 would experience a moderate and significant cumulative effect, due to increased distance and screening from the Proposed Development and Hurlie substation. More distant receptors would experience more limited change, and effects would be not significant. <u><i>Intra and Inter Developments</i></u> It is expected that the construction of the Fetteresso 132 kV Substation extension, Glendye Wind Farm Grid Connection and Network Rail Drumlithie would overlap with construction of the Proposed Development. Construction programmes for the other inter developments is unclear, however should construction overlap (with exception of Laurencekirk Residential Development located in LCT 22) there would be a large area of active construction works across LCT 24 and 29, between the Carron Water to the south, across Fetteresso Forest itself, and to Durris Forest in the north with physical and perceptual effects on landscape character, with predicted moderate and significant cumulative effects localised to these areas. There would be limited interaction between the residential development and the Proposed Development given the distance of approximately 2 km between them, with some physical and perceptual cumulative effects if construction overlapped. For LCT 22, and beyond the localised effects on LCT 24 and 29, the influence of construction would reduce and cumulative effects on landscape character would reduce to not significant. During operation, there would be an increased influence of energy infrastructure within LCT 24 and 29, resulting in significant localised effects between Carron Water to the south across Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest in the north. For LCT 22, there would be no significant adverse effects. In terms of visual effects, cumulative effects would be major and significant during construction for the closest receptors across localised areas within VRAs D22, D23, D24, D25, D26, E1, E2, E3, E5 and E6. Effects may reduce depending on the length of construction phases on different projects, but the assessment considers the worst case scenario of all Intra and Inter Developments being constructed simultaneously. Effects on receptors within other VRAs near Fetteresso Forest and in D1 and D3 near Laurencekirk would be not significant. Similarly, during operation significant cumulative effects would be predicted for the closest receptors across localised areas within the same VRAs as identified during construction. Effects may reduce for receptors in more distant parts of these VRAs, where intervening features such as landform or woodland and forestry is likely to filter views of some of the inter developments. Effects on receptors within other VRAs near
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	Fetteresso Forest and in D1 and D3 near Laurencekirk would be not significant. The contribution (in-addition cumulative effect) of the Proposed Development to these cumulative effects is considered significant, as the Proposed Development would be larger and more extensive than most of the Intra and Inter Developments, and would have greater landscape and visual effects.
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Section E: Hurlie 400 kV Substation to River Dee

5.5.55

The following are considered to be the key landscape and visual considerations within Section E:

- > the upland ridge at Fetteresso and Durris Forest which forms the northern extent of the Highland Boundary Fault and a prominent landscape feature when viewed from the lower lying areas to the north and south;
- > the wide strath formed by the River Dee, and Dee Valley SLA that covers this area with its "broad, meandering river, with wooded banks" and "key routes through the valley... long-distance walking, cycling and horse riding trails";
- > views along the Dee Valley, including those experienced by residents and recreational users within and travelling along the valley; and
- > effects on residents, recreational receptors and road users along the length of the Proposed Development around and between Fetteresso Forest, Kirkton of Durris and West Park.

Table 5.5 Section E: Hurlie 400 kV Substation to River Dee

Section E:	
Landscape Character	The southern half of Section E is located in LCT 29: Summits and Plateaux – Aberdeenshire, stretching between Fetteresso Forest in the south to the north of Durris Forest. The northern half of Section E is located within LCT 31: Broad Wooded and Farmed Valley. A small area of the eastern extent of the study area, north of Durris Forest, sits within LCT 27: Farmed Moorland Edge – Aberdeenshire. <u>Construction</u> Within LCTs 29 and 31, significant effects on landscape character due to physical and perceptual changes would occur within 1 km from the Proposed Development, over an area that extends across Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest within LCT 29 and an area between Calladrum and Loch of Park within LCT 31. Significant perceptual effects would also occur within LCT 27: Farmed Moorland Edge – Aberdeenshire. Beyond 1 km of the construction works, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of construction activity. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on landscape character would occur within LCT 29 and 31 through physical and perceptual effects. Within LCT 29 these would generally be focused within 1 km of the Proposed Development, particularly over an area that extends across Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest. Within LCT 31 these would generally be focused within 1 km over an area between Calladrum and Loch of Park. Beyond 1 km of the Proposed Development in these LCTs, the effects would reduce to not significant due to decreased perceptibility. Perceptual effects would

	occur within LCT 27 but are considered not significant due to decreased perceptibility.
Landscape Designations	The study area crosses Aberdeenshire Council's Dee Valley SLA, in a north – south orientation, in the north of Section E, between Kirkton of Durris and Loch of Park. An approximate length of 3.1 km of the Proposed Development would be located within the Dee Valley SLA. <u>Construction</u> The Proposed Development crosses the Dee Valley SLA with physical and perceptual effects as a result of construction activity. However, given the temporary nature of those activities the effects on the special qualities of the Dee Valley SLA would be not significant and construction would not affect the integrity of this SLA. <u>Operation</u> Between Funach Wood, Kirkton of Durris, Mills of Drum and Loch of Park, there are localised significant effects predicted during operation of the Proposed Development on the following special qualities of the SLA: "broad, meandering river, with wooded banks", the "visual diversity" and the "richness of landscape character". Effects on other special qualities would be not significant. Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of the local landscape designation.
Visual Effects	Settlement within this Section consists of dispersed farmsteads and smaller communities, including Rickarton near the northern edge of Fetteresso Forest and Kirkton of Durris and Crathes to the south of the River Dee. There is limited presence of settlement across the forested hills in the western part of the study area across Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest. Transit corridors through Section E are limited to the A957, the A93 along with a network of B roads and minor roads. There are limited Core Paths within the study area. National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 195 crosses the Proposed Development as it travels through the Dee Valley. There are multiple areas of open access forestry land throughout Section E which offer informal tracks for recreational use including Durris and Fetteresso Forests. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors, within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close views of construction activity would be available, for example in VRA E3 around Mergie and VRA E13 around Milton. In addition, from some more distant locations beyond 1 km, higher sensitivity receptors would have views of the construction work along the upland ridge of Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest, which is visually distinctive landscape feature with a wider extent of intervisibility, for example in VRA E5 around Strathgyle Wood and Hill of Auquhollie. The extent of commercial forest cover across Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest, as well as further pockets of commercial forest and broadleaved woodland within the Dee Valley would reduce the visibility of construction works in some views. Generally, the perceptibility of construction activity would reduce as the distance between the Proposed Development and receptors increases,

	with many more distant views, generally over 1 km, limited to the erection of steel lattice towers and therefore are not expected to be significant. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors, within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close views of the Proposed Development would be available, for example in VRA E3 around Mergie and VRA E13 around Milton. In addition, from some more distant locations beyond 1 km, higher sensitivity receptors would have views of the Proposed Development as it crosses the upland ridge of Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest, which is a visually distinctive landscape feature with a wider extent of intervisibility, with some localised significant effects, for example in VRA E5 around Strathgyle Wood and Hill of Auquhollic. The extent of commercial forest cover across Fetteresso Forest and Durris Forest, would provide partial or full screening of the Proposed Development from some locations within Section E. Within the Dee Valley, the Proposed Development would be visible as it descends the southern slopes of the valley and crosses the River Dee, with steel lattice towers appearing as prominent large scale features. Pockets of broadleaved and riparian woodland within the Dee Valley however would serve to fully or partially screen the Proposed Development, and where this is the case views would be not significant, for example at VP30: Durris Bridge in VRA E1.
Cumulative Effects	Section E has been assessed alongside Section D at Table 5.4 above and is not repeated.

Section F: north of River Dee to Kintore Substation

The following are considered to be the key landscape and visual considerations within Section F:

- > the wide strath formed by the River Dee, and Dee Valley SLA that covers this area with its “*broad, meandering river, with wooded banks*” and “*key routes through the valley... long-distance walking, cycling and horse riding trails*”;
- > views along the Dee Valley, including those experienced by residents and recreational users within and travelling along the valley;
- > the elevated and panoramic views afforded from hill summits including Meikle Tap and Barmekin Hill.; and
- > effects on residents, recreational receptors and road users along the length of the Proposed Development around and between Drumoak, Echt, Dunecht and Kintore.

Table 5.6 north of River Dee to Kintore Substation

Section F:	
Landscape Character	The majority of Section F is located in LCT 26: Wooded Estates Aberdeen, a landscape that comprises a mosaic of broad valleys, floodplains, dense woodland and mosses, and a series of low, gently rounded hills. A smaller area in the south of Section F sits within LCT 31: Broad Wooded and Farmed Valley.

	<u>Construction</u> Significant effects on landscape character are predicted for LCT 31 as described above for Section E, and through physical and perceptual effects on LCT 26 within 1 km of the Proposed Development particularly over an area between Coldstream Plantation and the A944 in the Echt Unit of LCT 26, and over an area between the A944 and Kintore in the Kintore Unit. Beyond 1 km of the construction works, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of construction activity. <u>Operation</u> Similarly to construction effects, significant operational effects would be limited to within 1 km of the Proposed Development within LCT 26 and LCT 31. Beyond 1 km, effects on landscape character would reduce and would be not significant due to the decreased perceptibility of the Proposed Development.
Landscape Designations	Aberdeenshire Council's Dee Valley SLA traverses the southern end of Section F from west to east, extending to the edge of the study area in the east. Bennachie SLA is located approximately 3.3 km northwest of the Proposed Development, with the majority of the SLA beyond the study area. <u>Construction</u> No significant effects are predicted on the Dee Valley SLA as outlined above in relation to Section E.. The Proposed Development would be located outside the Bennachie SLA, and construction effects were not assessed as any effects would be perceptual and temporary, it being expected there would be no significant effect on the SLA or its special qualities. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects are predicted on the Dee Valley SLA, as explained above at Section E, however it would not affect the integrity of the landscape designation. Effects on the Bennachie SLA would be perceptual only. Visibility of the Proposed Development from the Bennachie SLA would be limited due to the woodland and forestry cover within the designation. Given the limited visibility and distance, it is considered that effects on the special qualities of the SLA would not be significant, and overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of this local landscape designation.
<u>Visual Effects</u>	Concentrated settlements and communities within this Section include: Drumoak to the east of the Proposed Development and Crathes to the west in the southern end of Section F; Echt to the west and Dunecht to the east further north; Lyne of Skene and Leylodge to the east and Kintore to the north. There are smaller groups of properties and scattered individual dwellings and farmstead across the landscape. The A944 passes through the study area west to east between Alford and Aberdeen. The A93 passes through the study area west to east connecting Banchory and Aberdeen. There is also an extensive network of B-roads and minor roads.

	There are a number of Core Paths, popular hill summits and visitor attractions within the study area, including the Deeside Way Long Distance Path and NCN Route 195 within the Dee Valley. <u>Construction</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors, within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close views of construction activity would be available, for example in VRA F1 around Upper Park and Beechgrove Cottages and VRA F19 around Monecht and South Monecht. Beyond 1 km, the rolling nature of the landform would play a role in reducing the extent of visibility from more distant receptors as intervening slopes and undulations would partially or fully screen views, for example in VRA F24. Generally, the perceptibility of construction activity would reduce as the distance between the Proposed Development and receptors increases, with many more distant views limited to the erection of steel lattice towers and not significant. <u>Operation</u> Significant effects on views and visual amenity would affect high sensitivity receptors such as residents and recreational receptors within approximately 1 km of the Proposed Development, where close proximity views of the Proposed Development would be available, for example in VRA F1 around Upper Park and Beechgrove Cottages and VRA F1925 around Monecht and South Monecht. From more distant and elevated views including from Meikle Tap in VRA F16 (VP34) and Barmekin Hill in VRA F23 (VP36) the Proposed Development would be visible in middle-to-longer distance views along the lower lying landscape and would be backclothed against more distant landform, reducing the overall prominence of the steel lattice towers. Effects on these more distant and elevated views are considered to be not significant. Additionally, from some VRAs, particularly those beyond 1 km, visibility would be reduced by intervening features such as intervening landform or pockets of broadleaved woodland, commercial forestry and roadside vegetation, that would partially or fully screen the Proposed Development, for example in VRA F24.
Cumulative Effects	Significant localised cumulative effects are predicted on both landscape and visual receptors in combination with Intra Developments and Inter Developments. <u>Intra Developments</u> There are no Intra Developments that would interact with Section F of the Proposed Development, and therefore cumulative effects would only arise in relation to Inter Developments. <u>Inter Developments</u> During construction, moderate, significant cumulative landscape effects are expected within LCT 26 in localised areas around Leylodge, Letter and Womblehill, and Meikle Tap and Echt. Beyond these areas cumulative landscape effects would reduce to not significant. During operation, moderate, significant cumulative landscape effects are expected within LCT 26 in a localised area around Kintore Substation (between Leylodge, Letter and Womblehill) associated with the cluster of Inter Developments near Kintore, and more widely between Dunecht and Crathes due to the influence of both the Proposed Development and the large scale Hill of Fare Wind Farm. Beyond this area, the influence of the

	Inter Developments would reduce, and cumulative effects would reduce to not significant. Major, significant cumulative visual effects are expected during construction, with construction activity visible in combined, successive and/or sequential views from some visual receptors across localised areas within VRAs F16, F30, F32 and F33. For receptors within VRAs F29 and F31 the effect would be moderate and significant v. Effects may reduce for receptors in more distant parts of these VRAs, where intervening features such as landform or woodland and forestry is likely to filter views of some of the inter developments. Effects on receptors within other VRAs would be Not Significant due to greater distance leading to lower magnitude of change in views. During operation the Inter Developments alongside the Proposed Development would introduce a range of different electrical and energy related infrastructure into views, including prominent vertical structures and electrical compounds. Nearby residential receptors and road users across localised areas within VRAs F29, F30, F31, F32 and F33 would experience combined, successive and sequential views. Receptors within VRAs F10, F11, F17, F21 and F23 would experience mainly successive and sequential views, but may experience some combined views from east of the Proposed Development. Major, significant cumulative visual effects are expected on some visual receptors within VRAs F10, F11, F17, F21, F23, F30, F32 and F33, and moderate significant cumulative visual effects on some receptors in VRAs F29 and F31. Effects may reduce for receptors in more distant parts of these VRAs, where intervening features such as landform or woodland and forestry is likely to filter views of some of the inter developments. Effects on receptors within other VRAs would be Not Significant due to greater distance leading to lower magnitude of change in views. The contribution (in-addition cumulative effect) of the Proposed Development to these cumulative effects is considered to be significant. The Proposed Development would be larger and more extensive than most of the Intra and Inter Developments, and would have greater landscape and visual effects.
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- 5.5.56 In summary, **significant landscape and visual effects** are predicted as a result of the construction and operation of the Proposed Development both in isolation and cumulatively. These would be localised in nature and are generally limited to within 1 km of the Proposed Development, in some instances significant visual effects would extend beyond 1 km, for example during operation within Section B and Section C where significant effects would extend out to between 1.3 km – 1.5 km. Beyond this distance the perceptibility of the Proposed Development would reduce and effects would be deemed **not significant**.

Policy 11 (e) (iii) - Public Access

- 5.5.57 Public access impacts associated with the Proposed Development are anticipated to be temporary and localised and would typically result in a temporary disturbance to access or use of land or severance of land parcels during construction. Rights of Way ('RoW') data was used to inform design and ensure that effects on public access were avoided where possible. Impacts on Core Paths, National Cycle Network (NCN) routes, other public RoW and recreational routes was scoped out of the EIA as the land use change is not predicted to have significant effects on the users of these assets and any construction effects would be temporary and managed through implementation of relevant mitigation measures. The Proposed Development would cross a number of recreational routes and these are identified for context within **Volume 2, Chapter 7: Land Use and Prime Agricultural Land** of the EIA Report.
- 5.5.58 Effects on the amenity of recreational receptors are considered within **Volume 2, Chapter 9 Landscape and Visual Amenity** of the EIA Report and are summarised above in relation to

the landscape and visual considerations. The LVIA notes that for all routes identified, significant adverse effects are largely limited in scope and intensity and would be localised in nature. Path users are in motion and often experience views in a dynamic way, reducing the perceptual impact of visual change. Furthermore, the visual context of these trails already includes a mix of landscape elements – woodland, agriculture, settlements, and existing electricity infrastructure – against which the new infrastructure would be seen.

- 5.5.59 Importantly, the Proposed Development in the vast majority of cases would not sever or restrict access to existing paths or trails or introduce physical barriers or prolonged noise disruption that would diminish the quality of the recreational experience. Construction activities will be managed to avoid obstructing public access and to ensure the safety and continuity of use along nearby routes.
- 5.5.60 Core paths are also frequently used by local residents as part of daily routines and informal recreation. These paths often serve as connectors between settlements and countryside and tend to be valued for their utility rather than pristine visual quality. The Proposed Development is not anticipated to have any direct or indirect impact on the use, safety, or enjoyment of core paths.
- 5.5.61 A series of mitigation measures and management plans have been proposed to help mitigate and offset impacts on public access. These include the implementation of a **CTMP** and **Outdoor Access Management Plan** ('OAMP') which would be secured by condition. An Outline OAMP is submitted at Appendix **Volume 5, Appendix 7.1: Outline Outdoor Access Management Plan**.

Policy 11 (e) (iv) (v) - Aviation, Defence Interests and Telecommunications

- 5.5.62 The Proposed Development would not give rise to any negative effects on aviation, defence interests and telecommunications. No significant impact is predicated upon aviation activity associated with licensed aerodromes, military aerodromes, and their associated infrastructure. Full details are set out in **Volume 5: Appendix 7.2 – Aviation Impact Assessment** of the EIA Report ('AIA').
- 5.5.63 The AIA did however identify that the Proposed Development would interact with three unlicensed civil recreational airfields³³.
- 5.5.64 The reference to aviation within Policy 11 (e) (iv) '*impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording*' suggests impacts that are in the national interest in relation to commercial or defence aviation interests, rather than local or regional recreational airfields/airstrips. The policy is therefore deemed of limited relevance to unlicensed recreational airfields. Impacts on recreational airfields are discussed further within Chapter 6 relating to Aberdeenshire LDP Policy PR2 Reserving and Protecting Important Development Sites.

Policy (e) (vi) - Impacts on Road Traffic and Trunk Roads

- 5.5.65 **Volume 2: Chapter 14** of the EIA Report considers the effects of the Proposed Development in terms of traffic and transport. The Chapter is supported by a Transport Assessment (**Volume 5, Appendix 14.1: Transport Assessment** of the EIA Report). For the purposes of the Transport Assessment the Proposed Development has been split into three geographically defined 'Transport Sections', as some of the Proposed Development is in Angus Council area and some is within Aberdeenshire Council area. The Transport Sections which have been used are described as follows:
- > Transport Section i – Tealing to Inchbare (Towers GE 1 to T127, within Angus Council area and includes Sections A, B and some of Section C of the Proposed Development subsections);

³³ Recreational airfield is defined in the EIA Report as a small unlicensed recreational aviation airfield or airstrip which is not safeguarded in the same way as licensed or military airfields.

- > Transport Section ii – Inchbare to Drumlithie (Towers T128 to T205, within the Kincardine and Mearns area of Aberdeenshire Council area and includes part of Section C and the majority of Section D of the Proposed Development's subsections); and
- > Transport Section iii – Drumlithie to Kintore (Towers T206 to N1, within the Garioch area of Aberdeenshire Council area and includes a small part of Section D and all of Sections E and F of the Proposed Development's subsections).

- 5.5.66 The Proposed Development is assessed relative to the environmental effects of construction traffic. The Principal Contractors have provided average construction traffic generation for activities listed within the indicative construction programme. These vehicle movements have been distributed through the construction programme to estimate the peak construction month, which is month 29.
- 5.5.67 Once operational, the Proposed Development would only generate occasional maintenance traffic, and this was scoped out of detailed assessment. No significant operational effects are anticipated as a result of the traffic and transport activity anticipated for routine maintenance and inspections required for the installed OHL. Consideration of cumulative traffic effects has also been undertaken.
- 5.5.68 A review of existing theoretical road capacity has been undertaken. The theoretical road capacity has been estimated for each of the road links for a 12-hour period that makes up the study area for Transport Sections i, ii, iii. The results indicate there are no road capacity issues with the addition of construction traffic predicted for the Proposed Development's construction. Moreover, the assessment states that ample spare capacity exists within the trunk and local road network to accommodate all construction phase traffic.
- 5.5.69 With regards to OHL Sections A to D (Sections i, ii and a short part of Section iii), average daily construction traffic movements are expected to result in a total of 198 movements (99 inbound trips and 99 outbound trips), which comprise 108 HGV movements (54 inbound trips and 54 outbound trips) and 90 Car/LGV trips (45 inbound trips and 45 outbound trips).
- 5.5.70 For Sections E to F (spanning the majority of Section iii) average daily construction traffic movements for these works are anticipated to result in a total of 354 movements (177 inbound trips and 177 outbound trips), which comprise 134 HGV (67 inbound trips and 67 outbound trips) and 220 Car/LGV trips (110 inbound trips and 110 outbound trips).
- 5.5.71 The assessment of significance shows that the following receptors within Transport Section i (Sections A, B and some of Section C of the Proposed Development subsections) would be predicted to experience **significant** traffic-related environmental effects prior to the application of additional mitigation measures:
- > Zc6 Residents/Visitors and Road Users;
 - > Zc30 Residents/Visitors and Road Users;
 - > B957 Residents/Visitors and Road Users;
 - > Zc31 Residents/Visitors and Road Users;
 - > Minor Roads and Access Tracks Users; and
 - > Core Path Users.
- 5.5.72 The assessment of significance shows that the following receptors within Transport Section ii (part of Section C and majority of Section D of the Proposed Developments Subsections) would experience **significant** traffic-related environmental effects prior to the application of additional mitigation measures:
- > B974 Residents/Visitors and Road Users;
 - > Glenbervie Road Residents/Visitors and Road Users;

- > Unclassified Road north of Glenbervie Road and south of C1K Residents//Visitors and Road Users;
- > B966 Residents//Visitors and Road Users;
- > C1K Residents//Visitors and Road Users;
- > Minor Roads and Access Tracks Users; and
- > Core Path Users.

5.5.73 The assessment of significance shows that the following receptors within Transport Section iii (Part of Section D and all of Section E and F) would experience **significant** traffic-related environmental effects prior to the application of additional mitigation measures:

- > C1K Residents/Visitors and Road Users;
- > Couper's Road Residents//Visitors and Road Users;
- > Minor Roads and Access Tracks Users; and
- > Core Path Users/National Cycle Network (NCN) Users.

5.5.74 It is notable that the effects of the construction period would be transitory in nature and the peak of construction activities would be temporary. Whilst it is acknowledged that other months (outwith the construction peak month – month 29) within the construction programme may cause significant effects, these would be less than those assessed and for which mitigation measures have been proposed.

5.5.75 Mitigation measures for Proposed Development traffic include both embedded and applied mitigation (TA1-TA5). Monitoring measures (TA6 – TA8) have also been applied. Additional mitigation (TA9 – TA10) to address the predicted significant adverse effects identified are also provided for. Traffic and transport mitigation and monitoring measures are as follows:

- > TA1: Basic traffic management measures, including the provision of direction signage at the proposed site access junction;
- > TA2: The use of local material suppliers to reduce traffic impacts and overall project mileage;
- > TA3: Provision of a CTMP;
- > TA4: Provision of an OAMP;
- > TA5: Construction staff Travel Plan, to reduce the use of single occupancy travel to and from the Site;
- > TA6: construction staff Travel Plan (TA5) will be monitored to ensure that staff use van sharing or construction site minibuses to access the Site.
- > TA7: CTMP will be monitored to ensure plan is implemented during construction.
- > TA8: Principal Contractors will undertake checks to ensure that approved access routes agreed with the relevant roads authorities are adhered to.
- > TA9: Enhanced CTMP;
- > TA10: Public Information;
- > TA11: Pedestrian Management;
- > TA12: Access Improvements; and
- > TA13: Public Road Improvements.

- 5.5.76 The **Assessment concludes** that following the application of the proposed additional mitigation measures (TA6 -TA10), the significance of residual effects across all receptors assessed would be minor in nature and therefore **not significant**.
- 5.5.77 In terms of cumulative effects, projects connected with the Proposed Development (identified as Intra Developments) and other developments (Inter Developments) that may use the study area road network have been considered and the potential effects set out. **No significant adverse effects** are predicted as it is not anticipated that the projects' peak construction traffic/period will coincide with that of the Proposed Development.

Policy 11 (e)(vii) - Historic Environment

- 5.5.78 **Volume 2, Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage** of the EIA Report considers the potential effects of the Proposed Development on cultural heritage assets from both the construction and operational stages of development. A more detailed policy assessment in relation to NPF4 Policy 7 is provided below.
- 5.5.79 In summary, the assessment within the EIA Report has resulted in the identification of **moderate adverse significant effects** on the settings of eight Scheduled Monuments as a result of the Proposed Development. These are located within Section A (one), Section B (one), Section C (three) and Section F (three). **Significant moderate adverse cumulative effects** are also predicted in relation to four designated heritage assets in Section A (two) and Section F (two).
- 5.5.80 It is explained in the assessment that while the character of the landscape within which the monuments are located would be altered by the presence of the proposed towers, the permeable nature of the Proposed Development would still allow the landscape surroundings, and context of, the monuments to be appreciated, understood and experienced. The key aspects of the setting of these assets would be adequately retained such that the integrity of their settings for the majority of cultural heritage assets would not be significantly adversely affected.
- 5.5.81 **No significant effects** on the setting of any of the Listed Buildings, GDLs or Conservation Areas has been predicted. With the exception of the designated heritage assets identified in paragraph 5.5.78 above, all other impacts, affecting the settings of designated heritage assets in the surrounding landscape, would give rise to effects that are either of minor or negligible significance.
- 5.5.82 Mitigation measures have been embedded into the project design development to reduce overall effects with additional mitigation such as archaeological watching briefs/investigation and recording proposed to reduce direct and potential effects on heritage assets. The additional mitigation measures can be secured via an appropriately worded condition.

Policy 11 (e)(viii) - Hydrology, the Water Environment and Flood Risk

- 5.5.83 **Volume 2, Chapter 13: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils** of the EIA Report identifies and assesses the potential impacts and effects of the Proposed Development on the hydrology, hydrogeology, geology and soils.
- 5.5.84 A summary of the effects that were assessed in full is:
- > potential construction effects of pollution on surface watercourses, waterbodies, groundwater, and PWS quality;
 - > potential quantitative construction effects on PWS and GWDTE;
 - > potential effects on the designated geological SSSI (North Esk and West Water Palaeochannels) in Section C; and
 - > potential construction and operational effects on run-off rates and flood risk.
- 5.5.85 Some of those potential effects were scoped out on a section by section basis after consideration of the baseline conditions.

- 5.5.86 Topic specific embedded mitigation (HG1-HG8) (mitigation achieved through design) has been applied to the Proposed Development in relation to hydrology, the water environment and flood risk.
- 5.5.87 The Applicant is committed to implementation of applied mitigation and monitoring measures (HG9-20) which are an integral part of the project development and reflect best practice guidance and recognised industry standards, as well as the Applicant's experience of constructing OHLs. They will comprise a CEMP which will comprise, among other requirements, a suite of SSEN Transmission GEMPs and contractor authored documentation, which would detail general and site-specific measures which would be implemented to avoid or mitigate likely significant effects and which will be secured through planning conditions.
- 5.5.88 Additionally, committed additional mitigation measures (HG21-HG70) are set out for each section of the Proposed Development at **Table 13.22 Volume 2, Chapter 13: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils** of the EIA Report.
- 5.5.89 No significant adverse effects predicted in relation to hydrology, run-off rates and flood risk; or geology in terms of the designated SSSI.
- 5.5.90 Some significant adverse effects, prior to application of additional mitigation, were predicted in relation to water quality to downstream watercourses and receptors (including the River Tay SAC, River Esk SAC and River Dee SAC); private water supplies and two GWDTEs (GWDTE 1 and 8). However, with site-specific additional mitigation at locations where relevant buffers could not be achieved, the residual construction effects were assessed to be minor or negligible and **not significant**.
- 5.5.91 During operation, the minor increase in hardstanding areas (towers legs, CSE Compound and permanent tracks) within each rivers' catchment in Sections A – F could result in a very slight increase in the rate and volume of surface water runoff, leading to a potential increase in flood risk in watercourses downstream. It is noted that Embedded and Applied Mitigation will be in place and runoff will be attenuated and there will no land raising in flood risk areas.
- 5.5.92 It is explained in the assessment that given the size of the areas of proposed hardstanding compared to the catchment areas of the downstream watercourses, the magnitude of the effect on flood risk downstream is considered to be negligible, resulting in an effect of negligible significance for all catchments. No additional mitigation during operation is therefore required as there is no likely significant effect.
- 5.5.93 Cumulative construction and operational effects are assessed to be negligible and **not significant**.
- 5.5.94 The EIA Report has demonstrated that through project design and mitigation that the effects on hydrology and the water environment have been addressed and there are no predicted residual significant effects as a result of the Proposed Development.
- Policy 11 (e) (ix) - Biodiversity including impacts on birds**
- 5.5.95 **Volume 2, Chapter 11: Ecology and Volume 2, Chapter 12 Ornithology** of the EIA Report presents the assessments of the potential effects on terrestrial ecology and ornithology.
- Ecology*
- 5.5.96 The EIA Report has identified an Ecological Survey Area ('ESA') for the Proposed Development which comprises the LOD of the Proposed Development, plus relevant buffers (up to 250 m from LOD) with the exception of access tracks, tie ins and tie backs for which a buffer of up to 50 m was applied in which all ecology surveys were undertaken in line with good practice guidelines for all ecological features surveyed. Sites designated for ornithological interests are dealt with separately under the heading Ornithology.
- 5.5.97 The following **statutory designated sites** with an Impact Pathway are located within the ESA:

- > River Tay SAC (**Section A**): the Proposed Development will oversail the designation at two locations, the Kerbet Water at Towers S168 to S167 and the Dean Water between towers S165 to S164.
- > River South Esk SAC (**Section B**): the Proposed Development will oversail the designation at two locations, River South Esk (Towers S143 to S142) and Noran Water (Towers S131 to S130).
- > River Dee SAC (**Section E**): the Proposed Development will oversail the designation at two locations, at The Burn of Sheeoch (Towers N68 to N67) and the River Dee (Towers N62 to N61).
- > Loch of Park SSSI (**Section F**): Adjacent to the west of the LOD (Towers N56 to N53).

5.5.98 There are no statutory designated sites with an impact pathway within Sections C and D of the Proposed Development.

5.5.99 The following **non statutory designated sites** with an impact pathway are located within the Proposed Development:

- > Unnamed woodland (AWI) of LEPO (**Section A**): Woodland blocks located within the LoD (Towers S193, S178 to S177).
- > Woodside LNCS (**Section B**): LNCS is within the LoD, no infrastructure is proposed in LNCS (Towers S151 to S150).
- > Auchleuchrie LNCS (**Section B**): the LNCS is within the LoD of an existing access track (Track to S141).
- > Unnamed Wood (AWI) Ancient (of Semi Natural Origin) (**Section B**): Woodland block overlaps with the LOD (Tower S130).
- > Unnamed Woodlands, Forestmuir Wood, Oak/Redford Wood, Boggie Wood, Duns Wood, Lochty Wood (AWI) LEPO (**Section B**): Woodland blocks overlap with the LOD³⁴.
- > Various named and unnamed Woodlands³⁵ (AWI) LEPO (**Section C**): Woodland blocks overlap with the LOD.
- > Various named and unnamed Woodlands³⁶ (AWI) LEPO (**Section D**): Woodland blocks overlap with the LOD.
- > River Dee LNCS (**Section E**): The Proposed Development will oversail the designation (Towers N62-N61)
- > Unnamed woodland, Kirkton Wood (AWI) Ancient (of Semi-Natural Origin) (**Section E**): Woodland blocks overlap with, or are adjacent to, the LOD (Towers N87, N67, N66).
- > Unnamed Woodlands, Wood of Mergie, Funach/Free Church Wood (AWI) LEPO (**Section E**): Woodland blocks overlap with the LOD (Towers N89, N87, N67).
- > Loch of Park LNCS (**Section F**): The LNCS is located within the LoD; no infrastructure is proposed within the LNCS (Towers N56-N49).

³⁴ At Towers S155, S150, S147, S141, S140-S139, S133, S126, S121, S115-S113, S112-S111

³⁵ Unnamed Woodlands, Keeper's/Belliehill Woods, Little Brechin Wood, Bankhead Wood, Capo Plantation, Cleary Wood, Inverury Wood, Lady Jane's Plantation (Pitgarvie/Lower Thorton Wood), Greenbottom Wood, at Towers S104-S102, S101, S98, S82, S79, S78, S77-S73, S65-S63, S60, S58

³⁶ Unnamed Woodland, Cammackmuir Plantation, Woods of Redhall, Den Wood, Jacksbank Wood at Towers S47-S46, S34, S31-S29, S16, S14

- > Various named and unnamed Woodlands³⁷ (AWI) LEPO (**Section F**): Woodland blocks overlap with, or are adjacent to, the LOD.
- 5.5.100 Woodlands listed on the AWI are located within the ESA and comprise 566.1 ha of which approximately 16.7 ha was ancient woodland and the remainder LEPO, some of these woodlands will be subject to felling to facilitate the Proposed Development. Further detail on the felling required to construct and operate the Proposed Development is set out at Section 5.9 at Policy 6 and within **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry and associated Appendix 8.2 Woodland Reports** of the EIA Report.
- 5.5.101 A total of 39 UK Habitat (UK Hab) classifications³⁸ have been recorded within the ESA for area-based habitats. In addition, 11 linear habitats were recorded in the ESA. Chapter 11 of the EIA Report should be referred for full details of habitat classifications. The most commonly occurring habitats within Section A-D and F was cropland – cereal crops and Grassland - Modified Grassland. The exception to this pattern of land management was in Section E, which is dominated by woodland habitats associated with the large forestry plantations of Fetteresso Forest and Durrus Forest where much of the area is dominated by forms of plantation woodland, associated with non-native conifer species such as Sitka spruce.
- 5.5.102 Extents of semi-natural woodlands, comprising Scottish Biodiversity List ('SBL') priority habitats such as Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland, Upland Birchwoods, Upland Mixed Ashwood, and Wet woodland, were scattered throughout the ESA.
- 5.5.103 Notable areas of heathland were present within Section A and Section E. Wetland habitats were recorded occasionally scattered within the lowland areas across all Sections of the ESA.
- 5.5.104 Other habitats present throughout the study area included hedges, treelines, ponds, and watercourses.
- 5.5.105 Habitats of conservation concern were identified within the ESA which were listed within Annex 1 of the Habitats Directive, the Scottish Biodiversity List, Local Biodiversity Action Plans or had potential groundwater dependencies.
- 5.5.106 Habitats within the ESA were considered suitable to support a wide range of commuting and foraging protected and notable species, though as the Proposed Development is predominantly comprised of intensive agricultural land and commercial conifer woodland plantation, resting sites for all protected and notable species are limited. Watercourses were similar in that they provide suitable commuting and foraging habitat for protected and notable species, though confirmed resting sites, or areas with the potential for resting sites within the ESA were also limited.
- 5.5.107 Species taken forward for detailed assessment included: Bats, Otter, Beaver, Wildcat, Badger, Red Squirrel, Pine Marten, Freshwater Pearl Mussel, and Atlantic Salmon.
- 5.5.108 Embedded mitigation of specific relevance to ecological interests was applied at the design stage. These include:
 - > EC1: Avoidance of statutory designated sites. The Proposed Development has been designed to avoid direct impacts on statutory designated sites and these sites have been excluded from the LOD wherever possible. Where the Proposed Development intersects with statutory designated sites, this is limited to crossings of three riverine SACs which require to be oversailed.
 - > EC2: Avoidance of non-statutory LNCS. The Proposed Development has been designed to, wherever possible, avoid direct impacts on LNCS that are located within proximity to the Proposed Development. No permanent infrastructure is proposed within the

³⁷ Unnamed Woodlands, Collonach/Coldstream Plantation, Backstrip Wood, Marketmuir Wood, North Kirkton Wood, Myriewell Wood, Tillybrig/Scaur Wood, Corskie Wood, at Towers N54, N52-N51, N36, N34, N33-N32, N30, N21, N19, N18, N16

³⁸ UK Habitat (UK Hab) Classification system (2020) version 1.1

boundaries of a LNCS. Where the Proposed Development intersects with a LNCS, this is limited to the following:

- Woodside LNCS: oversail of acid grassland habitats and removal of limited number of birch trees.
 - Auchleuchrie LNCS: upgrade of an existing track bound on either side by birch woodland of the LNCS.
 - River Dee LNCS: oversail the watercourse and removal of limited number of bankside trees.
 - Loch of Park LNCS: oversail grassland habitats and removal of a limited number of broadleaved trees.
- > EC3: Avoidance of sensitive areas of woodland. The Proposed Development has been designed to avoid impacts to woodland listed on the AWI and SBL priority woodland habitats where possible. Where ancient woodland (categories 1a and 2a) are within proximity to the Proposed Development, i.e. within the standard LoD distances applied to the infrastructure of the Proposed Development, the LOD has been amended to exclude these woodlands from the Proposed Development.
- > EC4: Reduction of the LOD in areas of ecological constraint (such as designated sites and ancient woodland). This includes adjustment of the L-OD to ensure retention of sensitive habitats at Loch of Park SSSI and within woodland listed on the AWI at Lochty Wood.
- > EC5: Design of watercourse crossings to ensure flows are not obstructed or reduced, and maintain passage for fish and aquatic species.

5.5.109 The Applicant is committed to a range of additional Applied Mitigation measures (EC6 – EC27) which comprises of the Applicant's GEMPs and SPPs, as well as a CEMP amongst other bespoke site and or species specific mitigation. The detail of these is set out within **Table 11.13 Volume 1, Chapter 11 Ecology** of the EIA Report. In addition, further surveys and monitoring will be undertaken prior to commencement of construction and throughout the construction period.

Overview of Significant effects

5.5.110 **Volume 2, Chapter 11 Ecology** of the EIA Report sets out the residual effects following application of mitigation measures noted. It concludes:

- > No significant effects are predicted on any statutory designated sites.
- > No significant effects are predicted on any non-statutory designated sites from an ecological perspective.
- > No significant adverse effects are predicted on any of the habitats of conservation concern.
- > No significant adverse effects are predicted on any of the protected species considered as a result of the Proposed Development.

5.5.111 Subject to embedded and applied mitigation, **no significant residual adverse effects** as a result of construction of the Proposed Development are anticipated on the important ecological features identified. Operational effects were scoped out of the assessment as no significant adverse effects were considered likely for this phase.

5.5.112 In relation to cumulative effects, significant impacts to designated sites are not anticipated as each of the projects assessed in the cumulative assessment has avoided impacts via embedded and applied mitigation measures, or there is no connectivity to designated sites. Thus, **no cumulative significant effect** upon designated sites has been identified.

- 5.5.113 Loss of habitats of conservation concern was minimal across all proposed developments, thus **no cumulative significant effect** has been identified in relation to habitats of conservation concern.
- 5.5.114 Features within the landscape which protected and notable species are more likely to utilise for resting sites were generally avoided by projects. Some loss of foraging and commuting habitat for species, such as bats and badger, may be anticipated, but each project will result in a very small loss within the landscape; these losses are not assessed to be at a scale that would be likely to result in cumulative significant effects when taking all projects into consideration. All projects are anticipated to have similar industry-standard best practice embedded and applied mitigation measures in place to reduce potential impacts. **No significant cumulative impact** is therefore anticipated on protected or notable species.

Ornithology

- 5.5.115 **Volume 1, Chapter 12 Ornithology** of the EIA Report explains a study area comprising up to a 20 km buffer from the Site³⁹ was used for the purposes of assessment. Individual Study Areas vary by desk and field survey, and by ornithological features, as defined by best practice. Larger study areas are applied for statutory designated sites (20 km) and a smaller study area applies to breeding birds (2 km). These are set out in **Volume 3, Figure 12.1: The Proposed Development and Survey Area** and **Figure 12.2: Ornithological Designated Sites** within 20 km and 5 km.
- 5.5.116 The following are the **statutory designated sites** identified within 20 km of the Proposed Development, and all non-statutory designated sites identified within 5 km of the Site where qualifying features are of ornithological interest:

Section A

- > Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary SPA & Ramsar (7.5 km south): Potential connectivity with Greylag and Pink-footed Geese as Section A lies within core foraging range (20 km).
- > Outer Firth of Forth and St. Andrews Bay SPA (7.5 km southeast): designated for breeding seabirds including Herring Gull that may forage inland (mean distance 10.5 km from nesting site). Therefore, there is potential for connectivity with Section A of the Proposed Development and the SPA.
- > Loch of Lintrathen SPA, Ramsar and SSSI (13.3 km west): Potential connectivity with Greylag Geese as Section A lies within core foraging range (20 km).
- > Loch of Kinnordy SPA, Ramsar and SSSI (6.4 km west): Potential connectivity with Greylag and Pink-footed Geese as Section A lies within core foraging range (20 km).

Section B

- > Loch of Lintrathen SPA, Ramsar and SSSI (12.5 km west): Potential connectivity with Greylag Geese as Section B lies within core foraging range (20 km).
- > Loch of Kinnordy SPA, Ramsar and SSSI (5.6 km west): Potential connectivity with Greylag and Pink-footed Geese as Section B lies within core foraging range (20 km).

Section C

- > Montrose Basin SPA, Ramsar, SPA, and SSSI (6.7 km east): Potential connectivity with Greylag and Pink-footed Geese as Section C lies within core foraging range (20 km).

³⁹ Defined as the area bounded by the Limit of Deviation (LOD) for the proposed OHL and access tracks;

Section D

- > Montrose Basin SPA, Ramsar SSSI, and LNR (12.5 km south): Potential connectivity with Greylag and Pink-footed Geese as Section D lies within core foraging range (20 km).
- > Fowlsheugh SPA and SSSI (8.8 km east): Potential connectivity with Herring Gull as Section D lies within core foraging range (foraging Herring Gull).

Section E

- > Fowlsheugh SPA and SSSI (8.9 km east): Potential connectivity with Herring Gull as Section E lies within core foraging range (foraging Herring Gull).

Section F

- > Loch of Skene SPA, Ramsar and SSSI (3.1 km east): Potential connectivity with Greylag Geese, as Section F lies within 20 km of Loch of Skene SPA.

- 5.5.117 There are no non-statutory designations, e.g. nature reserves, for ornithological interest within 2 km of the Proposed Development.
- 5.5.118 The Proposed Development lies within three Natural Heritage Zones⁴⁰ ('NHZ'):
- > NHZ 16 - Eastern Lowlands (Sections A, B, C and D to Tower S4 of the Proposed Development);
 - > NHZ 12 – North East Glens (Section D from Tower S4; Section E to Tower N70); and
 - > NHZ 9 – North East Coastal Plain (Section E from Tower N69 and Section F).
- 5.5.119 A number of Target Species⁴¹ have been identified as part of the baseline survey data and which are described and set out within Section 12.9 of Chapter 12 of the EIA Report. The Target Species identified and additionally those which comprise qualifying features of Designated Sites which are considered as part of the detailed assessment are as follows:
- > Greylag goose (non-breeding); Pink-footed Geese (non-breeding); Red-breasted Merganser (non-breeding); Herring Gull; Red Kite; Goshawk; Peregrine falcon; Merlin; Short-eared Owl; and Nightjar.
- 5.5.120 Embedded mitigation of specific relevance to ornithological interests was applied at the design stage. These include:
- > O1: Avoidance of Designated Sites and areas of high bird use through the routeing and alignment processes; and
 - > O2: Installation of line markers (also known as Bird Flight Diversers - BFDs) on the OHL as appropriate to reduce collision risk for SPA-qualifying species and other bird species potentially at risk of collision. Line marking will therefore be applied within 5 km of all SPAs; where flight activity across any OHL span is judged to be substantial; within 500 m of identified Schedule 1 raptor species nests and where the OHL spans a waterway. A full schedule of locations where line marking would be applied is set out in Table 12.11: North and south Towers defining spans with Embedded Mitigation (line marking) of the EIA Report.

⁴⁰ Natural Heritage Zones (NHZs) are regions of Scotland identified for their biogeographical differences (landscape, climate, habitats etc.) and which show a high level of environmental coherence within each zone. NHZs are generally considered the appropriate default regional scale for assessment of ornithological populations.

⁴¹ A list of sensitive bird species, as identified in NatureScot Guidance (2025): Assessing Significance of Impacts on bird populations from onshore wind farms that do not affect protected areas, whose populations may be adversely affected by disturbance and collision risk associated with the construction and operation of onshore wind farms. Since many of these potential effects are relevant to the Proposed Development, this guidance has been adopted here.

- 5.5.121 The Applicant is committed to additional Applied Mitigation which comprises a suite of SSEN Transmission standard management plans and contractor authored documentation. These would include:
- > O3: Bird Species Protection Plan ('BSPP'): The Applicant's BSPP TG-NET-ENV-505, will be implemented to ensure legislation in relation to the protection of birds is adhered to. It will include pre-commencement and pre-construction surveys and monitoring to determine nesting and roosting sites of specially protected or sensitive breeding birds.
 - > O4: CEMP: Preparation and implementation of the CEMP: This will incorporate an Ecological and Ornithological Management Plan ('EOMP') pursuant to the contractual requirements of the Principal Contractors.
 - > O5: Biodiversity Net Gain: The Applicant will implement on-site and off-site BNG measures, as defined in the BNG Report included with the Section 37 application. BNG measures will deliver no less than a 10% net gain in Biodiversity Units ('BU'), which will include measures designed to provide habitat for ornithological species.

- 5.5.122 The EIA Report concludes that the Proposed Development would have no likely significant effects either by itself or cumulatively on ornithological receptors. This relies on the mitigation set out to avoid or minimise the risk on species of High and Moderate Nature Conservation Importance ('NCI').

Policy 11 (e)(x) – Trees, woods and forests

- 5.5.123 **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry** of the EIA Report considers potential impacts resulting from construction and operation phases of the Proposed Development on forestry and other woodland. Forestry in this context considers all woodland and forests including commercial forestry. It is explained in the assessment that total felling required for the construction and operation of the Proposed Development is **214.75 ha** (comprised of 138.84 hectares of infrastructure felling, 56.74 ha of management felling and 19.16 ha of scrub and regen clearance). Mitigation through design has sought to avoid felling insofar as possible, while balancing the impacts on other constraints.
- 5.5.124 Some felling would be required of woodlands categorised as ancient and semi-natural. Significant adverse effects are predicted in relation to the impacts on ancient and semi natural woodland. This is further addressed in more detail below in relation to NPF4 Policy 6.
- 5.5.125 As the Proposed Development would result in the permanent loss of forestry or woodland, the Applicant is committed to the provision of compensatory planting offsite to meet the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy. The Applicant is committed to off-site planting to compensate for loss of woodland within permanent infrastructure areas. Proposed compensatory planting would be provided as outlined in **Volume 5, Appendix 8.1: Compensatory Planting Management Plan**. The extent, location and composition of such planting will be agreed with Scottish Forestry, taking into account any revision to the felling and restocking plans.

Policy 11 (e) (xi) Decommissioning and (xii) Site Restoration Plans

- 5.5.126 **Volume 1, Chapter 3 Project Description** explains that the Proposed Development would not have a fixed operational life. The effects associated with the construction phase can be considered to be representative of worst-case decommissioning effects, and therefore no separate assessment on decommissioning has been undertaken within the EIA Report. An outline mitigation strategy for decommissioning has been provided as **Volume 5, Appendix 3.6: Outline Decommissioning Mitigation Strategy** of the EIA Report to inform such future requirements and to help avoid the potential for significant effects associated with this project stage.
- 5.5.127 Following completion of construction works, all temporary working areas around tower bases and other construction sites would be reinstated. Reinstatement would form part of the contract obligations for the Principal Contractors and would include the removal of all temporary lattice tower diversions, temporary access tracks, all work sites around the tower

locations and the re-instatement of all land occupied by construction compounds. An Outline Site Restoration Plan is provided in **Volume 5, Appendix 3.3: Outline Site Restoration Plan**.

Policy 11 (e) (xii) Cumulative impacts

- 5.5.128 Cumulative effects have been assessed through the EIA Report and have been considered within each topic section examined with the Planning Statement with the relevant cumulative effects reported. The EIA Report has clearly demonstrated how cumulative effects have been addressed through project design and mitigation.

Policy 11: Consideration of Underground Cabling

- 5.5.129 The concluding text to **Part e) of Policy 11** refers specifically to grid infrastructure and notes that in these cases consideration should be given to underground connections where possible. The environmental, technical, and operational constraints associated with undergrounding at extra high voltages, particularly 400kV, make the option extremely challenging to deliver in many areas of Scotland. **Volume 1, Chapter 4: Alternatives and the Routing Process** of the EIA Report explains the process that was undertaken in considering whether to develop an UGC or OHL. There are a number of challenges to developing a 400kV UGC and a range of factors were considered in reaching the decision to deliver the Proposed Development via OHL. These included: the significant cost difference between OHL and UGC; UK Government policy; technical challenges of undergrounding, and system limitations of short sections of underground cable.
- 5.5.130 In summary, in consideration with the system limitations, environmental, technical and cost challenges, the practical application of 400 kV underground cabling was not considered to be a reasonable alternative technology at any stage of the development of the Proposed Development. Therefore, the Proposed Development has been progressed as a high voltage OHL in accordance with the process described in Chapter 4 of the EIA Report. Moreover, the Applicant's decision during the project development/consultation phases to adopt a continuous OHL is further supported by factors that have been considered in further detail during the EIA study.
- 5.5.131 Given these constraints and the Applicant's responsibility for an economical and efficient transmission network, overhead lines are the main choice for projects of this scale. Where there is a clear evidence base to justify undergrounding, this will be carefully considered.
- 5.5.132 Ancillary works, which benefit from permitted development rights, in the form of the existing Kintore to Craigiebukler 132 kV OHL are proposed for undergrounding for a distance of approximately 1.76 km. This is required to allow space provision for realignment of the existing Kintore to Tealing 275 kV OHL.

Balancing the Contribution of a National Development and Conclusions on Policy 11

- 5.5.133 **Part e) ii) of NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy)** makes it clear and recognises that in terms of significant landscape and visual impacts, such impacts are to be expected for some forms of energy proposals. There is a very clear steer that significant effects are to be expected, and where localised and/or subject to design mitigation, they should generally be considered to be acceptable. As explained above, all of the landscape and visual effects would be localised. Furthermore, appropriate design mitigation has been applied.
- 5.5.134 The Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable on balance in relation to all of Policy 11's environmental and technical topic criteria.
- 5.5.135 The assessments undertaken demonstrate that there are only limited significant adverse residual effects anticipated as a result of the Proposed Development. These relate to localised landscape and visual matters, cultural heritage, impacts on recreational airfields and impacts on ancient and other woodlands.
- 5.5.136 The second last paragraph of **Paragraph e) of Policy 11** is expressly clear that in considering any identified impacts of developments, significant weight must be placed on the

contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. In particular, the Policy recognises that landscape and visual impacts are to be expected but provided they are localised and / or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they are likely to be considered acceptable.

5.5.137 The “contributions” are inextricably related to the increase in renewable capacity which the Proposed Development is required to provide transmission for and policy recognises that any identified impacts must be assessed in the context of these contributions.

5.5.138 In terms of contribution to targets, the proposal’s contributions have been set out in Chapter 3 above. The importance of delivering grid infrastructure is a critical consideration and one which is provided strong support within NPF4 having National Development status. Additional, the need for the project has been established via NESO’s Pathway to 2030 projects whereby there is a confirmed need for a significant and strategic increase in the capacity of onshore and offshore electricity transmission infrastructure to deliver 2030 targets and support the pathway to net zero across Great Britain and Scotland and both the UK and Scottish Governments commitments to meet legally binding net zero targets by 2050 and 2045.

5.6 NPF4 Policy 3: Biodiversity

Policy 3 & Principles

5.6.1 In summary, there are no unacceptable effects arising as a result of the Proposed Development in relation to biodiversity matters, nor in relation to nature conservation designations which NPF4 **Policies 3 and 4** address.

5.6.2 **Policy 3** requires developments to, wherever feasible, provide nature-based solutions that have been integrated and made best use of and for significant biodiversity enhancements to be provided.

Current Guidance Position

5.6.3 The **letter from the Chief Planner issued on 8 February 2023** refers to the application of new policy where specific supporting guidance / parameters for assessment are not yet available to aid assessments. The letter states:

5.6.4 *“recognising that currently there is not a single accepted methodology for calculating and / or measuring biodiversity ‘enhancement’ – we have commissioned research to explore options for development a biodiversity metric or other tool, specifically for use in Scotland. There will be some proposals which will not give rise for opportunities to contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, and it will be for the decision maker to take into account the policies in NPF4 as a whole, together with material considerations in each case”.* (underlining added)

5.6.5 Therefore, exactly how enhancement is to be measured in the longer-term is to be the subject of further guidance. Accordingly, the current position in relation to guidance summarised below, should not be regarded as settled or standard practice at this stage.

5.6.6 **NatureScot Guidance** was issued in Summer 2023 in support of NPF4 Policy 3 c). This states that the selection and design of enhancement measures will be a matter of judgment based on the circumstances of the individual case but should take into account a number of considerations. These considerations include:

- > The location of the development site and the opportunities for enhancing biodiversity;
- > The character and scale of development;
- > The requirements and cost of maintenance and future management of the measures proposed;
- > The distinctiveness and scale of the biodiversity damaged or lost; and

- > The time required to deliver biodiversity benefits and any risks or uncertainty in achieving this.
- 5.6.7 The Scottish Government also published '**Draft Planning Guidance: Biodiversity**' in November 2023. Paragraph 1.1 states that it: *"Sets out the Scottish Minister's expectations for implementing NPF4 policies which support the cross cutting NPF4 outcome 'improving biodiversity'."*
- 5.6.8 The guidance refers to 'key terms' and with regard to 'enhancement', states at Paragraph 1.10:

"The terms 'enhance' and 'enhancement' are widely used in NPF4. In order for biodiversity to be 'enhanced' it will need to be demonstrated that it will be in an overall better state than before intervention, and that this will be sustained in the future. Development proposals should clearly set out the type and scale of enhancements they will deliver".
- 5.6.9 The guidance addresses development planning and, in terms of development proposals, references 'core principles.' At Paragraph 3.1 the guidance states that these principles can be followed when designing developments so that nature and nature recovery are an integral part of any proposal. Section 3.2 of the guidance states:

"Applying these principles will not only help to secure biodiversity enhancements, they can also help to deliver wider policy objectives including for green and blue infrastructure, open space, nature based solutions, nature networks and 30 x 30. Development proposals which follow these steps are also much more likely to result in more pleasant and enriching places to live, work and spend time."
- 5.6.10 The principles set out are as follows:
 - > Apply the mitigation hierarchy;
 - > Consider biodiversity from the outset;
 - > Provide synergies and connectivity for nature;
 - > Integrate nature to deliver multiple benefits;
 - > Prioritise on-site enhancement before off-site delivery;
 - > Take a place-based and inclusive approach;
 - > Ensure long term enhancement is secured; and
 - > Additionality.
- 5.6.11 Notwithstanding the fact that the guidance is informal at this stage, these core principles have nonetheless been applied as appropriate to the Proposed Development.
- 5.6.12 Page 15 of the draft guidance makes specific reference to determining planning applications and, with regard to the policy context, Paragraph 4.1 makes it clear that NPF4 must be read and applied as a whole. Specific reference to NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity) Part 3 b) is made and from Section 4.6 key points in the guidance include the following:
 - > It is set out that NPF4 that does not specify or require a particular assessment approach or methodology to be used, although the policy makes clear that best practice assessment methods should be utilised;
 - > Assessments can be qualitative or quantitative (for example through use of a metric); and
- 5.6.13 It is stated that NatureScot is to shortly commence work to develop an adapted biodiversity metric suitable for use in supporting delivery of NPF4 Policy 3 b). The draft guidance states that further information will be provided on this work "in due course".
- 5.6.14 Section 4.12 of the draft guidance states:

“In the meantime, the absence of a universally adopted Scottish methodology/tool should not be used to frustrate or delay decision making, and a flexible approach will be required. Wherever relevant and applicable, and as indicated above, information and evidence gathered for statutory and other assessment obligations, such as EIA, can be utilised to demonstrate those ways in which the policy tests set out in NPF4 have been met. Equally, where a developer wishes to use an established metric or tool, the planning submission should demonstrate how Scotland’s habitats and environmental conditions have been taken into account. Where an established metric or tool has been modified, the changes made and the reasons for this should be clearly set out”.

- 5.6.15 Section 4.14 of the draft guidance states that it will be for a planning authority to determine whether the relevant policy criteria have been met, taking into account the circumstances of the particular proposal. It adds:
- “NPF4 does not specify how much enhancement, or ‘net gain’ should be delivered, though biodiversity should clearly be left in a ‘demonstrably better state’ than without intervention. Rather, the selection and design of enhancements will be a matter of judgement based on the circumstances of the individual case, taking into account a range of considerations.”*
- 5.6.16 The draft guidance makes reference to the various considerations which are already set out in the NatureScot guidance issued in the Summer of 2023 with regard to NPF4 Policy 3 (as listed above).
- 5.6.17 The draft guidance also makes reference to off-site delivery of enhancement proposals and states at Paragraph 4.19 that:
- “Where the relevant policy tests cannot be met on site, off-site provision may be considered alongside on site. In these circumstances, off-site delivery should be as close as possible to the development site, with consideration being given firstly to the immediate landscape context and existing ecological value of the site.”*
- 5.6.18 In early 2024 **NatureScot consulted on ‘a Biodiversity Metric for Scotland’s Planning System’**. The consultation ended on 10 May 2024. The consultation paper outlines work that NatureScot has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to develop a biodiversity metric for Scotland’s planning system, to support delivery of NPF4 policy 3(b).
- 5.6.19 This consultation paper does not propose solutions or reach conclusions on specific aspects of the Scottish biodiversity metric to be developed, as these are yet to be fully assessed. While work on developing a Scottish biodiversity metric is ongoing, NatureScot highlight here the advice set out in the Scottish Government’s draft Planning Guidance on Biodiversity, as referenced above, namely that the absence of a universally adopted Scottish methodology / tool at the present time, should not be used to frustrate or delay decision making.
- 5.6.20 The commission’s final outputs are expected to include:
- > a Scottish biodiversity planning metric tool (to be hosted on the NatureScot website), which is based on current understanding of science and evidence, clear and transparent in its workings, accessible and easy to use by relevant professionals with outputs understandable by decision makers, and which informs siting and design of development as well as evidence-based decision making; and
 - > a user guide supporting the metric (together with any supporting information).
- The application of Policy 3**
- 5.6.21 Notwithstanding the lack of policy guidance at national level in Scotland, the Applicant has a business commitment⁴² for all projects gaining consent to deliver a minimum 10% BNG.

⁴² SSEN Transmission: Delivering a positive environmental legacy Accessed at <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/2030-projects/2030-project-documents/biodiversity-net-gain.pdf>

NPF4 Policy 3 requires projects to leave nature in a 'demonstrably better state than without intervention'.

- 5.6.22 Given the nature of the Proposed Development as a linear route in multiple ownerships it is not possible to agree on-site enhancement opportunities in all instances – constraints as regards ownership of land forming the Operational Corridor and other such restrictions also require to be considered. As a result, a mixed on-site and off-site approach to biodiversity enhancement is proposed.
- 5.6.23 BNG is a process which leaves nature in a better state than it started. Although it is an internationally recognised process and tool within the development industry, it is not a term that is widely used or implemented in Scotland at this time. SSEN Transmission has developed a BNG toolkit based upon the accepted Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs ('DEFRA') metric which aims to quantify biodiversity based upon the value of habitats for nature. It is an efficient and effective method for demonstrating whether development projects have been able to maintain or increase the biodiversity value of a development site after construction works.
- 5.6.24 An OBEP has been prepared and is submitted at **Volume 5 Appendix 11.5** of the EIA Report. The OBEP has been prepared to meet the requirements of NPF 4 Policy 3. The headline actions to deliver ecological benefits are:
- > Hedgerow reinstatement and creation: Reinstating hedgerows affected by the works wherever possible, and introducing new native hedgerow planting both on-site (where possible) and off-site to compensate for permanent losses;
 - > Scrub/heath regeneration: Removing plantation conifers in the operational corridor and allowing a transition to more diverse open habitat types (heath or scrub), in line with Volume 5, Appendix 9.6: Outline Landscape Mitigation Design Guide; and
 - > Woodland compensation: Creating or enhancing native woodland on-site (where possible) and off-site to compensate for unavoidable permanent losses
- 5.6.25 The SSEN BNG project toolkit has been used to undertake a BNG assessment for the Proposed Development. Full details of the BNG calculations are presented in **Annex 11.5.1: Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment Report** of the EIA Report. It sets out the baseline Biodiversity Units ('BU') associated with the Proposed Development, the post-development BU predicted and the net change in biodiversity as a result of the Proposed Development broken down by local authority area.
- 5.6.26 The on-site habitat restoration proposed has not yet been fully quantified in the preliminary BNG calculations as discussions with landowners are ongoing. Once the proposals and calculations are finalised as part of the final BEP, it will be determined whether on-site measures alone can achieve the 10% net gain target, especially in relation to the wooded areas.
- 5.6.27 Given current assumptions, it is expected that off-site habitat creation or enhancement will be required. SSEN Transmission is actively assessing a pipeline of off-site projects within Angus Council and Aberdeenshire Council areas, working with local stakeholders to identify suitable areas for woodland compensation, peatland restoration, and other habitat improvements that complement existing ecological networks. Once these off-site opportunities are confirmed, site-specific BNG calculations will be undertaken to ensure the 10% target is met for all affected habitats, in line with the relevant trading rules and SSEN Transmission's commitment to leaving the natural environment in a demonstrably better state.
- 5.6.28 Through the delivery of the proposed biodiversity enhancement measures, the Proposed Development would deliver significant positive effects and strengthen nature networks and the connections between them, so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention, consistent with the provisions of Policy 3.
- 5.6.29 It is important to keep in mind that the greatest threat to biodiversity is climate change. The principal and essential benefit of the Proposed Development is a significant contribution of

energy transmission and security within a modern grid network with enhanced capacity, to facilitate the earliest possible decarbonisation of the energy system and the achievement of 'net zero' no later than 2045, in accordance with the objectives of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 (as amended). The purpose of net zero is to protect biodiversity and the earlier it can be achieved, the greater the benefits to biodiversity.

5.7 NPF4 Policy 4: Natural places

Policy 4 & Principles

5.7.1 The policy has an intent to protect, restore and enhance natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions. Policy outcomes are stated as being natural places are protected and restored, and natural assets are managed in a sustainable way that maintains and grows their essential benefits and services.

5.7.2 **Policy 4, Paragraph a)** of the policy states that development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment will not be supported.

5.7.3 **Policy 4 Paragraph b)** refers to development proposals which are likely to have a significant effect on a European designated site and sets out in such circumstances the requirement for appropriate assessment.

5.7.4 **Policy 4, Paragraph c)** deals with national landscape designations and has a similar approach in relation to the former SPP in terms of how a proposal that affects a National Park or National Scenic Area ('NSA') should be addressed. There are no national landscape interests that would be affected by the Proposed Development.

5.7.5 **Policy 4, Paragraph d)** deals with local landscape designations and contains a different policy approach to that which was contained within the former SPP. Policy 4, Paragraph d) is as follows:

"Development proposals that affect a site designated as ...a local landscape area in the LDP will only be supported where:

i Development will not have significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area or the qualities for which it has been identified; or

ii Any significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance".

5.7.6 The policy now follows a similar construct to that which deals with national level designations. The first limb of the policy refers to significant effects on the "*integrity*" of the area or "*the qualities for which it has been identified*".

5.7.7 The policy set out in the second limb of NPF4 Policy 4, Part d) provides that development proposals that affect a site designated as a local landscape area will only be supported where any significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance. It must be noted that:

- > this policy provision, reflects the wider NPF4 policy that adverse effects (including adverse landscape and visual effects outside of a National Park or National Scenic Area) must be balanced against the benefits of a proposed development;
- > the second limb is independent of the first ("or") and is to be applied where a decision-maker concludes that a proposed development will have significant adverse effects on the integrity of a local designation;
- > NPF4, Policy 4, Part d) now expressly includes a balancing mechanism ("*clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits*") and sets out the threshold to be used ("*of at least local importance*").

- 5.7.8 In considering this policy, it is informative to note the Reporter's position in the Sanquhar II Supplementary Inquiry Report. In that case (paragraph 2.70 of the Report), the Reporter made reference to the impact of the proposed development in relation to a Local Landscape Area, which in that case was a Regional Scenic Area ('RSA'). The Reporter had concluded that the proposed development would not affect the integrity of the designation but would result in some significant adverse effects. The Reporter stated:
- "...even if the opposite conclusion was reached and the integrity of the RSA was considered to be significantly adversely affected by this proposal, I consider part (d)(ii) of the policy would continue to give support to the development. This is because, in my view, a national development which by definition supports the delivery of the national spatial strategy, must offer benefits of more than local importance. Having regard to the benefits of the development in the round, as outlined in chapter six of my original Report, I am firmly of the view that this proposal is capable of support under policy 4(d)(ii)."*
- 5.7.9 **Policy 4, Paragraph e)** addresses the precautionary principle.
- 5.7.10 **Policy 4, Paragraph f)** sets out that *"...development proposals that are likely to have an adverse effect on species protected by legislation will only be supported where the proposal meets the relevant statutory tests. If there is reasonable evidence to suggest that a protected species is present on a site or may be affected by a proposed development, steps must be taken to establish its presence. The level of protection required by legislation must be factored into the planning and design of development, and potential impacts must be fully considered prior to the determination of any application"*.
- 5.7.11 **Policy 4, Paragraph g)** of the policy deals with Wild Land Areas ('WLA'). There are no WLAs within the LVIA Study Area of the Proposed Development. Therefore, WLAs are not affected by the Proposed Development.
- The application of Policy 4**
- 5.7.12 As explained above in the context of NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy), the EIA Report contains an assessment of the effects of the Proposed Development in relation to natural heritage.
- 5.7.13 The EIA has fully addressed the relationship of the Proposed Development with international and European designations to inform necessary Habitat Regulations Assessments (HRA). A Shadow HRA has been undertaken in relation to the following SACs: River Tay; River South Esk; and River Dee and SPAs/Ramsar sites: Firth of Tay and Eden Estuary; Outer Firth of Forth and St Andrews Bay; Loch of Lintrathen; Loch of Kinnordy; Montrose Basin; Fowlsheugh and Loch of Skene detailing the potential impacts pre-mitigation and all mitigation measures which will be employed to avoid impacting the qualifying features. The shadow HRA is presented at **Volume 5, Appendix 12.3: Shadow Habitat Regulations Appraisal** of the EIA Report. The Shadow HRA concludes that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of any of the European Sites as a result of the Proposed Development (including when considered in-combination with other developments).
- 5.7.14 There are no nationally important landscape designations within the LVIA study area which would be affected by the Proposed Development.
- 5.7.15 As noted, six local landscape designations (Sidlaw LLA; River South ESK LLA; Angus Glens LLA; Braes of the Mearns SLA; Dee Valley SLA; Bennachie SLA) would be located within the landscape and visual 5 km study area. Two local landscape designations would experience a significant adverse effect as a result of the Proposed Development - the River South Esk LLA in Angus and relating to Section B and the Dee Valley SLA in Aberdeenshire and relating to Section E and Section F.
- 5.7.16 In terms of the River South Esk LLA, it is considered that the Proposed Development would have localised significant effects on the *"sweeping meanders lined with trees"* and the *"strong rural character"* special qualities of the LLA. These effects would be localised to the area between Inshewan, Quarryhill and Craigeassie during construction and between Cairn Farm, Inshewan, Craigeassie and East Murthill during the operational phase. Effects on other special qualities would be not significant, and the wider LLA would be largely

unaffected. The LVIA concludes that the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of this local landscape designation.

- 5.7.17 In terms of the Dee Valley SLA, it is considered that the Proposed Development would have localised significant effects on the “*broad meandering river, with wooded banks*”, the “*visual diversity*” and “*richness of landscape character*” qualities of the SLA. Effects on the remaining special qualities of the SLA are judged to be not significant. Overall, however it is considered that the Proposed Development would not affect the integrity of this local landscape designation.
- 5.7.18 Studies to identify potentially impacted protected species were undertaken and a detailed assessment of relevant species is set out in **Volume 2, Chapter 11 Ecology** of the EIA Report. Nine protected species were assessed as having potential to be impacted by the Proposed Development. All of those impacts have been fully mitigated through design, embedded mitigation and applied mitigation measures. No significant adverse effects are predicted on any of the protected species considered as a result of the Proposed Development.
- 5.7.19 In summary, while there would be some locally significant adverse effects on the local landscape designations mentioned, none would be such that the overall integrity of the areas would be significantly adversely affected. Otherwise, there will be no likely significant effects identified applicable to Policy 4. The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy 4 of NPF4.

5.8 NPF4 Policy 5: Soils

Policy 5 & Principles

- 5.8.1 In terms of soils, **Policy 5** states that where development on peatland or carbon rich soils or priority peatland habitat is proposed, a detailed site-specific assessment is required to identify baseline, likely effects and net effects. The policy intent is to protect carbon rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development. This is very similar to the policy position that was in SPP; however, a key difference is that essential infrastructure with a specific locational need is a type of development expressly envisaged to be acceptable in principle on peatlands (Paragraph c).

The application of Policy 5

- 5.8.2 **Volume 2, Chapter 7: Land Use and Prime Agricultural Land** of the EIA Report assesses the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on PAL and **Volume 2, Chapter 13: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils** of the EIA Report deals with hydrology, hydrogeology, geology and soils.
- 5.8.3 In relation to impacts on PAL, Chapter 7 concludes that in total, approximately 4.97 ha of land required for the Proposed Development permanently is classified as PAL. This includes 1.56 ha of Class 2 PAL and 3.41 ha of Class 3.1, no Class 1 PAL would be impacted. The loss of 4.97 ha of PAL would occur during the construction phase and would be direct, adverse and permanent across Angus and Aberdeenshire.
- 5.8.4 In summary:
- > The effect of the Proposed Development on PAL is considered **not significant**.
 - > The overall area of PAL that would be taken by the Proposed Development represents approximately 0.004% of Angus and Aberdeenshire Councils' total PAL resource, and approximately 0.001% of Scotland's PAL resource. In this context the permanent loss of PAL for the Proposed Development on its own would be predicted to have a **negligible impact** on Scotland's PAL resource overall.
 - > **No significant cumulative effects** on PAL are predicted when the Proposed Development is considered alongside the Intra Developments (the proposed Emmock and Hurlie 400 kV substations).

- > Considering Inter Developments, there are nine that are likely to intersect with areas of PAL in the study area, no data is available on the extent to which these projects would impact PAL individually and therefore no quantitative assessment has been undertaken to determine the likely cumulative effects in detail. Although the residual effect of the Proposed Development on PAL is not significant with a loss of around 4.97 ha of PAL predicted, given the number and scale of the Inter Developments there is potential for further loss of PAL. It is estimated that a combined area of 15 ha or more of PAL could be lost to the Inter Developments if all were developed and therefore the potential **cumulative adverse effect** on PAL alongside the Proposed Development and the Intra Developments would be considered **as significant**.
- 5.8.5 The policy provision within NPF4 makes an allowance for developments which are for essential infrastructure which includes all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emission technologies for electricity generation and distribution and transmission electricity grid networks where there is a specific locational need, where there is no other suitable site, and where the layout and design of the proposal minimises the amount of protected land that is required.
- 5.8.6 There is therefore a specific carve out within the policy approach to the protection of prime agricultural land to enable the deployment of renewable energy development and associated distribution and transmission infrastructure.
- 5.8.7 The Scottish Government in preparing this policy approach has clearly been aware of potential impacts on agricultural land from such development and has expressly allowed for essential infrastructure on such land.
- 5.8.8 Notwithstanding this policy provision, as part of the design process, and in trying to avoid the most valuable areas of prime land, the Proposed Development has been located such that it avoids Class 1 Prime land.
- 5.8.9 **Volume 2, Chapter 13: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils** of the EIA Report deals with impacts on peat and carbon rich soils. Peat was avoided to the extent feasible in the design development. A peat survey was carried out in areas of the Proposed Development where peat or carbon-rich soils were likely based on a review of the NatureScot (2016) Carbon and Peatland Map and soil maps from the James Hutton Institute.
- 5.8.10 The majority of the Proposed Development is not underlain by peat and is generally classed as Class 0 (Mineral Soils). There are a few areas where peat could not be fully avoided, which are described in **Volume 5, Appendix 13.3: Peat Depth Survey Report and Appendix 13.4: Outline Peat Management Plan ('OPMP')** of the EIA Report.
- 5.8.11 All areas of Class 1, 2 and 3 peat were avoided during the early routeing stages of the project as a result of early survey work which was fed into the design such that areas of deeper peat have been avoided. Class 4 and Class 5 peat are found in small areas within the Site, within Sections A and B (near Douglstown), Sections D and E (near Fetteresso Forest) and Section F (near Kintore).
- 5.8.12 Over the whole Proposed Development, there are only four areas in Durriss Forest (Section E) where proposed towers are on or in close proximity to peat soils > 50 cm deep, all of which are classed as having a peatland condition of forested/previously forested. Micrositing during design stage of towers N79 and N83 and their associated infrastructure working areas has enabled peat soils to be avoided in these areas. As such, there are only two towers (N77 and N78) where peat could not be fully avoided.
- 5.8.13 Tower N45 (Section F) is in shallow peaty soils (all less than 50 cm deep) just south of Quartains Moss. Micrositing has been undertaken and working area modified to avoid excavation of peat soils. The tower and working area are not in peat soils.
- 5.8.14 In total, approximately 592 m³ of peat will be permanently excavated and approximately 5,515 m³ temporarily excavated and reinstated. All temporarily excavated peat will be reinstated at source once tower construction has concluded. Permanently excavated peat will be reused to support forest-to-bog restoration being undertaken by FLS in areas immediately adjacent to

the proposed OHL. As reported in the OPMP, there will be no net loss of peat, with all peat reinstated at source or used in support of peat restoration.

- 5.8.15 A Peat Landslide Hazard Risk Assessment ('PLHRA') (**Volume 5, Appendix 13.6: Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment**) in the EIA Report has been undertaken in support of the Proposed Development. No areas of moderate peat landslide likelihood were identified and therefore risks cannot exceed Low. As a result, standard good practice construction measures, set out in the PLHRA, are considered to be sufficient to manage these risks.
- 5.8.16 Potential significant effects on peat are confined to Section E of the Proposed Development are considered to be of low magnitude, and no significant effects are predicted.
- 5.8.17 Policy 5 makes provision for certain types of development within peatland or carbon rich soils, including essential infrastructure where there is a specific locational need and no other suitable site is available. The Proposed Development has gone through an extensive site selection and design iteration in reaching the finalised design as demonstrated in **Volume 1, Chapter 4 Alternatives and the Routeing Process** of the EIA Report.
- 5.8.18 Subject to adoption of embedded mitigation, best practice construction techniques and applied mitigation including a CEMP no significant adverse effects are identified on soils, PAL or peat.
- 5.8.19 The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy 5.

5.9 NPF4 Policy 6: Forestry, woodland and trees

Policy 6 & Principles

- 5.9.1 The policy intent is to protect and expand forests, woodland and trees. It states that development proposals that enhance, expand and improve woodland and tree cover will be supported.
- 5.9.2 **Policy 6 Paragraph a)** states that *"Development proposals that enhance, expand and improve woodland and tree cover will be supported."*
- 5.9.3 **Policy 6 Paragraph b)** states that *"development proposals will not be supported where they will result in:*
- "i. Any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition;*
 - ii. Adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerow and individual trees of high biodiversity value, or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy;*
 - iii. Fragmenting or severing woodland habitats, unless appropriate mitigation measures are identified and implemented in line with the mitigation hierarchy;*
 - Iv. Conflict with Restocking Direction, Remedial Notice or Registered Notice to Comply issued by Scottish Forestry."*
- 5.9.4 **Policy 6 Paragraph c)** states that:
- "Development proposals involving woodland removal will only be supported where they will achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits in accordance with relevant Scottish Government policy on woodland removal. Where woodland is removed, compensatory planting will most likely be expected to be delivered".*

The application of Policy 6

- 5.9.5 **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry** of the EIA Report considers potential impacts resulting from construction and operation phases of the Proposed Development on forestry. Forestry in this context considers all woodland and forests including commercial forestry. A Forestry Study

Area ('FSA') is shown in **Volume 3, Figures 8.1.1 – 8.1.7: Forestry Study Area** of the EIA Report and extends to **214.75 ha**.

- 5.9.6 The FSA has been defined as the woodland or forest blocks that will be directly and indirectly felled as a result of the Proposed Development. The FSA and the Site are two separate areas. The FSA takes into account any management felling out with the OC required to establish windfirm edges.
- 5.9.7 Felling required for construction of the Proposed Development is divided into three separate categories for the purposes of the forestry assessment:
- > Infrastructure Felling - felling required for the Proposed Development footprint;
 - > Management Felling - felling recommended as a result of the Infrastructure Felling, i.e. to consolidate coupe edges and prevent future windthrow; and
 - > Scrub/Regen Clearance – clearance of trees or shrubs that have naturally regenerated in areas and may not normally require felling permission.
- 5.9.8 It should be noted that only infrastructure felling would be approved through the deemed planning permission and any management felling would be applied for by the affected landowner. However, consent for felling of trees associated with access tracks outwith the OC is also sought. Consent for any other felling outwith the OC is not being sought as part of this application.
- 5.9.9 A felling plan for the Proposed Development is shown in **Volume 3, Figures 8.4.1 – 8.4.15: Proposed Development Felling Plan** within the EIA Report, which identifies felling required for construction of the Proposed Development within the OC (and associated access tracks), as well as the management felling required to achieve the windfirm edge.
- 5.9.10 It is explained within the assessment that the Proposed Development will result in the felling for the construction of the Proposed Development of **214.75 ha** of woodland as follows;
- > infrastructure felling totals 138.84 ha;
 - > management felling totals 56.74 ha; and
 - > scrub/regen clearance totals 19.16 ha.
- 5.9.11 The 138.84 ha of infrastructure felling will be left unstocked as the OC for the Proposed Development and is regarded as permanent woodland loss as a result of the Proposed Development. The total **classified woodland** within the AWI database to be felled for the Proposed Development would be an area of **71.56 ha** (53.40 ha for infrastructure felling; 17.98 ha for management felling and scrub clearance of 0.19 ha).
- 5.9.12 The categories for infrastructure felling are as follows:
- > 0.94 ha is forestry categorised as 2a Ancient Woodland (of semi-natural origin) (1860);
 - > 0.48 ha is woodland identified as 2a Ancient (of semi-natural origin)(1860) through site surveys but not officially categorised as such in the AWI;
 - > 0.19 ha is woodland categorised as 1b Long-Established (of plantation origin - 1750) (LEPO);
 - > 36.17 ha is woodlands categorised as 2b Long-Established (of plantation origin - 1860) (LEPO); and
 - > 15.61 ha is considered to be Native Woodlands.
- 5.9.13 A total of 85.44 ha of infrastructure felling is uncategorised.
- 5.9.14 As such, the assessment of the FSA has determined that some felling will be required of woodlands categorised as ancient, semi-natural, LEPO and native woodlands.

- 5.9.15 NPF4 defines ancient woodland as '*Land that has maintained continuous woodland habitat since at least 1750*'.
- 5.9.16 The amount of ancient woodland impact, as per the NPF4 definition, is therefore **0.19 ha** (1b) which is an extremely limited area of ancient woodland removal considering the scale and extent of the Proposed Development.
- 5.9.17 It is acknowledged that there is other woodland loss, (37.59 ha) however this woodland is not considered to fall within the definition of 'ancient woodland' as described within NPF4.
- 5.9.18 As the Proposed Development would result in the permanent loss of forestry or woodland, the Applicant is committed to the provision of compensatory planting offsite to meet the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy. The Applicant is committed to off-site planting to compensate for loss of woodland within permanent infrastructure areas. The Applicant will create 138.84 ha of new woodland planting, or such area as of final felling as matches that lost through the management of a Compensatory Planting Scheme as outlined in **Volume 5, Appendix 8.1: Compensatory Planting Management Plan**. The extent, location and composition of such planting will be agreed with Scottish Forestry, taking into account any revision to the felling and restocking plans. The proposals meet the objective of no net loss of woodland in that regard.
- 5.9.19 The construction effect on both ancient woodland and semi-natural broadleaved woodland is considered in the assessment to be a significant adverse effect.
- 5.9.20 Mitigation through design has sought to avoid felling insofar as possible, while balancing the impacts on other constraints. As explained in **Chapter 8: Forestry** and detailed in **Volume 1, Chapter 4 Alternatives and Routing** of the EIA Report, the presence of ancient woodland, LEPO or non-categorised areas of known native woodland was considered as a key constraint in the routeing process. Wherever possible, corridor and route options were selected which would allow the alignment to avoid or minimise the need for removal of such woodland areas. This is demonstrated by the limited areas of the most sensitive types of woodland which would be impacted by the Proposed Development.
- 5.9.21 The policy wording is clear that development proposals will not be supported where they will result in any loss of ancient woodlands or ancient and veteran trees. Additionally, proposals will not be supported where there are adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and trees of high biodiversity value. As such, there is some non-accordance with Policy 6.
- 5.9.22 Nonetheless, it is also clear (as noted above) that conflicts among the NPF4 policies are to be expected. When one considers the overall planning balance, it is important to note that the Proposed Development has sought to minimise this impact through the application of a detailed routeing strategy and embedded mitigation within the design and alignment. Furthermore, the need for woodland/forestry removal will be further assessed and minimised as far as possible on site via a native woodland retention plan as described through applied mitigation within Chapter 8 (F5) at the construction stage of the project.
- 5.9.23 The Proposed Development represents an optimal solution against all environmental and technical assessments and has sought to minimise overall impact on trees and forestry wherever possible. The scale, nature and required OHL route location is such that an impact on these important assets is considered to be unavoidable. However the mitigation hierarchy has been applied and the wider BNG strategy will result in a range of biodiversity benefits which can offset impacts.
- 5.9.24 This matter has been addressed in a recent decision by Scottish Ministers in the Kendoon to Tongland 132kV Section 37 decision. In that case, the Reporters recommended refusal of the application due to the loss of ancient and semi-natural woodland. Scottish Ministers took a different view and concluded that the proposed development on a balance of the relevant policies therein, would be supported by NPF4 and that ultimately significant weight should be attached to the benefits of the proposal in terms of the expansion of the electricity grid.

- 5.9.25 The Proposed Development is a nationally significant project and is an important element in securing the decarbonisation of the electricity grid due to the levels of renewable energy generation it will enable to be connected to the electricity network.
- 5.9.26 The Applicant has sought to avoid the loss of ancient woodland through the design development, and in the context of the scale of the Proposed Development, the extent of woodland affected that is of high value sensitivity has been minimised, albeit it has not been possible to avoid it entirely due to the range of other constraints being managed.
- 5.9.27 As explained earlier, NPF4 is required to be read as a whole and the weight to be placed on different policies will vary. The ancient woodland impact therefore requires to be seen in the context that NPF4 as a whole and all impacts in the round need to be balanced against the benefits of the Proposed Development. This is therefore considered further in the overall planning balance within Chapter 7 of this Planning Statement.

5.10 NPF4 Policy 7: Historic assets and places

Policy 7 & Principles

- 5.10.1 In terms of Policy 7 which deals with Historic Assets and Places,,
the intent of the policy is to protect and enhance the historic environment, assets and places and to enable positive change. Key parts of the policy include the following:
- 5.10.2 **Paragraph a)** states that *“development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place. The assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change, including cumulative effects and provide a sound basis for managing the impact of change. Proposals should also be informed by national policy and guidance on managing change in the historic environment, and information held within Historic Environment Records.”*
- 5.10.3 **Paragraph c)** states that *“Development proposals affecting the setting of a Listed building should preserve its character, and its special architectural or historic interest”*.
- 5.10.4 **Paragraph d)** states that *“Development proposals in or affecting Conservation Areas will only be supported where the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its setting is preserved or enhanced”*.
- 5.10.5 **Paragraph h)** states that *“Development proposals affecting Scheduled Monuments will only be supported where:*
i) direct impact on the Scheduled Monument are avoided;
ii) significant adverse impacts on the integrity of the setting of the Scheduled Monument are avoided; or
iii) exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a Scheduled Monument and its setting and impact on the monument or its setting have been minimised.
- 5.10.6 **Paragraph i)** states that *“Development proposals affecting nationally important Gardens and Designed Landscapes will be supported where they protect, preserve or enhance their cultural significance, character and integrity and where proposals will not significantly impact on important views to, from and within the site or its setting”*.
- 5.10.7 **Paragraph o)** states that *“Non designated historic environment assets, places and their setting should be protected and preserved in situ wherever feasible. Where there is potential for non-designated buried archaeological remains to exist below a site, developers will provide an evaluation of the archaeological resource at an early stage so that planning authorities can assess impact”*.

The application of Policy 7

- 5.10.8 **Volume, 2 Chapter 10: Cultural Heritage** of the EIA Report deals with cultural heritage assets. Some 346 heritage assets have been identified within or partly in the inner cultural heritage study area (defined as the Standard LOD for the Proposed Development). The majority of these are undesignated former settlement remains and agrarian features ranging in date from the prehistoric period to the post-medieval period.
- 5.10.9 The 346 heritage assets include:
- > five Scheduled Monuments (Balkemback Cottages Stone Circle (SM 2868), Law of Baldoukie Barrow (SM 6314), Baldoukie Soutterains (SM 6315), Cowie Line, Pillbox and Earthworks (SM 6437) and South Leylodge Steading Stone Circle (SM 12350);
 - > two Non-Inventory Designed Landscapes (Inshewan House and Auchenreoch House); and
 - > 339 non-designated heritage assets.
- 5.10.10 The assessment explains that there is potential, in the absence of additional mitigation, for construction works of the Proposed Development to result in direct effects on 174 heritage assets. Of these it has been assessed that there is potential for significant construction effects on 30 heritage assets recorded within the inner study area. In addition, 18 heritage assets could potentially be significantly affected by any micro-siting of proposed towers or proposed access track. All other direct impacts, would give rise to effects that are either minor or negligible significance and not significant. Additional mitigation measures have been set out within **Table 10.6 within Chapter 10 Cultural Heritage of the EIA Report** that would ensure that any archaeological remains that may be present are addressed appropriately and to reduce and offset the predicted effects to a level that would be deemed not significant.
- 5.10.11 Residual effects are predicted on **94 undesignated heritage assets** from the Proposed Development following the implementation of mitigation, and on an **additional 49 undesignated heritage assets** if the proposed towers or proposed access tracks were to be located within the LOD. However, no significant residual effects would remain, with the effects resulting in either a minor or negligible significance.
- 5.10.12 Taking into account the historic landscape character and the evidence for occupation and activity within the inner study area, from the early prehistoric period to the post-medieval period, it is considered that there is a moderate to high likelihood for hitherto undiscovered archaeological remains to be present within the inner study area. In areas where the Proposed Development crosses areas of modern commercial forestry plantation the potential for hitherto undiscovered archaeological remains to survive is considered to be negligible to low.
- 5.10.13 Any adverse effect on hitherto unknown buried archaeological remains that may be encountered during the construction of the Proposed Development would be offset by archaeological investigations and recording to a standard acceptable to Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service ('ACAS'). The residual effect would be of no more than minor significance (not significant) as a consequence of recording to a standard acceptable to ACAS.
- 5.10.14 **478 designated heritage assets** have been identified within the outer study area (extending 3 km either side of the proposed 400kV OHL Alignment), including five within the inner study area. Out of these it is predicted that there would be theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development from 115 Scheduled Monuments, 336 Listed Buildings, eight Inventory GDL and five Conservation Areas.
- 5.10.15 Additionally, 13 designated heritage assets (eight Scheduled Monuments, two Category A Listed Buildings, two Inventory GDL and one Conservation Area) that are located outwith the 3 km outer study area were identified through consultation with statutory consultees as requiring consideration. These designated heritage assets were considered to be especially sensitive to changes in their setting from the Proposed Development and are also included in the assessment.

- 5.10.16 The assessment explains, that at distances greater than 3 km, it is considered that, in most instances, the Proposed Development would not appreciably alter the characteristics of the settings of the heritage assets that contribute to their cultural significance. Nor would it appreciably alter how a heritage asset is understood, appreciated and experienced.
- 5.10.17 The assessment explains that 132 designated heritage assets identified within 3 km of the Proposed 400 kV OHL Alignment are assessed as having settings that would potentially be affected by the Proposed Development. The assessment has resulted in the identification of **moderate significant effects** on the settings of **eight scheduled monuments**. These include:
- Section A*
- > Balkemback Cottages Stone Circle (SM 2868), 0.1 km from nearest tower;
- Section B*
- > Law of Baldoukie Barrow (SM 6314) (Section B), 0.2 km from nearest tower;
- Section C*
- > Mill of Balrownie Ring Ditch (SM 6472) (Section C) 0.1 km from nearest tower;
 - > Westside Barrows (SM 6367) (Section C), 0.1 km from nearest tower;
 - > Westside Unenclosed Settlement (SM 6368) (Section C), 0.2 km from nearest tower;
- Section F*
- > East Finnercy Cairn (SM 6076) (Section F), 0.3 km from nearest tower;
 - > New Wester Echt Stone Circle (SM 6074) (Section F), 0.2 km from nearest tower, and
 - > South Leylodge Steading Stone Circle (SM 12350) (Section F), 0.2 km from nearest tower.
- 5.10.18 The cultural heritage assessment concludes in relation to these assets, that while the character of the landscape within which the monuments are located would be altered by the presence of the proposed towers, the permeable nature of the Proposed Development would still allow the landscape surroundings, and context of, the monuments to be appreciated, understood and experienced. It is considered that the ability to understand, appreciate and experience the siting of these monuments and the key aspects of their settings would be adequately retained such that the integrity of their settings would not be significantly adversely affected.
- 5.10.19 In relation to cumulative effects, **significant cumulative effects** are predicted on the setting of two scheduled monuments:
- > Balkemback Cottages Stone Circle (SM 2868) (Section A): the cumulative operational effect of the addition of the Proposed Development to, and in combination with, the Alyth to Tealing OHL to Emmock Substation Tie-in would be no different from that of the Proposed Development alone an impact of **moderate significance**. The Proposed Development contributing the greater effect to the cumulative impact.
 - > St Orland's Stone (SM 90270) (Section A): the cumulative operational effect of the addition of the Proposed Development to, and in combination, with the Cossans Solar & BESS on the setting of St Orland's Stone would be significant. The combined effect of the Proposed Development and the proposed Cossans Solar Array and BESS would, however, be no greater than that assessed for the proposed solar array alone, an impact of **moderate significance**. The Proposed Development would lie at a greater distance from the monument and the proposed solar array would exert the greater effect on the setting of the monument.

- > East Finnercy Cairn (SM 6076) (in Section F): the cumulative operational effect of the addition of the Proposed Development to, and in combination, with Hill of Fare Wind Farm on the setting of East Finnercy Cairn would be no different from that of the Proposed Development alone, resulting in an impact of **moderate significance**, the Proposed Development contributing the greater effect to the cumulative impact.
- > South Leylodge Steading Stone Circle (SM12350): the cumulative operational effect of the addition of the Proposed Development to, and in combination, with Kintore Hydrogen Production Facility on the setting of South Leylodge Stone Circle (SM 12350) would be no different from that of the Proposed Development alone, an impact of **moderate significance**. The Proposed Development contributing the greater effect to the cumulative impact.

5.10.20 These significant effects would be no greater than those effects already predicted as a result of the Proposed Development in isolation.

5.10.21 No significant effects on the setting of any of the Listed Buildings, GDLs or Conservation Areas have been predicted. Additionally, no significant effects have been predicted on the settings of designated heritage assets outwith the 3 km study area which have been included in the assessment. All other impacts, affecting the settings of designated heritage assets in the surrounding landscape, would give rise to effects that are either of minor or negligible significance.

5.10.22 In summary, while **significant adverse effects** are predicted on **eight scheduled monuments** they would not be such that they would affect the integrity of the setting of the assets. Embedded, applied and additional mitigation measures have sought to minimise the impacts on heritage assets avoiding direct impacts where possible. This is demonstrated in the relatively limited extent of significant adverse effects predicted as a result of the Proposed Development in the context of the development as a whole. As such, the Proposed Development is considered to accord with the provisions of Policy 7 of NPF4.

5.11 NPF4 Policy 22 Flood risk and water environment

5.11.1 The intent of Policy 22 is to strengthen resilience to flood risk by promoting avoidance as a first principle and reducing the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding. Paragraph c) is the most relevant part of the policy for the Proposed Development, which states that development proposals should not increase the risk of surface water flooding to others, or itself be at risk. In addition, all rain and surface water should be managed through Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems ('SUDs').

Application of Policy 22

5.11.2 A review of SEPA Future Flood Maps for rivers indicates that there are several flood risk areas from rivers along the Proposed Development. There are large areas of predicted river flood risk along the Proposed Development associated with:

- > the Kerbet Water and the Dean Water west of Forfar in Section A;
- > the Dean Water west of Forfar the River and the River South Esk in Section B;
- > the Cruich Water and the West Water near the confluence with the River North Esk in Section C;
- > the Luther Water in Section D;
- > the River Dee in Section E; and
- > the Gormack Burn and the Kinnernie Burn in Section F.

5.11.3 There are also smaller areas of flood risk associated with numerous other watercourses, including the Noran Water in Section B; the Black Burn, Weiris Burn and Dowrie Burn in Section C; the Ducat Water, Bervie Water and Carron Water in Section D; and the Burn of Sheeoch in Section E.

- 5.11.4 SEPA updated their Future Flood maps for rivers and surface water and small watercourses in March 2025. Before this update, the Future Flood maps did not explicitly include flood risk from small watercourses. The March 2025 update includes small watercourses and has increased the mapped flood risk areas along the alignment and close to the Proposed Development. Known flood risk areas were avoided as much as practicable during early routing and alignment phases; this took place before the SEPA map update in March 2025.
- 5.11.5 Flood risk areas could not be fully avoided. A total of 79 towers would be located in either areas of fluvial or surface water flood risk. In these areas, there will be no land raising. Towers within fluvial flood risk areas (river and small watercourses) will be designed to remain safe and operational during floods and be flood resistant.
- 5.11.6 The Proposed Development is considered essential infrastructure as defined within NPF4 whereby development classed as essential will be supported in flood risk areas. Subject to the mitigation proposed, the assessment has concluded that there would be no significant adverse effects predicted in relation to flood risk.
- 5.11.7 No significant adverse effects are predicted in relation to the water environment or for flood risk and the Proposed Development would be in accordance with Policy 22.

5.12 Conclusion on NPF4 Appraisal

- 5.12.1 A detailed assessment of the Proposed Development has been undertaken referencing the EIA Report and other supporting documents.
- 5.12.2 The lead policy in this case is Policy 11 (Energy), consistent with the Kendoon to Tongland 132kV Reinforcement (KTR) Section 37 Decision (ECU00002124-2128), where paragraph 99 stated that for energy proposals, “*Scottish Ministers consider that, in considering NPF4 holistically, most weight should be placed on Policy 11 in considering whether the Proposed Development is supported by NPF4*” and this policy should be afforded most weight. It is contended that this approach is also applicable to the Proposed Development.
- 5.12.3 The Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable in relation to all the relevant environmental and technical topic criteria within Policy 11. Embedded, applied and additional mitigation measures have resulted in comparatively few significant effects arising as a result of the Proposed Development, which will deliver nationally important essential infrastructure.
- 5.12.4 Significant adverse effects are limited to the following:
- > Significant localised landscape and visual effects;
 - > Significant adverse effects on eight scheduled monuments, however there would be no significant impact on the integrity of the assets identified;
 - > A significant adverse effect on three local recreational airfields; and
 - > Loss of 49.38 ha of designated and categorised forests and woodland (for infrastructure felling) of which 0.19 ha is considered ancient woodland as defined under NPF4.
- 5.12.5 A key point within Policy 11 (Energy) is that any identified impacts have to be weighed against a development’s specific contribution to meeting targets – which attracts significant positive weight in this case. It has been demonstrated that the Proposed Development attracts strong support from Policy 11.
- 5.12.6 Significant weight is also afforded in relation to Policy 1 (Tackling the climate and nature crises). This policy direction fundamentally alters the planning balance compared to the position that was set out in in the former NPF3 and SPP.
- 5.12.7 The term “tackling” the respective crises in Policy 1 is also important – this means that decision makers should ensure an urgent and positive response to these issues and take positive action.

- 5.12.8 The National Spatial Strategy set out in NPF4 is intended to support the delivery of three types of 'place' in Scotland: namely, Sustainable, Liveable and Productive places.
- 5.12.9 Eighteen National Developments are identified to support the strategy, and they are to be a "focus for delivery" (NPF4 page 4). National Development 3 (strategic renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure) is one of six National Developments which support the delivery of Sustainable Places.
- 5.12.10 Sustainable Places are primarily concerned with dealing with the climate crisis, and this issue is seen as a fundamental threat to the capacity of the natural environment to provide the services and amenities relied on, including clean air, water and food (NPF4, page 6).
- 5.12.11 In order to deliver Sustainable Places, NPF4 makes it clear that there must be significant progress in achieving net zero emissions by 2030 in order to hit the overall target of net zero by 2045.
- 5.12.12 Furthermore, it sets out that meeting the Government's climate ambition will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of the economy and society and that this means ensuring *"the right development happens in the right place"* (Page 7).
- 5.12.13 The importance of applying NPF4 and its aims and objectives as a whole is demonstrated within the recent Creag Dhubh to Dalmally 275 kV Section 37 decision (ECU00002199) which recognises that conflict with some areas of policy can arise - in that case Policy 6 (ancient woodland loss) and to a lesser degree due to localised amenity harm. However, in applying NPF4 as a whole, there was recognition of the wider benefits and accordance with policy. Scottish Ministers stated the following in their Decision letter on that proposed development:
- "However, it would satisfy the requirements of all other development plan policies and would benefit from being a national development in NPF4 and from the support that is given within NPF4 to developments that contribute to renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Therefore, the Scottish Ministers conclude that the Development is, overall, in accordance with and supported by NPF4".*
- 5.12.14 In a development management context, the application of NPF4 policies has to be done by reading NPF4 as a whole. The policy appraisal contained in this Statement has demonstrated that the Proposed Development would accord with NPF4 when it is read as a whole, and as a consequence, the Proposed Development is considered to be the right one in the right location and one which will contribute to Scotland being a Sustainable Place.

6. Appraisal against the Local Development Plans

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The other elements of the statutory Development Plan covering the Site comprise:

- > The Angus Local Development Plan ('ALDP') (2016); and
- > The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan ('ABLDP') (2023)

6.1.2 The ALDP and ABLDP were both prepared and adopted prior to NPF4 coming into force and as such reflect the provisions of NPF3 and Scottish Planning Policy, both now superseded. Where conflicts or contradictions exist between the LDP and NPF4, or where LDP is silent, the provisions of NPF4 prevail.

6.1.3 Relevant policies from the LDPs are referenced below in Table 6.1 and 6.2. This Chapter does not present a detailed assessment of the Proposed Development as that has been covered in Chapter 5 against the policy provisions of NPF4. An assessment of key policy and consideration of areas of conflict or contradictions with NPF4 is provided.

6.2 The Lead LDP Policies

Angus LDP

6.2.1 The Angus LDP makes reference to the Scottish Government targets in terms of moving towards a low carbon economy and identifies planning as having a key role in delivering this. Namely it refers to the target for 100% equivalent to Scottish electricity demand generated from renewable sources by 2020; a largely decarbonised electricity generation sector by 2030; and, a largely decarbonised heat sector by 2050 with significant progress by 2030.

6.2.2 Given the age of the ALDP these targets are outdated and as set out in Chapter 3 of this Planning Statement, the Scottish Government has much more ambitious targets to achieve in relation to achieving net zero and decarbonising the electricity grid.

6.2.3 Notwithstanding, Policy PV9 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development is generally supportive of new renewable and low carbon energy development including infrastructure, activity and materials required for transmission of energy, subject to certain criteria being met.

6.2.4 The policy wording of PV9 Renewable and Low Carbon Energy Development is as follows:

"Proposals for renewable and low carbon energy development will be supported in principle where they meet the following criteria:*

the location, siting and appearance of apparatus, and any associated works and infrastructure have been chosen and/or designed to minimise impact on amenity, landscape and environment, while respecting operational efficiency;

access for construction and maintenance traffic can be achieved without compromising road safety or causing unacceptable change to the environment and landscape;

the site has been designed to make links to the national grid and/or other users of renewable energy and heat generated on site;

there will be no unacceptable impact on existing or proposed aviation, defence, seismological or telecommunications facilities;

there will be no unacceptable adverse impact individually or cumulatively with other existing or proposed development on:

- *landscape character, setting within the immediate and wider landscape (including cross boundary or regional features and landscapes), sensitive viewpoints and public access routes;*
- *sites designated for natural heritage (including birds), scientific, historic, cultural or archaeological reasons;*
- *any populations of protected species; and*
- *the amenity of communities or individual dwellings including visual impact, noise, shadow flicker.*
- *during construction, operation and decommissioning of the energy plant there will be*
- *no unacceptable impacts on:*
 - *groundwater;*
 - *surface water resources; or*
 - *carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat or geodiversity.*

Where appropriate mitigation measures must be supported by commitment to a bond commensurate with site restoration requirements.

Consideration may be given to additional factors such as contribution to targets for energy generation and emissions, and/or local socio-economic economic impact.

Supplementary guidance will be prepared to set out a spatial framework to guide the location of onshore wind farm developments, consistent with the approach set out in Table 1 of Scottish Planning Policy. It will also provide further detail on the factors which should be taken into account in considering and advising on proposals for all types of renewable energy development.

Prior to the adoption of that supplementary guidance, the Council will apply the principles and considerations set out in Scottish Planning Policy in assessing the acceptability of any planning applications for onshore wind farms.

****infrastructure, activity and materials required for generation, storage or transmission of energy where it is within the remit of the council as local planning authority (or other duty). Includes new sites, extensions and/or repowering of established sites for onshore wind.*** (emphasis added)

- 6.2.5 Having considered this policy alongside Policy 11 of NPF4, it is considered that there is a partial conflict between Policy PV9 and Policy 11, whereby the NPF4 sets a lower compliance threshold for renewable energy developments and grid transmission infrastructure that would result in localised landscape and visual impacts. Policy 11 also directs decision makers to afford significant weight to the contribution a given development would make to targets.

Aberdeenshire LDP

- 6.2.6 Spatial framework mapping on page 86 of the LDP identifies national development sites, including high voltage transmission infrastructure around Kintore. The LDP makes reference to high voltage infrastructure being required at various locations within Aberdeenshire.
- 6.2.7 This is set out under Policy PR2 Reserving and Protecting Important Development Sites which is concerned with protecting sites that may be required for certain categories of development including ‘*sites to support the national developments identified in the National Planning Framework.*’ It notes that high-voltage electricity transmission infrastructure, including cabling, substations, and converter stations, will be at a range of locations within Aberdeenshire.
- 6.2.8 The Proposed Development can draw direct support from this Policy. As noted, the Proposed Development is an identified National Development in NPF4.

6.2.9 The policy wording of Policy PR2 Reserving and Protecting Important Development Sites is as follows:

"PR2.1 We will protect and not allow alternative development on sites that may reasonably be needed in the future for:

- *delivering improvements to transportation including projects identified in the Settlement Statements, the Aberdeen City and Shire Strategic Development Plan, the Local or Regional Transport Strategy, or the Strategic Transport Projects Review, routes recognised in the Core Paths Plan network, closed railways and their abutments, embankments and cuttings, existing airports and airfields and operational areas of ports and harbours;*
- *generating and providing energy;*
- *waste management facilities;*
- *education facilities;*
- *cemeteries;*
- *other community facilities and infrastructure; and*
- *sites to support the national developments identified in the National Planning Framework.*

PR2.2 National developments that directly affect the area covered by this Plan include proposals for contribution to capturing and storing carbon and making use of heat generation. Carbon Capture is specifically promoted at the St Fergus Gas Terminal but also at other locations associated with the pipeline from the central belt to St Fergus. High-voltage electricity transmission infrastructure, including cabling, substations, and converter stations, will be at a range of locations but are expected to include sites associated with the electricity substation south of Peterhead.

PR2.3 Where we know about the above, we have identified them in the relevant Settlement Statements typically identified as 'Reserved Land'."

6.2.10 Policy PR2.1 also looks to protect existing airports and airfields. There are three recreational airfields which would be directly affected by the Proposed Development.

6.2.11 **Volume 2, Chapter 7: Land Use and Prime Agricultural Land** of the EIA Report considers the land use impact on recreational airfields from the permanent features of the Proposed Development, and is supported by an AIA (Volume 5, Appendix 7.2: Aviation Impact Assessment).

6.2.12 Gossesslie Airfield, Fordoun Airfield, and Laurencekirk Airstrip are unregistered aerodromes, where aviation activity is understood to be for recreational use, and flights are considered to be of low frequencies due to their unmarked runways. The aviation risk level in the AIA is reported as high and the Proposed Development is predicted to have a **significant adverse effect** on the operations at each of the airfields/airstrips. In summary:

- > At Section C, the Proposed Development's LOD and OHL would oversail the middle of the airstrip at Gossesslie Airfield which lies to the east of Edzell. Towers would be located to the south and north of the airstrip and the OHL (and associated LOD) would run north to south directly over the middle of the airstrip.
- > At Section D, the Proposed Development's LOD intersects the southern half of the airstrip at Fordoun Airfield which lies north of Fordoun. Towers would be located to the southwest and east of the airstrip and the OHL would potentially clip the southern end of the airstrip.
- > In addition at Section D, the Proposed Development's LOD would intersect the southern and northern ends of the airstrip at Laurencekirk Airstrip. Towers would be located to the

south of the airstrip and the LOD would clip the southern and northern ends of the airstrip.

- 6.2.13 The Proposed Development will have a **significant effect** on operations at Gossesslie Airfield, Laurencekirk Airstrip and Fordoun Airfield which would occur during the construction phase and would continue through operation, impacts would be direct, adverse and permanent.
- 6.2.14 SSEN Transmission is in liaison with the owners and operators of Gossesslie Airfield, Laurencekirk Airstrip and Fordoun Airfield regarding the impacts on their operations. Liaison with the airfields will continue to confirm the airfield operators' position in relation to the Proposed Development.
- 6.2.15 There is some non-accordance with Policy PR2.1 in relation to impacts on recreational airstrips, which need to be balanced with the national development status of the Proposed Development which is also offered protection and support through Policy PR2.1.
- 6.2.16 Conflicts are to be expected within planning policy and while significant effects on these recreational airfields are predicted, the needs case for the Proposed Development is strongly in favour of the Proposed Development, outweighing those significant effects.

6.3 Other Relevant LDP Policies

- 6.3.1 The other policies of relevance in the ALDP are summarised below in **Table 6.1** with brief comment added with regard to how the policies relate to the policies of NPF4, where relevant:

Table 6.1: Angus LDP Policy Summaries

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
Policy DS1	Development Boundaries and Priorities	This policy states that the Council will support proposals where public interests and social, economic, environmental, or operational considerations confirm the need for development that is proposed. Furthermore, supported proposals should be of an appropriate scale and nature with regards to their specific location and should be in accordance with all other relevant policies of the ALDP.	Policy 1 'Tackling the climate and nature crises', encourages, promotes and facilitates development that addresses the global climate emergency and nature crises. Policy 11 'Energy' is a policy of encouragement and facilitation for all forms of renewable energy development, including transmission infrastructure, subject to assessment against various criteria. No conflicts or contradictions with NPF4 have been identified.
Policy DS3	Design Quality and Placemaking	This policy states that development proposals should deliver a high design standard and contribute positively to the character and sense of place in the area in which they are to be located. Developments should also make a good use of existing resources and sites and should develop a design to minimise environmental impacts and	Policy 14 'Design, quality and place' of the NPF4, seeks to encourage, promote and facilitate well designed developments that are consistent with the six qualities of successful places, as well as improving the quality of an area, and are not detrimental to the amenity of the surrounding area. No conflicts or contradictions with NPF4.

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		maximise the use of local climate and landform.	
Policy DS4	Amenity	This policy states that proposed developments should have full regard to opportunities for maintaining and improving environmental quality. The Council will consider the impacts of developments on air quality, noise and vibration levels, levels of light pollution and others similar environmental considerations.	Policy 11 'Energy', seeks to ensure impacts on communities and individual dwellings are taken into account, including residential amenity, visual amenity, noise and shadow flicker. No conflicts or contradictions with NPF4
Policy PV1	Green Networks and Green Infrastructure	Angus Council will seek to protect, enhance and extend the wildlife, recreational, amenity, landscape, access and flood management value of the Green Network. Development proposals that are likely to erode green networks and green infrastructure will not be permitted unless appropriate mitigation or replacement can be secured. In some cases, a developer contribution towards enhancement of the wider Green Network may be appropriate.	Policy 3 'Biodiversity', seeks to reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks. Policy 4 'Natural Places', aims to protect, restore and enhance natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions. No conflicts or contradictions with NPF4.
Policy PV3	Access and Informal Recreation	This policy states that new development should not compromise the integrity or amenity of existing recreational access opportunities including access rights, core paths and rights of way. If existing accesses cannot be retained, the Council requires that alternative provisions are offered. Provisions for public access should also be incorporated into all new development proposals.	There is no specific policy within NPF4 relating to access and informal recreation. Volume 2 Chapter 7 Land Use and Prime Agricultural Land identified a significant adverse effect on recreational fishing on the River North Esk, the River South and the River Dee Esk during the construction and operation phases due to the requirement to put in place an exclusion zone of 30 m either side of the OHL where the OHL would cross these rivers. As fisheries tend to be several kilometres in length, the loss of up to approximately 80 m to an exclusion zone is unlikely to have a major impact on the recreational use of a fishery overall. While this may affect the visitor experience for anglers on these two rivers at the locations where the OHL crosses the river, the wider region offers a wealth of alternative high-quality fishing locations. The Socio Economic Assessment Report concludes that it is considered that any angling tourists displaced from the Rivers North and South Esk could substitute their

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
			activity to other nearby rivers. As a result, it is not anticipated that there would be a discernible reduction in the total number of fishing tourists visiting the region as a whole. Therefore, the resulting effect on the wider tourism economy is assessed as minor, which is not significant. The Proposed Development is therefore not considered to compromise the overall integrity or amenity of these assets as there would remain areas where fishing could take place along the wider asset. In addition, and as noted above significant effects are predicted on the following recreational airfields: Gossesslie Airfield; Laurencekirk Airstrip; and Fordoun Airfield which has been considered above under Policy PR2 of the ABLDP.
Policy PV4	Sites Designated for Natural Heritage and Biodiversity Value	The Council will seek to protect and enhance habitats of natural heritage value. Development proposals which are likely to affect protected sites will be assessed to ensure compatibility with the appropriate regulatory regime.	Policy 3 'Biodiversity' aims to protect and reverse biodiversity loss, as well as seeking positive effects from development and strengthening nature networks. Policy 4 'Natural places' states that development proposals that affect a site designated as a local nature conservation site or landscape area in the LDP will only be supported where the development will not have significant adverse effects on integrity of the area, or the qualities for which it has been identified, or the effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance. No conflicts or contradictions with NPF4.
Policy PV5	Protected Species	The Council will seek to protect and enhance all wildlife and their habitats, important roost or nesting places. Development proposals which are likely to affect protected species (including European, nationally, or locally protected species) will be assessed to ensure compatibility with the	Policy 3 'Biodiversity' aims to protect and reverse biodiversity loss, as well as delivering positive effects from development and strengthening nature networks. Policy 4 'Natural Places' states that proposals that are likely to have an adverse effect on species protected by legislation will only be supported where the proposal meets the

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		appropriate regulatory regime depending on the level of protection.	relevant statutory tests. Additionally, if a protected species is present on a site, steps must be taken to establish its presence. No conflicts or contradictions with NPF4.
Policy PV6	Development in the Landscape	The Council seeks to protect and enhance the quality of the landscape, its diversity and distinctive local characteristics, important views, and landmarks. New developments which have an adverse effect on landscape will only be accepted, where: The selected site is capable of accommodating the proposed development; The siting and design integrate with local landscape; Potential impacts with any other relevant proposals are considered to be acceptable; and There are adopted mitigation measures and/or reinstatement are proposed where appropriate.	Policy 4 'Natural places' states developments which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported. Policy 11 'Energy' states that where significant landscape and visual impacts are localised and/ or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable. <i>Conflict by virtue of the NPF4 having a lower compliance threshold for renewable energy developments that would result in localised significant landscape and visual impacts. In addition, NPF4 Policy 4 has a specific test in relation to local landscape designations.</i>
Policy PV8	Built and Cultural Heritage	The Council will seek protect and enhance areas designated for their built and cultural heritage value. Development proposals which are likely to affect protected sites, their setting or the integrity of their designation will be assessed within the context of the appropriate regulatory regime. Development proposals which affect Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings and Inventory Gardens and Designed Landscapes will only be supported where: proposed development will not adversely affect the integrity of the site or the reasons for which it was designated; any significant adverse effects on the site or its setting are significantly	Policy 7 'Historic assets and places' seeks to protect and enhance historic environment assets and places, and to enable positive change as a catalyst for the regeneration of places. With respect scheduled monuments the policy also makes an allowance for exceptional circumstances being demonstrated to justify impacts on the setting of for the asset. Policy 11 'Energy' states that project design and mitigation should demonstrate how impacts on the historic environment will be addressed. However, it goes on to state that when considering these impacts, significant weight is to be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets. <i>There is an element of conflict between Policy PV 8 and Policy 7 of NPF4 in terms of where impacts are recorded on the integrity of a</i>

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		outweighed by social, environmental and/or economic benefits; and appropriate measures are provided to mitigate any identified adverse impacts.	<i>scheduled monument. There is also conflict with NPF4 Policy 11 given the different policy tests in the NPF.</i>
Policy PV12	Managing Flood Risk	The Council will seek to reduce potential risk from flooding and there will be a general presumption against built development proposals on the functional floodplain which would involve land raising resulting in the loss of the functional flood plain or which would materially increase the probability of flooding to existing or planned development. Where appropriate, development proposals will be assessed within the context of the Shoreline Management Plan, Strategic Flood Risk Assessments and Flood Management Plans, and will be considered within the context of SEPA flood maps to assess and mitigate surface water flood potential. Surface water drainage measures should have a neutral or better effect on the risk of flooding both on and off the site, taking account of rain falling on the site and run-off from adjacent areas.	Policy 11 'Energy' states that project design and mitigation will demonstrate how impacts on the effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk will be addressed. Policy 22 'Flood Risk and Water Management' aims to strengthen avoidance as a first principle and reducing the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding. Development proposals at risk of flooding or in a flood risk area will only be supported if they are for essential infrastructure where the location is required for operational reasons. <i>There is some conflict between Policy PV12 'Managing Flood Risk' and Policy 22 'Flood Risk and Water Management'. NPF4 makes provision for instances where development proposals in a flood risk area will be supported, this includes essential infrastructure where the location is required for operational reasons.</i>
Policy PV20	Soils and Geodiversity	Development proposals on prime agricultural land will be supported if they: Support the delivery of the development strategy and policies in the ALDP; and Constitute renewable energy development and are supported by a commitment to a bond commensurate with site restoration requirements. Furthermore, all development proposals will be incorporate measures to manage, protect and reinstate valuable soils, groundwater, and soil	Policy 5 'Soils' seeks to protect carbon-rich soils, restore peatland and minimise disturbance to soils from development. The policy also states that if a proposal is on prime agriculture land, the development will only be supported if essential infrastructure and where it is for the generation of energy from renewable sources. No conflicts or contradictions with NPF4.

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		biodiversity during construction.	

6.3.2

The policies of relevance in the ABLDP are summarised below in **Table 6.2** with brief commentary added with regard to how the policies relate to the policies of NPF4, where relevant.

Table 6.2 Relevant Aberdeenshire LDP Policy Summaries

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
Policy E1	Natural Heritage	This policy seeks to protect sites designated for nature conservation interests at European, National, and local levels, seeks to avoid unacceptable adverse impacts on protected species and seeks to generally enhance the wider biodiversity and geodiversity of development sites. The Council will not permit new development which may unacceptably adversely impact on a site designated for nature conservation interests at a European level unless there are no alternative solutions; there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest; and compensatory measures have been identified and agreed. Similarly for sites designated at the national and local levels, development will only be permitted where assessments demonstrate that the designation objectives and overarching site integrity will not be compromised, or any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits. In all cases, there is a requirement that any impacts are minimised through careful design and mitigation measures. Development proposals must seek to avoid any unacceptable detrimental impact on protected species. Where it is believed protected species may exist on or adjacent to the site, a Protected Species Survey will be required and a Species Protection Plans detailing appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures may be required. Development which will impact protected species will be refused unless justified in	NPF4 Policy 4 Nature Places deals with natural heritage matters and NPF4 Policy 3 Biodiversity covers the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. The provisions of Policy E1 are contained within the scope of NPF4 Policy 4 and Policy 3. No conflicts or contradictions have been identified with NPF4 in relation to ABLDP Policy E1.

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		accordance with the relevant protected species legislation. The Council will only approve development proposals when evidence of a baseline ecological survey is provided; when proposals have been designed to avoid impacts where possible; when an ecological or geological management plan is provided that includes necessary mitigation and compensation measures to result in ecological net gain; and, where impacts cannot be avoided, the public benefits clearly outweigh the site's ecological or geological value. Development proposals must also identify what the proportionate measures are that will be taken to enhance biodiversity on Site.	
Policy E2	Landscape	The Council will refuse development that causes unacceptable impacts as a result of its scale, location or design on key characteristics, natural landscape elements, features or the composition or quality of the landscape character (as defined in the Landscape Character Assessments produced by NatureScot) whether impacts are alone or cumulatively with other recent developments. The policy outlines that a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) may be required to assess the effects of change on a landscape as a result of a development proposal. The Council also requires appropriate mitigation be included in a proposal to address adverse impacts on the landscape and ensure that there are not unacceptable.	NPF4 Policy 11 Energy deals with landscape and visual impacts and Policy 4 Natural Places deals with natural heritage matters including landscape designations. The provisions of policy E2 insofar as relevant are contained within the scope of NPF4 Policy 11 and Policy 4. No conflicts or contradictions have been identified with NPF4 in relation to ABLDP Policy E2.
Policy HE1	Protecting Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments and Archaeological Sites (including other historic buildings)	The Council will resist developments that have an adverse impact on the character, integrity or setting of Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, or other archaeological sites. In situations where adverse impacts are not avoidable, the Council require these to be minimised through	NPF4 Policy 7 Historic Assets and Places seeks to protect and enhance historic environment assets and places, and Policy 11 Energy requires project design and mitigation to demonstrate how impacts on the historic environment will be addressed. The provisions of policy E2 insofar as relevant HE1

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		the exploration of mitigation measures and other alternatives. Development on nationally or locally important sites (or which will have an adverse impact on their setting) will only be permitted under exceptional circumstances, including those of a social or economic nature, and so long as there is no alternative Site. Development proposals should include details of any mitigation measures for the conservation of important sites.	contained within the scope of NPF4 Policy 7 and Policy 11. No conflicts or contradictions have been identified with NPF4 in relation to ABLDP Policy HE1.
Policy PR1	Protecting Important Resources	This policy seeks to protect important environmental resources associated with air quality, the water environment, important mineral deposits, prime agricultural land, peat and other carbon rich soils, open space, and important trees and woodland. Development proposals which will impact any of these resources will only be permitted when public economic or social benefits clearly outweigh any negative effects on the protected resource, and where there are no reasonable alternative sites. Development proposals which will impact water bodies, or their catchment areas must not prejudice water quality or flow rates, or their ability to achieve or maintain good ecological status. Policy PR1 requires opportunities for the improvement of water quality, physical enhancement of waterbodies and for the creation, enhancement and management of habitats to be included in development proposals where feasible. Policy PR1 establishes a strong presumption in favour of retaining woodland on development sites. Development resulting in the loss of, or serious damage to, trees and woodlands of significant ecological, recreational, historical, landscape or shelter value will not normally be permitted. In order to determine whether there are significant public benefits that would outweigh any loss or damage to trees and woodlands, developers are required to submit a Tree Survey to the British Standard for	NPF4 Policies 11 Energy and 22 Flood Risk and Water Management deal with hydrology and the water environment. The provisions of policy PR1 insofar as relevant to hydrology and the water environment are contained within the scope of NPF4 Policy 11 and Policy 22. When considering hydrology and the water environment, no conflicts or contradictions have been identified with NPF4 in relation to ABLDP Policy PR1. Separately, NPF4 Policy 6 deals with forestry, woodland and trees. The general provisions of policy PR1 with regard to forestry, woodland and trees are contained within the scope of NPF4 Policy 6. <i>Nonetheless, a conflict is identified in that NPF4 Policy 6 does not require a specific Tree Survey to be submitted to establish whether the public benefits from the development proposal outweigh any proposed tree or woodland loss and/or damage.</i>

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		Trees 5837. Where removal is considered appropriate, damage to existing trees must be minimised and compensatory planting will be required.	
Policy C2	Renewable Energy	Policy C2 supports solar, wind, biomass and hydro-electricity projects, as well as energy storage projects, which are located and designed appropriately. The Council's assessment of the acceptability of such development proposals will take into consideration anticipated impacts on socio-economic aspects; renewable energy targets; greenhouse gas emissions; communities; landscape and visual aspects; natural heritage; carbon rich soils; the historic environment; tourism and recreation; aviation, defence, telecommunications and broadcasting interests; road traffic; hydrology; and opportunities for energy storage.	Policy 11 'Energy' states renewable energy developments (including grid transmission infrastructure) will generally be considered to be acceptable where any significant landscape and visual impacts are localised, and where appropriate design mitigation has been incorporated. Furthermore, Policy 11 also places significant weight on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets, which also encompasses associated grid transmission infrastructure. There is no conflict between Policy C2 and NPF4 Policy 11, as Policy C2 does not explicitly reference or set a compliance threshold for grid transmission infrastructure.
Policy C4	Flooding	This policy requires Flood Risk Assessments to be undertaken (in accordance with SEPA's Technical Flood Risk Guidance) for development proposals that are located in the medium to high flood risk category. Development should avoid location within areas of medium to high flood risk, functional floodplains or other areas where the risks are otherwise assessed as heightened or unacceptable, except, <i>inter alia</i>, where it is essential infrastructure, and an alternative lower risk location is not available. Policy C4 states that developments should not increase flood risk vulnerability on site or elsewhere. Developments will not be approved if they enclose culverting of watercourses for land gain and all developments are subject to Sustainable Urban Drainage principles.	NPF4 Policies 11 Energy and 22 Flood Risk and Water Management deal with hydrology and the water environment. The provisions of policy C1 insofar as relevant are contained within the scope of NPF4 Policy 11 and Policy 22. No conflicts or contradictions have been identified with NPF4 in relation to ALDP Policy C4.
Policy RD1	Providing Suitable Services	Developments that are located and designed to take advantage of or incorporate the services,	NPF4 Policy 18 Infrastructure First encourages, promotes and facilitates an infrastructure first

Policy	Topic	Policy Summary	Position against NPF4
		facilities and infrastructure necessary to support the development will be permitted. Developments must be well related to existing developments and is close to existing public transport services (if available) or deliver major improvements to these. Safe and convenient access should also be provided for service, delivery and other goods vehicles required by the development. When development proposals require the formation of new accesses, Policy RD1 requires these to be designed to the agreed standard and should minimally impact the character of the site and surrounding area. Satisfactory arrangements for future maintenance of any new access facilities should also be made. If a new private access onto a public road is require, this must be designed to the satisfaction of Aberdeenshire Council's Road and Transportation Service and, in the case of a trunk road, Transport Scotland. The policy also explains that a Transport Assessment or Statement may be required to illustrate how the development proposal will not significantly impact existing transport infrastructure and services. The Council will support development where the required standards for water, wastewater and surface-water drainage servicing are satisfactorily met. Surface water drainage must be dealt with in a sustainable way, in ways that promote its biodiversity value, and in ways that avoid pollution and flooding, through the use of an integrated Sustainable Drainage System.	approach to land use planning, which puts infrastructure considerations at the heart of placemaking. NPF4 Policies 13 Sustainable Transport and 11 Energy consider access, traffic and transport while NPF4 Policies 11 Energy and 22 Flood Risk and Water Management consider the water environment and drainage. The provisions of policy RD1 insofar as relevant to the Proposed Development are contained within the scope of NPF4 Policy 11, Policy 13 and Policy 22. No conflicts or contradictions have been identified with NPF4 in relation to ALDP Policy RD1.

6.4 Conclusions on the LDPs

- 6.4.1 The relevant development management considerations have been addressed above (Chapter 5) in the context of NPF4 Policy 11 and are not repeated with reference to the policies of the ALDP and ABLDP.

- 6.4.2 It is considered that the effects arising from the Proposed Development would not be unacceptable in terms of ALDP Policy PV9 and ABLDP Policy PR2 or indeed other relevant policies within the local development plans.
- 6.4.3 Moreover, through considering the other relevant policies, it is considered that the Proposed Development accords with the two LDPs when they are read as a whole.
- 6.4.4 The policy provisions of the LDPs are based on those of the 2014 SPP. In addition, there are some incompatibilities between the LDPs and the policies of NPF4 as explained above. This means, as per the amendments made to the 1997 Act, that the provisions of NPF4 (which is the most recent part of the Development Plan) must prevail.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The Development Plan

- 7.1.1 NPF4 comprises the primary Development Plan document for the purposes of decision-making on this electricity application under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989. In that regard the lead policy, which should be afforded most weight in this case, is considered to be **Policy 11 (Energy)**. **NPF4 Policy 1 (Tackling the climate and nature crises)** is also key in the decision-making process, stating that in considering all development proposals, significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises.
- 7.1.2 The Proposed Development is **considered to be acceptable in relation to all of the relevant environmental and technical topic criteria within Policy 11, when read as a whole**. The adoption of embedded, applied and additional mitigation measures have resulted in comparatively few significant adverse effects arising as a result of the Proposed Development, which would deliver nationally important essential infrastructure.
- 7.1.3 A key point within **Policy 11 (Energy)** is that any identified impacts have to be weighed against a development's specific contribution to meeting targets – which attracts significant positive weight in this case. It has been demonstrated that the Proposed Development is in accordance with Policy 11.
- 7.1.4 The appraisal against the policies of NPF4 identifies an element of non-accordance with certain provisions of **Policy 6 (Forestry, woodland and trees)** as a result of the predicted significant adverse impacts on ancient woodland and other native broadleaved woodland.
- 7.1.5 As noted, this matter has been addressed in a recent decision by Scottish Ministers: the Kendoon to Tongland 132kV OHL Section 37 decision. In that case the Reporters, following a Public Inquiry, had recommended refusal of the application due to the loss of ancient and semi-natural woodland, which they concluded was contrary to Policy 7 of NPF4. The Scottish Ministers concluded that the Proposed Development, on a balance of the relevant policies, would be supported by NPF4 and that ultimately, significant weight should be attached to the benefits of the proposal in terms of the expansion of the electricity grid.
- 7.1.6 At paragraph 107 of the Decision Letter for the Kendoon to Tongland Section 37, the Scottish Ministers state that in their view, the KTR development was supported by NPF4 Policy 1. They add that the policy does not require proposals to respond equally to both the climate emergency and the nature crisis. They stated (paragraph 107):
- “While significant weight must be given to the environmental impacts of the removal of woodland, and to the conclusion that those impacts will not be fully mitigated, the resultant emissions and biodiversity impacts would be offset to an extent over time by planting and other measures committed to by the company and secured by conditions. More significant weight is afforded to the long term environmental benefits associated with an expanded grid, capable of connecting a significant amount of renewable energy over a lifetime of the assets. The contribution that the proposed development would make to tackling the global climate emergency would in time assist in mitigating the damage to natural habitats and biodiversity caused by climate change itself.”*
- 7.1.7 Furthermore, at paragraph 132 the Ministers state:
- “It is regrettable that the proposed development will result in the loss of a significant area of irreplaceable woodland. Scottish Ministers have attached conditions to the consent requiring a woodland planting strategy to address the loss of woodland, but it is accepted that this is an impact that cannot be fully mitigated. Scottish Ministers have given significant consideration to this impact but consider that the proposed development is both urgent, and necessary. The greater weight is attached to the benefits of the proposal in terms of the replacement of end-of-life electricity infrastructure and a need for security of supply for local people. The proposed development will make a significant contribution to national renewable energy targets, reducing emissions and addressing the global climate emergency. The Scottish*

Ministers conclude, for the reasons set out above, that the proposed development is supported by Scottish Government policies.”

- 7.1.8 It is suggested that a similar analysis of the planning balance applies in the present case, with further emphasis on the overall contribution the Proposed Development makes in real terms in that it delivers a new 400 kV OHL designed to unlock substantial new quantities of renewable energy, thus further supporting the KTR reasoning.
- 7.1.9 As set out in the Chief Planner's letter of February 2023, *“Conflicts between policies are to be expected. Factors for and against development will be weighed up in the balance of planning judgement.”*
- 7.1.10 This point is further demonstrated in the Scottish Ministers' KTR decision referenced above. It is clear that the application of planning judgement remains essential in all decision making. This is of particular importance in complex large scale transmission projects of this nature which traverse large geographical areas with a multitude of environmental and physical constraints, which need to be balanced across the project.
- 7.1.11 It is considered overall, taking cognisance of the scale and extent of the Proposed Development, and taking full account of the degree of embedded design mitigation (including by way of routeing and alignment) and the application of the mitigation hierarchy thereto, that the Proposed Development would be in accordance with NPF4 when read as a whole.

7.2 The Climate Crisis & Renewable Energy Policy Framework

- 7.2.1 The nationally important benefits of the Proposed Development have been set out in the context of the current climate emergency. The Proposed Development would help address the climate emergency and very challenging net zero targets and would contribute to improving security of supply.
- 7.2.2 The technical requirement for the Proposed Development has been established and it responds to the need for a significant and strategic increase in the capacity of onshore and offshore electricity infrastructure to support the UK and Scottish Government commitments and legal obligations on emissions reduction. The Proposed Development is identified as a key requirement to take power from large-scale onshore and offshore renewable generation to be transported to demand centres.
- 7.2.3 The level of weight to be applied to the identification and assessment of the Proposed Development through the mechanisms administered by NESO and Ofgem is a matter for the Scottish Ministers. In the KTR decision, paragraph 61 it was stated that

“The Scottish Ministers have considered the main deciding factors advised by the reporters...While the need for and benefits of the proposal are key considerations, Scottish Ministers consider that the technical and economic justification as considered ..goes beyond what Scottish ministers require to consider, in examining the roles of the system operator and the authority, and the decisions or assessments made by them in undertaking these roles, in advance of submission of the applications”.

However, it has been observed that the Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition document emphasises a collaborative approach between the Scottish Government and the industry. With regard to Ofgem's role, it has been noted that the Proposed Development is within the scope of the ASTI Framework. In relation to these projects Ofgem observed, in their ASTI Framework decision that *“By including projects within the list of ASTI projects, we are accepting the needs case for these projects in terms of the technical capabilities reflected in the HND/NOA Refresh”.* There is a clear expectation from Government and the energy regulator, Ofgem, that this project will be delivered by 2030.
- 7.2.4 More specifically, the project is needed to deliver Government's 2030 renewable energy targets set out in the British Energy Security Strategy and the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan.
- 7.2.5 The need for a high voltage electricity transmission network to support renewable energy and meet net zero, and to ensure energy security and supply, is included within NPF4:

“The electricity transmission grid will need substantial reinforcement including the addition of new infrastructure to connect and transmit the output from new on and offshore capacity to consumers in Scotland, the rest of the UK and beyond”. (pg. 103)

- 7.2.6 NPF4 identifies 18 National Developments described as “significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy”. National Developments are acknowledged as projects necessary for the delivery of the national spatial strategy and *“Their designation means that the principle for development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes.”*
- 7.2.7 The Proposed Development falls within ND3: ‘Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure’.

7.3 The Planning Balance & Conclusion

- 7.3.1 In NPF4 there is a clear recognition that climate change must be a primary guiding principle for all plans and decisions. Significant weight is to be given to the climate emergency and the contribution of individual developments to tackling climate change.
- 7.3.2 NPF4 provides up to date statements of Scottish Government policy, directly applicable to determination of this application. This should be afforded very considerable weight in decision-making.
- 7.3.3 NPF4 is unambiguous as regards the policy imperative to combat climate change, the crucial role of facilitating further renewable energy production and transmission and the scale and urgency of renewables deployment required. As described in this Planning Statement:
- > The global climate emergency and the nature crisis are the foundations for the NPF4 Spatial Strategy as a whole. The twin global climate and nature crises are “at the heart of our vision for a future Scotland” so that “the decisions we make today will be in the long-term interest of our country”⁴³;
 - > NPF4 Policy 1 (Tackling the climate and nature crises) directs decision-makers to give significant weight to the global Climate Emergency in all decisions. This is a radical departure from the usual approach to policy and weight and clearly denotes a step change in planning policy response to climate change. The matter of weight is no longer left entirely to the discretion of the decision maker; and
 - > NPF4 is clear that grid transmission infrastructure plays a crucial role in combatting climate change, transitioning to a net zero Scotland and ensuring security of energy supply. NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy) strongly supports proposals for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies, including transmission infrastructure. The Proposed Development does give rise to some non-accordance with the Development Plan – in relation to impacts on ancient woodland and woodland in general (NPF4 Policy 6) as discussed in section 7.1 above and impacts on recreational airfields (LDP Policy PR2) as discussed in chapter 6. As noted, some policy conflicts are inevitable, especially given a project of this scale. And while some conflict has been identified, it is considered that in the context of the scale of the Proposed Development that these are limited in nature. Overall, it is considered that the Proposed Development is in accordance with NPF4 when read as a whole.
- 7.3.4 Moreover, it is clear from the NPF4 Statement of Need, that need considerations and benefits of national importance attract **significant weight**.
- 7.3.5 The Proposed Development would deliver essential infrastructure and has been carefully routed and designed such that the level of significant effects remaining post-mitigation are limited in number and level of significance in the context of the project as a whole. When assessed in overall terms, it is considered that the benefits arising outweigh these limited significant adverse effects, and that the Proposed Development should be supported.

⁴³ NPF4, page 2

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