

Volume 5: Appendix 8.2.33 – Woodland Report:
Free Church Wood

Contents:

1.1	Introduction	2
1.2	Purpose of this Woodland Report	2
1.3	Woodland Property	3
1.4	Development Requirements	3
1.5	Woodland Characteristics	4
1.6	Windthrow Risk Impact	7
1.7	Woodland Management Impact	8
1.8	Mitigation Opportunities	8
1.9	Woodland Removal Impact	8
1.10	Compensatory Planting	9

Figures

Figure 8.1.33 - Landowner Boundaries

Figure 8.2.33 – Proposed Felling Requirements

1. WOODLAND REPORT: FREE CHURCH WOOD

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Woodland Report has been prepared by Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc (the Applicant) who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission), own, operate and develop the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and remote islands.
- 1.1.2 This Woodland Report will accompany an application for Consent under Section 37 of the *Electricity Act 1989*¹ (as amended) and Section 57(2) of the *Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997* to construct and operate approximately 105.2 kilometres (km) of new double circuit 400 kilovolts (kV) overhead transmission line (OHL) between Kintore and Tealing (hereafter referred to as the 'Proposed Development'). A full description of the Proposed Development and its ancillary works is set out within **Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description** of this EIAR.

1.2 Purpose of this Woodland Report

- 1.2.1 As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, it was identified that the OHL construction and the access tracks required to construct the Proposed Development would cross a number of woodland areas within private or state-owned landholdings.
- 1.2.2 This Woodland Report provides a conceptual assessment of the woodland areas that are affected by the Proposed Development, including the requirement of woodland removal and management recommendations to mitigate the impact of the woodland removal.
- 1.2.3 This Woodland Report relates to land at Free Church Wood and the relevant landholding property boundary is presented in **Figure 8.1.33: Landowner Boundaries**.
- 1.2.4 Field surveys of the woodland areas have been undertaken and have been used to determine the various woodland characteristics in order to identify the woodland removal required and recommended. This Woodland Report also sets out the area quantity (in hectares (ha)) to be compensatory planted to ensure no net loss of woodland is achieved as required by The Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal².

Requirement and Objectives of the Report

- 1.2.5 This Woodland Report details the works required to the woodland, including the felling and any restocking, due to the construction and operation of the Proposed Development.
- 1.2.6 The objectives of this Woodland Report are to:
- provide an assessment of the woodland areas that are affected by the Proposed Development, including the requirement for woodland removal and management recommendations to mitigate the impact of the woodland removal; and
 - describe any mitigation measures proposed to address likely impacts relating to loss of woodland and windthrow risk and to meet The Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal by identifying the required quantity for compensatory planting.

Limitations and assumptions

- 1.2.7 All data included within this Woodland Report has been gathered from field surveys or desk-based assessments, which includes analysis of nationally held datasets, up to date aerial imagery and field measurements and data collection.

¹ UK Government, 1989. *Electricity Act 1989*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/29/contents>

² Forestry Commission Scotland, 2009. *Scottish Government's Control of woodland Removal Policy* [Online] Available at: <https://www.forestry.gov.scot/publications/285-the-scottish-government-s-policy-on-control-of-woodland-removal>

- 1.2.8 Baseline data was derived from Scotland's environmental web³ and Scottish Forestry map viewer⁴. The data sources identified in paragraph 8.4.6 of **Volume 2, Chapter 8: Forestry** were also used to inform this Woodland Report.
- 1.2.9 Forests (or woodlands) comprise the land, of at least 0.5 ha (UKFS: V5 2023) under areas of trees with a canopy cover of at least 20%, or having the potential to achieve this, including the integral open space, as well as any felled areas awaiting replanting and are identified on the National Forest Inventory (NFI). The term 'forest' and 'forestry' for the purpose of this report is used to refer to areas that are typically coniferous that are managed for commercial timber production. The term 'wood' and 'woodlands' is used to refer to areas that are typically broadleaved and deciduous and not principally managed for timber production.
- 1.2.10 Woodland structure and age for the purpose of this Woodland Report have been categorised into an age class matrix:
- Young – young trees, generally less than 5 years old;
 - Immature – trees between approximately 6-15 years old;
 - Pole Stage – trees between 16 – 30 years old, primarily conifer;
 - Mature – trees considered to be of felling age, 31 –50 years and over; and
 - Established – established range of age classes with mature trees and an understory of younger trees.
- 1.2.11 In addition, to simplify the reader's understanding, a species matrix has been derived to categorise the species along the length of the Proposed Development:
- Felled – trees which have been felled and are awaiting restocking;
 - Mixed Broadleaves – broadleaf trees containing a range of species including native trees such as Oak or Birch, may also contain non-native trees such as Sycamore or Chestnut;
 - Mixed Woodland – a diverse mix of conifer and broadleaf trees with non-native species present;
 - Native Mixed Woodland – mixed woodland containing native broadleaf species such as Oak or Birch and including elements of Scots Pine;
 - Conifer – Conifer species; Sitka spruce, Norway spruce, Larch, Firs or Pines; and
 - Scrub/Regen – areas of unmanaged land with low density, self-seeded trees. A mixture of species with non-native conifer and broadleaf trees present.

1.3 Woodland Property

- 1.3.1 Free Church Wood (hereinafter referred to as the property) forms part of the broader Durris Forest complex, which is a state-owned forest managed by Forestry & Land Scotland (FLS). It lies ca. 0.5 km south of the village of Kirkton of Durris, with the centre point being at NGR NO769952 (as shown in **Figure 8.2.33: Proposed Felling Requirements**). Most of this forest block consist of non-native conifers managed on a commercial basis, although there are some small areas of broadleaves present on the property. Sitka spruce is the dominant species.
- 1.3.2 Durris Forest, incorporating Free Church Wood, is covered by an approved Land Management Plan (LMP), which expires in 2034. The Plan Reference Number is LMP 22.

1.4 Development Requirements

400 kV Overhead Line

- 1.4.1 The Study Area for this assessment is based on the required Operational Corridor (OC) (see **paragraphs 3.8.21 to 3.8.22 in Volume 1, Chapter 3: Project Description**). The Applicant defines the OC as the area in which it has rights to remove woodland for the purposes of the safe construction, resilience and continued maintenance of OHLs, or protection of electrical plant as required by *the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations (ESQCR) 2002 regulations* and

³ Scottish Forestry Land Information Search URL: https://map.environment.gov.scot/LIS_Agri/Agri.html

⁴ Scottish Forestry Map Viewer URL:

<https://scottishforestry.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=0d6125cfe892439ab0e5d0b74d9acc18>

the *Electricity Act 1989*. The OC is defined with reference to the distance at which a tree could fall and cause damage to the OHL, resulting in a supply outage. As a result, the final OC width would be based on the safety distance required to allow for a mature tree falling towards the OHL at the mid-point on an OHL span between two Towers, taking account of topography and tree height at maturity. Standard falling distance for a mature conifer tree is considered to be a minimum of 30 m. Where the OC passes through areas of native broadleaved woodland, it is noted that the width of woodland may be reduced, due to the general lower height and characteristics of the tree species present and as will be detailed in the Woodland Retention Plan.

1.4.2 The 400 kV OHL standard tower dimensions for the Proposed Development have a width of 11.2 m at the widest part (crossarm) of the tower ie from outside conductor to outside conductor, in addition to this the safety vicinity zone from each conductor is a 5.3 m radius around the conductor.

1.4.3 The OHL infrastructure and minimum safety clearance distance is therefore 90 m (45 m either side of the OHL centreline) and this has been utilised to calculate the area of the OC. In some cases, such as angle towers the requirement may be slightly in excess of this distance, however the average minimum distance has been used in this assessment.

Access Track Route Design

1.4.4 For the purposes of accessing Towers N66 and N67, an upgrade of the existing track passing through the Free Church Wood main block will be required. The total amount of felling required to facilitate this roading work will be 1.21 ha, and the forest type to be felled will be mature non-native conifers.

1.5 Woodland Characteristics

1.5.1 The property is managed primarily on a commercial basis for the purposes of timber provision⁵. Non-native conifers are the dominant species across the entire complex, as well as within the property, with broadleaves and open ground comprising a relatively small proportion of the forest area.

1.5.2 The forest has a diverse age structure, with the main ages ranging between late pole stage and over-mature. Maximum top height for these blocks is approaching ca. 35 m, and minimum top height is ca. 15 m.

1.5.3 In addition to commercial forestry activities, there is significant use of the forest for recreational purposes, with walkers and cyclists being most common.

1.5.4 A desk-based study of the woodland areas was conducted, utilising web-based data provided by Scottish Forestry³ and referencing the Scottish Government's Ancient Woodland Inventory, to identify current woodland environmental designations and classifications.

1.5.5 The Scottish Forestry Map Viewer⁴ provides spatial data on the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland⁶ and classifies the woodland types into four categories:

- Native woodland⁷;
- Nearly-native woodland⁸;
- Open land habitat⁹; and
- Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)¹⁰.

⁵ Information sourced from the Durrus Forest LMP

⁶ Scottish Forestry Native Woodland Survey of Scotland: Glossary of Terms; URL: <https://www.forestry.gov.scot/publications/75-native-woodland-survey-of-scotland-glossary-of-terms/viewdocument/75>

⁷ Native Woodland – woods where the canopy cover is composed mainly of native species (ie over 50%)

⁸ Nearly Native Woodland - where native species make up between 40% and 50% of the canopy. These are woods that could have potential to be converted into native woodlands by altering their species mix.

⁹ Open Land Habitat – areas with <20% canopy cover of trees and shrubs adjoining a native woodland.

¹⁰ PAWS - Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites. These are surveyed in the NWSS where they are recorded in the Scottish ancient woodland inventory (SAWI). These woodlands appear to have originated through natural regeneration sometime before the mid-19th century, but were later converted to planted woods.

- 1.5.6 The southeastern outlying section of Free Church Wood is indicated by the AWI as being of 2b (1.08ha- LEPO) and 2a (2.52 ha AW) antiquity. It should be noted regarding the 2a antiquity designation, that ground truthing of this area has found there to be no native or ancient woodland present whatsoever. This forest area consists primarily of over-mature Douglas fir and Sitka spruce (see **Plates 1 and 2**). As is evident from the photos, significant windblow is encroaching within these non-native conifer areas. Some mature beech trees are present along the northern boundary as a field-edge strip (see **Plate 3**), and a pole stage beech-dominant stand is present along the southwest edge (see **Plate 4**). It is usually beyond the scope of these reports to formally assign any designation to woodlands.
- 1.5.7 The forest blocks in question are indicated by the NWSS to contain elements of (i) Native Woodland (NW) and (ii) Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). The NW elements are said by the NWSS to be composed of Upland Birchwoods and Upland Mixed Ashwoods. The PAWS area corresponds to the aforementioned disputedly designated Ancient Woodland area mentioned above, and in this case the NWSS-assigned designation is feasible and not disputed.
- 1.5.8 Desk-based study of the woodland area, using both the Ancient Woodland Inventory and the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland, has identified small areas of Long Established of Plantation Origin (LEPO) (2b – 1860) and Native Woodland as detailed in **Table 1: Woodland type affected by the Proposed Development**.

Table 1: Woodland type affected by the Proposed Development

Woodland	Ancient semi-natural native broadleaved woodland (ASNW) 1a	Ancient semi-natural native broadleaved woodland (ASNW) 2a	Long Established of Plantation Origin (LEPO) (1b – 1750)	Long Established of Plantation Origin (LEPO) (2b – 1860)	Other Woodlands (Roy)	Native broadleaved woodland	Total woodland area
Free Church Wood	-	0.94		5.31		0.04	6.29

* - Rounding errors can occur

Plate 1: View south-eastwards from NGR NO 77308 95077 (between Towers N67 and N68).



Plate 2: View eastwards from NGR NO 77381 95053 (between Towers N67 and N68).



Plate 3: View southwards from NGR NO 77308 95166 (between Towers N67 and N68).



Plate 4: View south-westwards from NGR NO 77340 95039 (between Towers N67 and N68).



1.6 Windthrow Risk Impact

- 1.6.1 This outlying forest block is situated on the lower, undulating ground to the north of the prominent hill on which the main Durris Forest block is situated.
- 1.6.2 The predominant soil types¹¹ are humus-iron podzols, non-calcareous gleys, and brown earths. The woodland site affected by the Proposed Development has a relatively uniform 'Detailed Aspect Method of Scoring' (DAMS)¹² windthrow hazard class score, with this being 10. This gives it a risk classification of being Sheltered, with a low risk of windblow occurring. It should be noted that, despite being of low windblow risk, there is significant windblow in the overmature Sitka spruce and Douglas fir stand.
- 1.6.3 An assessment was undertaken of the risk of windblow to areas of woodland adjacent to the OC which would be exposed due to the tree clearance required for the OC. This assessment is based on the professional judgement of the forestry surveyor with consideration being given to the soil and moisture regime, the topography, tree species, top height, exposure, altitude and aspect in relation to the prevailing wind direction and any previous management regimes from either, observations at a site level or via an approved management plan. Reference is also made to the Forest GALES¹³

¹¹ As per the National Soil Map of Scotland (1:250,000), accessed at <https://soils.environment.gov.scot/maps/soil-maps/national-soil-map-of-scotland/>

¹² Detailed Aspect method of Scoring (DAMS) Ref. Forest Research, "Forest Gales software programme" and Forestry Commission Leaflet 85 "Windthrow Hazard Classification"

¹³ Forest Research (2025). Available at: <http://www.forestdss.org.uk/geoforestdss/>. The Detailed Aspect Method of Scoring (DAMS) is a system used to assess wind exposure in forestry and land management. It provides a numerical score that quantifies the level of exposure a site experiences based on factors such as elevation, topography, and aspect (the direction a slope faces). The DAMS score helps foresters predict wind risk, which is crucial for understanding tree stability, growth potential, and the likelihood of windthrow (trees being uprooted or broken by wind) The scoring system ranges from 0 to 24, with higher scores indicating more exposure to wind.

2.5 Forest Research decision support system. Felling outwith the OC to a windfirm boundary is termed Management Felling and is presented within **Figure 8.2.33: Proposed Felling Requirements**.

1.7 Woodland Management Impact

- 1.7.1 The Proposed Development will create additional challenges for the future management of the forest as it dissects existing management coupes. An electrical hazard will be introduced adjacent to each of these woodland blocks, creating an additional challenge for future forest management. The constraint associated with the electrical hazard will be reduced by regular maintenance of the operational corridor, which will avoid the incidences of “Red Zone”¹⁴ trees.
- 1.7.2 The OHL alignment may be restrictive to future in-forest machinery access. The requirement for dedicated forestry machine OHL crossing points will be discussed with the landowner and if required will be identified once the OHL has been constructed, thus providing a safe OHL crossing point(s) for future working within the woodlands.
- 1.7.3 The OHL alignment does not cross any existing forest roads, driveways and agricultural access tracks.
- 1.7.4 The Proposed Development will result in the permanent removal of existing mature conifer and broadleaved woodland from the OC. This will reduce the productive forestry land available for planting within the woodland property area, as the OC will require to be kept clear of trees.
- 1.7.5 During the construction phase, there will be a level of disruption to the undertaking of routine forestry management activities by the landowners on the woodland property. This will be project managed through communication and agreement with them.
- 1.7.6 The OHL alignment is likely to have moderate impact for the future management. This is tempered by the LMP indicating that the woodland blocks along the alignment are currently managed under a clearfell silvicultural regime, so the primary impact will be the bringing forward of the felling date.
- 1.7.7 Management felling is proposed for several stands outside the OC along most of the alignment covered by this woodland report, as indicated on **Figure 8.2.33: Proposed Felling Requirements**. This will reduce the risk of windblow occurring in future.

1.8 Mitigation Opportunities

- 1.8.1 The OC woodland removal area is required for the construction and functioning of the new OHL infrastructure. Reference to **Section 1.10: Compensatory Planting**, will fully mitigate the OC woodland removal area by replanting the area quantity (hectares) of woodland removed.
- 1.8.2 The management felling areas will be replanted by the landowner, in-line with the Scottish Forestry felling licence regulations of the area felled must be replanted.

1.9 Woodland Removal Impact

- 1.9.1 Woodland removal area calculations are approximate and have been rounded up to reflect the worst case scenario for removal. Woodland felling will be reduced as much as possible through mitigation.

Table 2: Woodland Removal for Infrastructure

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Infrastructure Felling	Mixed broadleaf woodland	0.89 ha
	Conifer plantation	5.76 ha

¹⁴ As specified by the ‘Red Zone’ set out in paragraph 41 of the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) Safety Guide 804 Electricity at Work: Forestry (2020) FISA 804: <https://ukfisa.com/>

Table 3: Compensatory Planting

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Compensatory Planting Area	Mixed conifer or mixed broadleaves	6.65 ha

Table 4: Woodland Removal Impact of Infrastructure

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Total Loss of Woodland Area		6.65 ha
Total Compensatory Planting Area		6.65 ha
Total Net Loss of Woodland Area		0.00 ha

Table 5: Woodland Removal for Management Felling

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Management Felling		7.21 ha
Replanting/Restocking		7.21 ha
Net Loss of Woodland Area		0.00 ha

Note. Felling and restocking approval is via Scottish Forestry Felling Permission application process or Long-Term Forest Plan application or amendment process. This is to be sought by the landowner on whose land the management felling takes place, who is also responsible for all associated restocking operations.

1.10 Compensatory Planting

- 1.10.1 Compensatory planting to achieve the area quantity (hectares) of woodland removal, referenced above will be provided for the OHL and access track OC area and will be in accordance with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal of no net loss of woodland.
- 1.10.2 Compensatory planting will be detailed within **Volume 5, Appendix 8.1: Compensatory Planting Management Strategy**.
- 1.10.3 Areas of tree felling required to facilitate construction (where necessary) outside of the OC, temporary access tracks, holding out positions and EPZ (Equi-potential zones) and areas felled to a windfirm boundary will be replanted on site. Replanting of these sites will follow the conditions set out in the Scottish Forestry approved felling permission (where required) and will be the responsibility of the landowner.

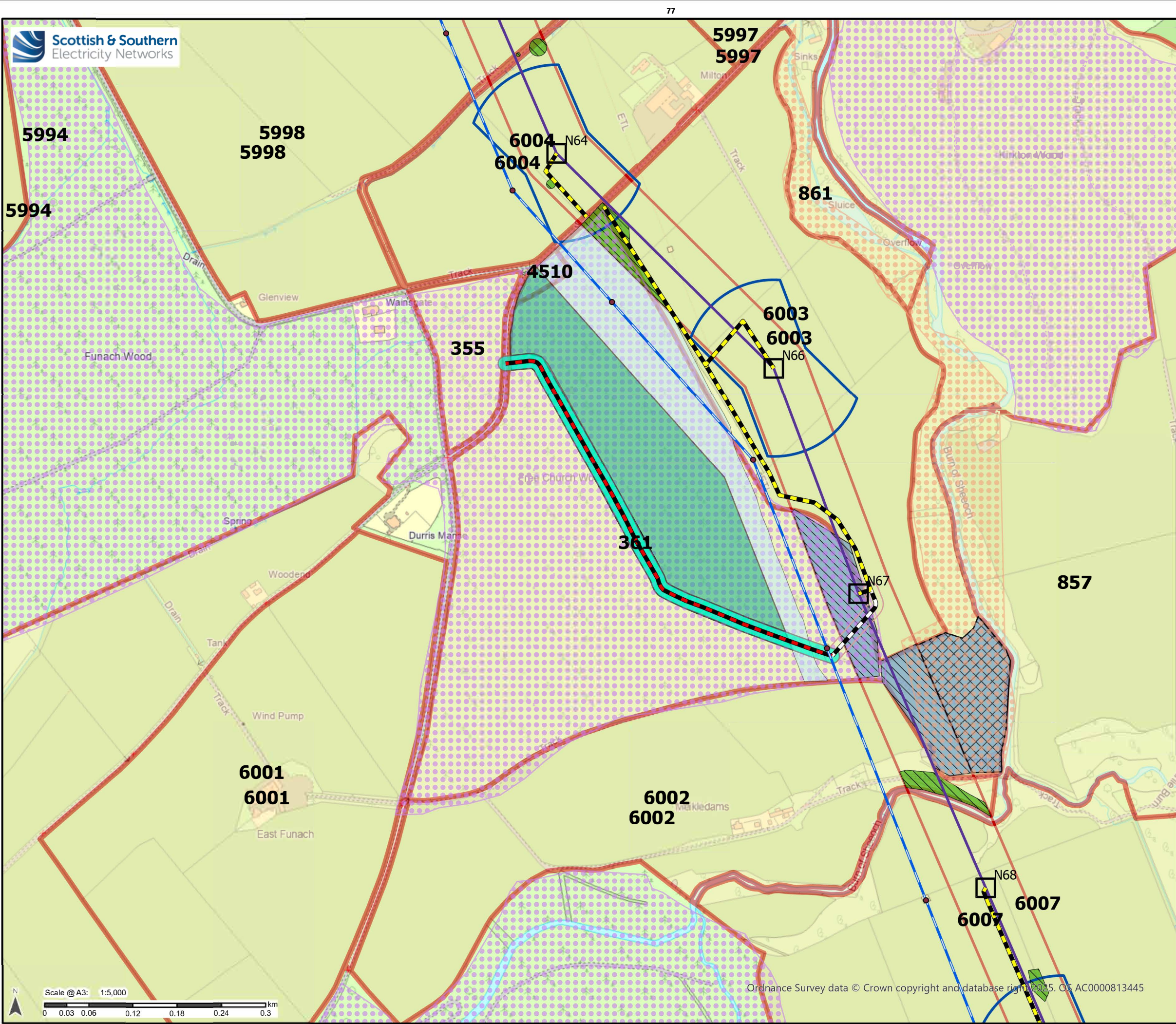


Figure 8.1.33 Landowner Boundaries

- Landowner Boundaries
- Proposed Tower - 400kV (with tower number)
- Proposed OHL Alignment - 400kV
- 90m Operational Corridor

Ancient Woodland Inventory

- Ancient (of semi-natural origin)
- Long-Established (of plantation origin)
- ACCESS - EXISTING UPGRADE
- ACCESS - NEW STONE TEMP
- ALTERNATIVE NEW STONE TEMP
- Proposed Conductor Pulling Area (EPZ)
- MES-SSEN temp stone access track 20m buffer
- Kintore Fetteresso Diversion

Felling - Diversion

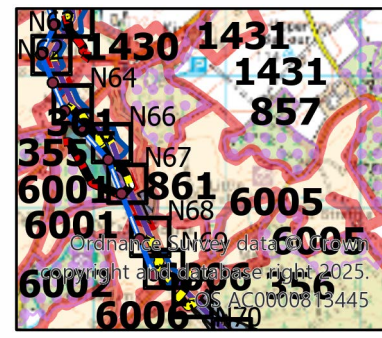
- OC
- MF

Proposed Felling requirements

- OC
- MF
- Access

Woodland Type

- BL
- CON
- Kintore___Fetteresso_275_



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO.
Crown copyright and database right 2025 all rights reserved.
Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000813445

Project No:

Project:

Title:

Drawn by: Date: 16/07/2025

Drawing:

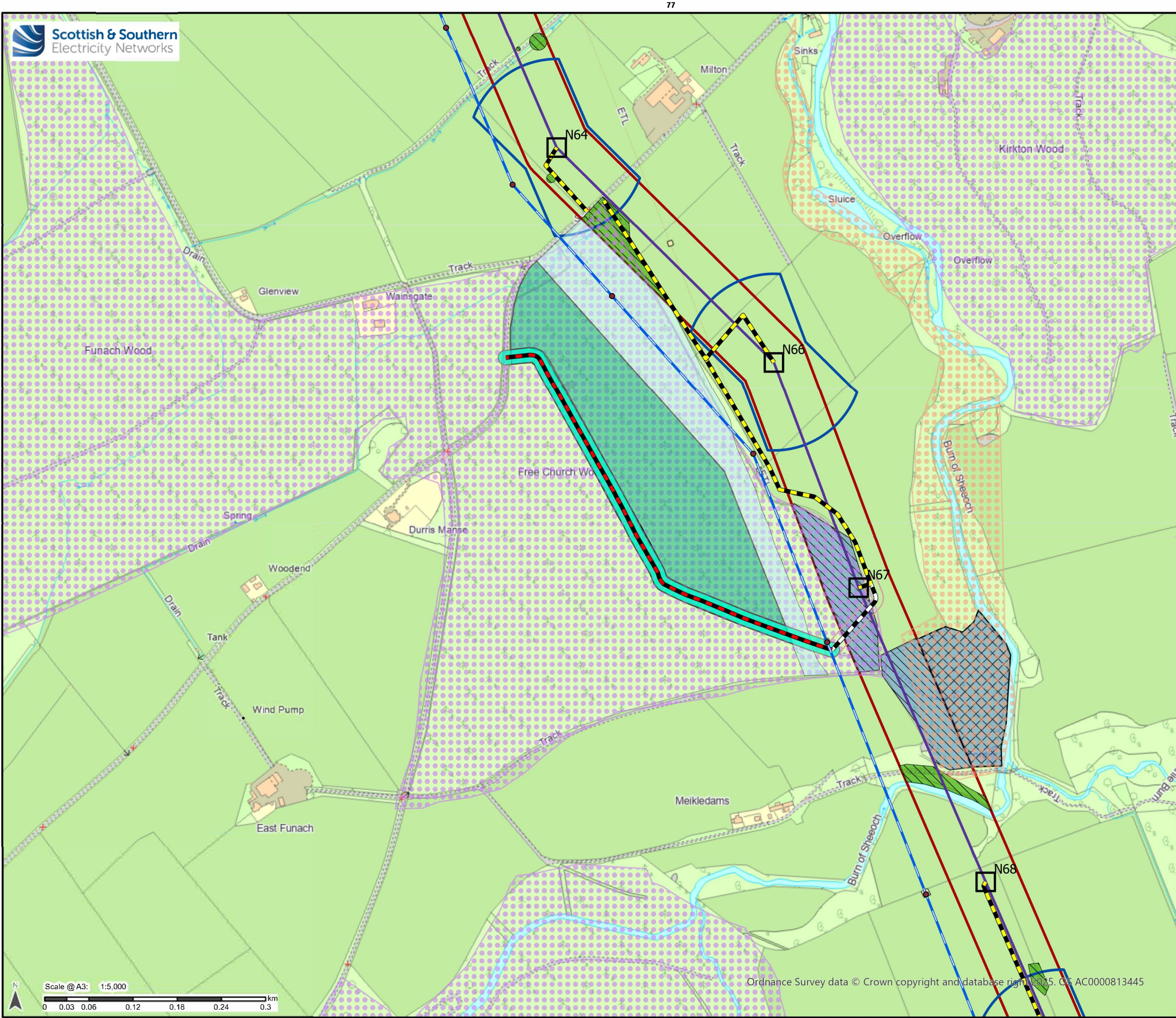


Figure 8.2.33 Proposed felling requirements

- Proposed Tower - 400kV (with tower number)
- Proposed OHL Alignment - 400kV
- 90m Operational Corridor

Ancient Woodland Inventory

- Ancient (of semi-natural origin)
- Long-Established (of plantation origin)
- ACCESS - EXISTING UPGRADE
- ACCESS - NEW STONE TEMP
- ALTERNATIVE NEW STONE TEMP
- Proposed Conductor Pulling Area (EPZ)
- MES-SSEN temp stone access track 20m buffer
- Kintore Fetteresson Diversion

Felling - Diversion

- OC
- MF

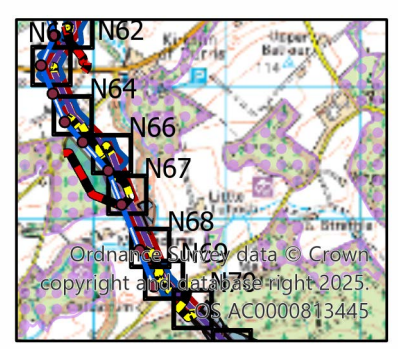
Proposed Felling requirements

- OC
- MF
- Access

Woodland Type

- BL
- CON

Kintore_Fetteresso_275_



Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of HMSO. Crown copyright and database right 2025 all rights reserved. Ordnance Survey Licence number AC0000813445

Project No:

Project:

Title:

Drawn by:

Date: 16/07/2025

Drawing: