

**Volume 5: Appendix 8.2.5 – Woodland
Report: Wester Letter Forest and (Part of)
Drum Hill**

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1. WOODLAND REPORT: WESTER LETTER FOREST AND (PART OF) DRUM HILL

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 Wester Letter Forest and part of Drum Hill and the relevant landholding property boundary is presented in **Figure 8.1.5: 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:
- 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 Wester Letter Forest (hereinafter referred to as the property) is situated on privately-owned property, and is located in a single contiguous grouping, ca. 2.67 km north of the village of Dunecht, Aberdeenshire (NGR NJ753120). Under the same ownership, but to the east, is a section of the broader Drum Hill native woodland (NGR NJ755121). A Forest Management Plan presently covers Wester Letter Forest (MPL310100), which expires in 2029. No plan covers the Drum Hill section. There are no active felling permissions for the woodlands in question.

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 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

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>

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 Access track requirements outside of the OC to facilitate tower construction on this property will pass through part of the mixed broadleaved area of this woodland. The felling associated with this access track will be included in the tree felling component of the Section 37 application.
- 1.4.5 Stump removal and residue mulching will be required for the installation of new access track construction.

1.5 Woodland Characteristics

- 1.5.1 This forest is primarily commercial and productive, mostly consisting of non-native conifers. There are some elements of amenity-focused/biodiversity-focussed woodland, which function so as to promote ecological services and visual effects in the landscape, in the far west and far east of the woodland complex. The species present within this property's OC felling are predominantly Sitka spruce, with a small quantity of mixed broadleaves.
- 1.5.2 The productive element of the forest has a uniform age structure, with the main age category being Pole Stage. The conifer area has had a first thinning performed. The western mixed broadleaved area's age class is Established, although the understorey regeneration is sparse on account of a high level of deer browsing. The eastern mixed broadleaved / open ground block is also established, and has a very low stem density, with open ground being predominant. Maximum top height for the conifers is ca. 18 m. The woodlands are not utilised for recreational purposes, with minimal public access taking place within them.
- 1.5.3 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.
- 1.5.4 The Scottish Forestry Map Viewer⁴ provides spatial data on the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland⁵ and classifies the woodland types into four categories:
 - Native woodland⁶;
 - Nearly-native woodland⁷;
 - Open land habitat⁸; and

⁵ 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>

⁶ Native Woodland – woods where the canopy cover is composed mainly of native species (ie over 50%)

⁷ 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.

⁸ Open Land Habitat – areas with <20% canopy cover of trees and shrubs adjoining a native woodland.

- Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)⁹.

1.5.5 Desk-based study of the woodland area, using both the Ancient Woodland Inventory and the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland, indicates that there are no designations for either at the property.

1.6 Windthrow Risk Impact

1.6.1 The forest is situated in a lowland arable agricultural zone. The predominant soil types¹⁰ are freely drained humus-iron podzols and brown earths.

1.6.2 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 Forest GALES¹¹ 2.5 Forest Research decision support system. Felling outwith the OC to a windfirm boundary is termed Management Felling and is presented within **Figure 8.2.5: Proposed Felling Requirements**.

1.6.3 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 14. This gives it a risk classification of being Moderately Exposed, with a low - moderate risk of windblow occurring. No significant windblow is present within any of the stands addressed in this report.

1.7 Woodland Management Impact

1.7.1 The OC Felling is confined to the northernmost quarter of the Wester Letter Forest, and largely includes trees that were to be clearfelled in future, so the primary impact of the proposed felling is to bring forward the felling of a portion of the overall forest. Management felling is recommended for the remainder of this northern portion, taking the felling to a significant ride to the south, which will serve as a wind-firm edge. Restocking of the management felling areas on a like-for-like species basis will allow a future windfirm edge to come into effect, simplifying future management.

1.7.2 An electrical hazard will be introduced adjacent to the remaining forest, 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"¹³ trees.

1.7.3 While track construction will take place through the northwest corner of the forest, the low density of trees in this section reduces the associated impact on these woodlands, and only a small proportion of the trees will need to be felled here.

1.7.4 Future forest management in the remaining forest should not be impacted by the OHL alignment, due to the landowner's access tracks which were previously used for forest management activities (ie thinning) not being impacted. Access hereby was previously from the south, while the OHL alignment only impacts access from the north.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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/>.

¹¹ 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.

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

¹³ 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/>

- 1.7.5 Management felling is recommended outside the OC along the southern edge of the OC, and at the northwest corner, as indicated on **Figure 8.2.5: Proposed Felling Requirements**. This will eliminate any open edges to the woodland which would be vulnerable to windblow, reducing the risk of future windblow occurring.
- 1.7.6 The Proposed Development will permanently remove existing pole-stage conifer forest and an area of broadleaved woodland from the OC where the OHL passed along the northern boundary of the forest in the vicinity of Towers N9 and N10. This will reduce the forestry restructuring/planting land available within the woodland property area, as the OC will be maintained clear of trees.

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 1: Woodland Removal for Infrastructure

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Infrastructure Felling	Conifer plantation	1.43 ha
	Mixed broadleaved woodland	1.16 ha

Table 2: Compensatory Planting

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Compensatory Planting Area	Mixed conifer or mixed broadleaves	2.59 ha

Table 3: Woodland Removal Impact of Infrastructure

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Total Loss of Woodland Area		2.59 ha
Total Compensatory Planting Area		2.59 ha
Total Net Loss of Woodland Area		0.00 ha

Table 4: Woodland Removal for Management Felling

Item	Woodland Type	Area
Management Felling		0.38 ha
Replanting/Restocking		0.38 ha
Net Loss of Woodland Area		0.00 ha

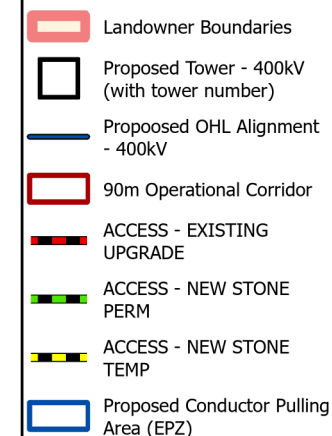
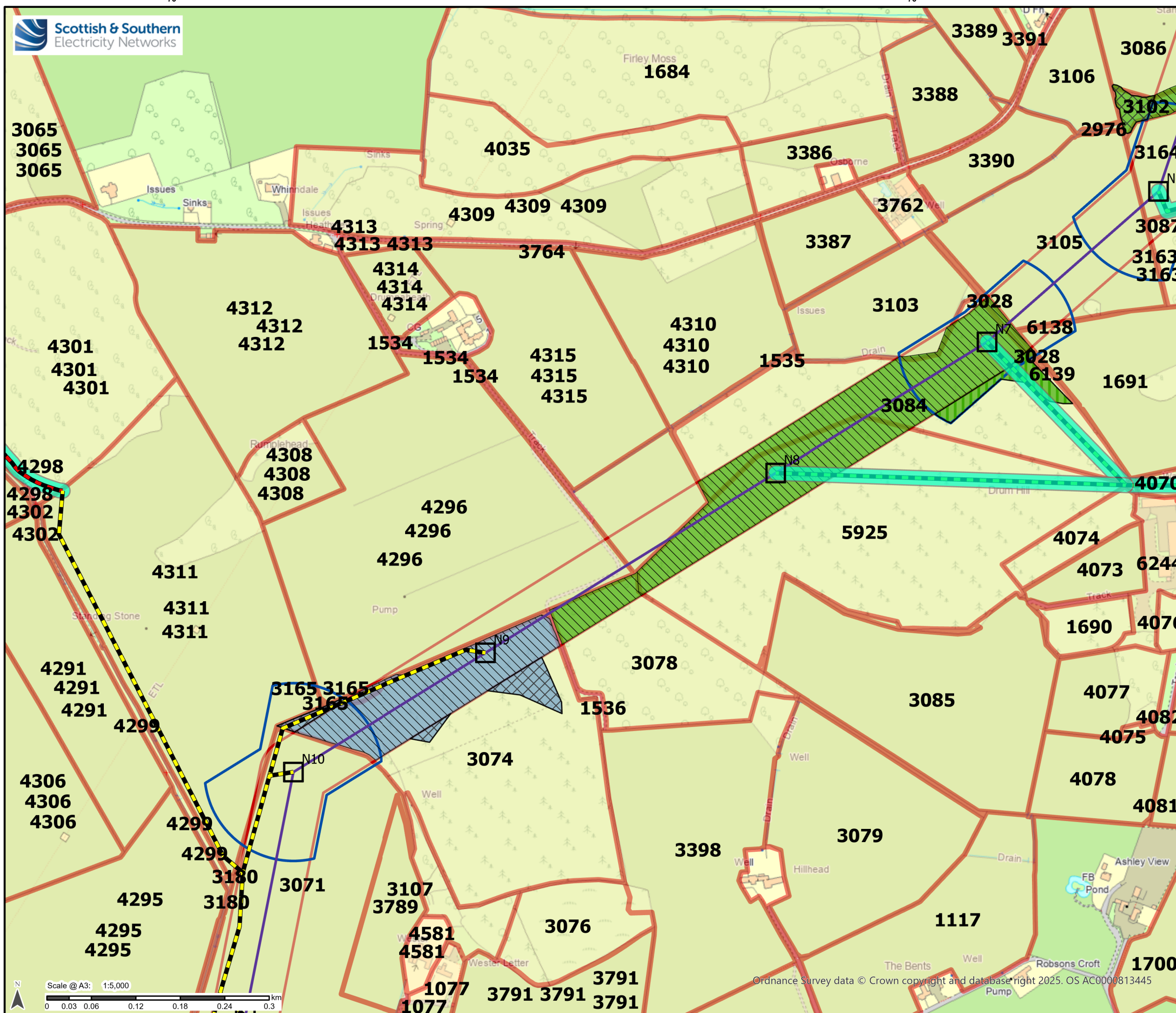
Note. Felling and restocking approval is via Scottish Forestry Felling Permission application process or Long-Term Forest Plan application or amendment process. This is to be sought by the landowner on whose land the management felling takes place, who is also responsible for all associated restocking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

1.10 Compensatory Planting

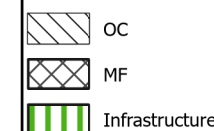
- 1.10.1 Compensatory planting to achieve the area quantity (hectares) of woodland removal, referenced above will be provided for the OHL and access track OC area and will be in accordance with the Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal of no net loss of woodland.

- 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.

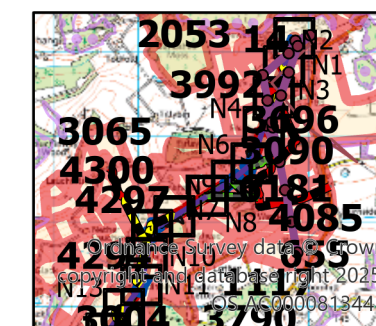
Figure 8.1.5 Landowner Boundaries



Proposed Felling requirements



Woodland Type



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