

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission

Lairg II Wind Farm Connection

Appendix 7.1 - Landscape and Visual Appraisal Methodology

June 2023



1. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL: APPROACH AND PROCESS

1.1 General Approach

1.1.1 This Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) was carried out broadly in accordance with best practice guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as set out in the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (3rd edition, 2013) (GLVIA3).

1.1.2 The assessment approach and process are summarised in the flow diagram below from GLVIA3.

3 Principles and overview of processes

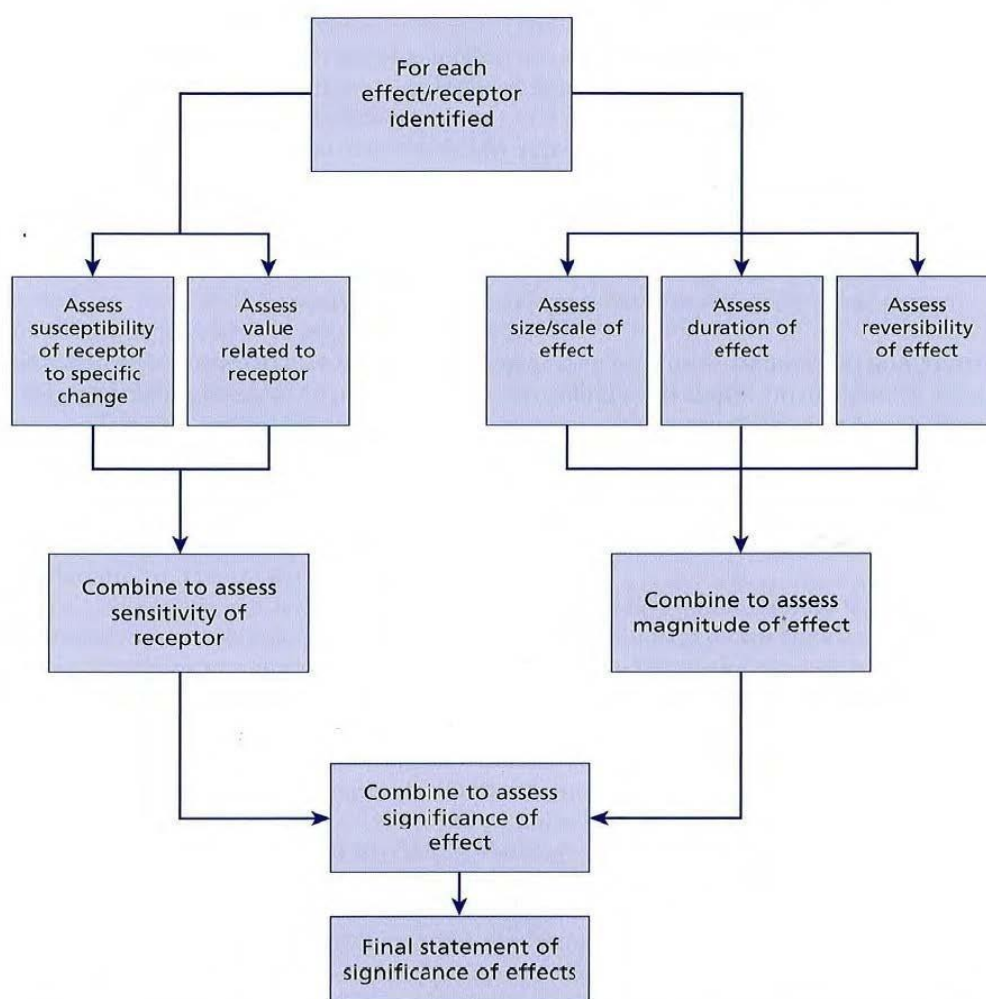


Figure 3.5 Assessing the significance of effects

1.1.3 In the text below there are a number of tables setting out the decision-making framework for assessing sensitivity and magnitude and how these are considered together to reach an assessment of significance.

1.1.4 In all cases these tables are guidelines, not hard and fast rules. Conclusions about the sensitivity of receptors, the magnitude of impacts and the significance of effects are always based on professional judgement.

1.2 Assigning value and sensitivity

Landscape Receptors

- 1.2.1 Landscape effects can be defined as the changes in the fabric, character and quality of the landscape as a result of a development, through:
- direct effects upon the landscape fabric (specific features and elements that make up the landscape);
 - indirect effects upon the overall patterns of elements and on the perceptual and aesthetic aspects that give rise to landscape character and regional and local distinctiveness; and
 - effects upon valued landscapes such as public open space, statutorily designated heritage assets and designated nature conservation sites with public access.
- 1.2.2 The sensitivity of the landscape receptors has been arrived at by considering the landscape receptor value and the landscape susceptibility of the receptor to the change proposed, generally in accordance with Tables 1 and 2 below.
- 1.2.3 Reference is normally made to the relevant Landscape Character Assessments.

Table 1: Landscape Receptor Value

Value	Recognition	Features	Quality / Condition
High	Typically, a landscape or feature of international or national recognition: World Heritage Sites, National Parks, National Scenic Areas, Gardens and Designed Landscapes.	Typically, a strong sense of place with landscape / features worthy of conservation; Absence of detracting features to occasional detracting features.	A very high-quality landscape / feature; attractive landscape / feature; exceptional / distinctive.
Medium	Regional recognition or undesignated, but locally valued landscape / features: Council landscape designation; Local Landscape Areas, Country Parks, Regional Parks.	Typically, a number of distinguishing features worthy of conservation; evidence of some degradation and some detracting elements.	Ordinary to good quality landscape / feature with some potential for substitution; a reasonably attractive landscape / feature; fairly typical and commonplace.
Low	Typically, an undesignated landscape / feature.	Few landscape features worthy of conservation, evidence of degradation with many detracting features.	Ordinary landscape / feature with high potential for substitution; quality that is typically commonplace and unremarkable; limited variety or distinctiveness.
Negligible	Typically, an undesignated landscape / feature.	No landscape features worthy of conservation; evidence of degradation with many detracting features.	Low quality landscape / feature with very high potential for substitution; limited variety or distinctiveness; commonplace.

Table 2: Susceptibility of the Landscape Receptor to Change

Value	Recognition
High	Low ability to accommodate the specific proposed change; undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation (receptor value) and / or achievement of relevant planning policies / strategies.
Medium	Moderate ability to accommodate the specific proposed change; some undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation (receptor value) and / or achievement of relevant planning policies / strategies.
Low	High ability to accommodate the specific proposed change; little or no undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation (receptor value) and / or achievement of relevant planning policies / strategies.
Negligible	Very high ability to accommodate the specific proposed change; no undue consequences for the maintenance of the baseline situation (receptor value) and/or achievement of relevant planning policies / strategies.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 1.2.4 Susceptibility and value can be combined in different ways although it is generally accepted that a combination of high susceptibility and high value is likely to result in the highest sensitivity, whereas a low susceptibility and low value is likely to result in the lowest level of sensitivity. As noted in GLVIA3 there can be complex relationships between the value attributed to a landscape and its susceptibility to change, which can be particularly important when considering change in or close to designated landscapes.
- 1.2.5 Landscapes considered highly susceptible to the proposed change are normally considered to be of high sensitivity unless there are particularly strong reasons associated with the landscape value that lead to a reduction in sensitivity.
- 1.2.6 Similarly, receptors considered of low or medium susceptibility are usually in the same category of sensitivity, unless there are reasons associated with the landscape value that lead to an increase in sensitivity.
- 1.2.7 Table 3, below, summarises typical characteristics of the different levels of sensitivity. It should be noted that the levels are indicative and the levels shown are arbitrary divisions of a continuum. Professional judgement is always used to determine the overall level.

Table 3: Landscape sensitivity

Level of sensitivity	Typical characteristics
High	<p>Areas of landscape character that are highly valued for their scenic quality (including most statutorily designated landscapes);</p> <p>Elements/features that could be described as unique or are nationally scarce;</p> <p>Mature vegetation with provenance such as ancient woodland or mature parkland trees; and/or</p>

Level of sensitivity Typical characteristics	
	<p>Mature landscape features which are characteristic of and contribute to a sense of place and illustrates time-depth in a landscape and if replaceable, could not be replaced other than in the long term.</p> <p>No or limited scope for substitution or positive enhancement.</p>
Medium	<p>Areas that have a positive landscape character but include some areas of alteration/degradation/or erosion of features;</p> <p>Perceptual/aesthetic aspects has some vulnerability to unsympathetic development; and/or features/elements that are locally commonplace; unusual locally but in moderate/poor condition; or mature vegetation that is in moderate/poor condition or readily replicated.</p> <p>Some scope for substitution or positive enhancement.</p>
Low	<p>Damaged or substantially modified landscapes with few characteristic features of value, Capable of absorbing major change; and</p> <p>Landscape elements/features that might be considered to detract from landscape character such as obtrusive man-made artefacts (e.g. power lines, large scale developments, etc.).</p> <p>Scope for substitution or positive enhancement.</p>
Negligible	<p>Areas that are relatively bland or neutral in character with few/no notable features;</p> <p>A landscape that includes areas of alteration/degradation or erosion of features; and/or</p> <p>Landscape elements/features that are common place or make little contribution to local distinctiveness.</p> <p>Opportunities for the restoration of landscape through mitigation measures associated with the proposal.</p>

Visual Receptors

1.2.8 Visual effects relate to changes in available views and the effect of those changes on people, including:

- the direct effects of the Proposed Development on the content and character of views (e.g. through intrusion or obstruction and / or the change or loss of existing elements in the view); and
- the overall effect on the change on visual amenity.

1.2.9 The sensitivity of a visual receptor reflects their susceptibility to change and any values which may be associated with the specific view. It varies depending on a number of factors such as the activity of the viewer, their reasons for being there and their expectations and the duration of view.

1.2.10 Certain views are highly valued for either their cultural or historical associations, which can increase the sensitivity of the viewer. However, whilst a valued view may serve to increase the overall visual receptor sensitivity, a low value will not necessarily reduce sensitivity.

1.2.11 GLVIA3 advises that it is helpful to consider (but not restricted to) the following:

- Nature of the view (full, partial or glimpsed);

- Proportion of the proposed development visible (full, most, part or none);
- Distance of the viewpoint from the proposed development and whether it would be the focus of the view or only a small element;
- Whether the view is stationary, transient or sequential; and
- The nature of the changes to the view.

1.2.12 Additionally, the seasonal effects of vegetation are considered, in particular the varying degree of screening and filtering of views.

1.2.13 The sensitivity of the visual receptors has been arrived at by considering the susceptibility of the visual receptor to the change proposed (guided by Table 4, below) and any values associated with the particular view (guided by Table 5, below).

Table 4: Susceptibility of the visual receptor to change

Sensitivity to the proposed change	Type of receptor
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents at home; • Walkers on long distance trails and mountain access routes, • Users of footpaths where the attractive nature of the countryside is a significant factor in the enjoyment of the walk, • Cyclists on national and local cycle routes designed to provide an attractive experience; • Road users on recognised tourist routes; • Visitors to landscape and heritage resources and other attractions where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to appreciation, experience and/or enjoyment.
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General road users; • Passengers on rail lines where the trains run at low or moderate speeds; • Users of public open space and footpaths where the nature of the surroundings is not a significant factor in the enjoyment of the activity; • Visitors to landscape and heritage resources and other attractions where views of the surroundings are a minor contributor to appreciation, experience and/or enjoyment.
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People at their place of work or shopping; • Users of high speed roads and passengers in trains running at high speed. • People engaged in recreational activities where the view of the surroundings is secondary to the enjoyment of the activity (such as playing or spectating at outdoor sports facilities) • Users of public open space and footpaths where the nature of the surroundings is irrelevant to the enjoyment of the activity
Negligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents at home; • Walkers on long distance trails and mountain access routes, • Users of footpaths where the attractive nature of the countryside is a significant factor in the enjoyment of the walk, • Cyclists on national and local cycle routes designed to provide an attractive experience; • Road users on recognised tourist routes; • Visitors to landscape and heritage resources and other attractions where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to appreciation, experience and/or enjoyment.

Table 5: Values associated with views (which may raise the receptor sensitivity)

Value	Recognition	Indicators of value
High	Recognised views from nationally or internationally important landscape or heritage resources, Scheduled Monuments; may be identified in planning policies or statutory documents.	High value / celebrated view; referred to in national or international guide books, tourist guides etc.; literary and art references; presence of interpretive facilities (e.g. visitor centre).
Medium	Recognised views from local or regionally important landscape or heritage resource, such as Local Landscape Areas or Conservation Areas; may be identified in local planning policies or supplementary planning documents.	Moderately valued view; referred to in local or regional guide books, tourist maps etc.; local literary and art references; presence of some interpretive facilities (e.g. parking places or sign boards)

Visual Sensitivity

- 1.2.14 As with landscape, susceptibility and value can be combined in different ways to form a judgement about the sensitivity of a given receptor. It is generally accepted that a combination of high susceptibility and high value is likely to result in the highest sensitivity, whereas a low susceptibility and low value is likely to result in the lowest level of sensitivity.
- 1.2.15 However, whilst a valued view may serve to increase the overall sensitivity of the visual receptor, a low value will not necessarily reduce sensitivity. Visual receptors considered highly susceptible to the proposed change are normally considered to be of high sensitivity unless there are particularly strong reasons associated with the value of the view that lead to a reduction in sensitivity.
- 1.2.16 Similarly, receptors considered of low or medium susceptibility are usually in the same category of sensitivity, unless there are reasons associated with the value of the view that lead to an increase in sensitivity.
- 1.2.17 Table 6, below, summarises typical characteristics of the different levels of sensitivity. It should be noted that the levels are indicative and the levels shown are arbitrary divisions of a continuum.

Table 6: Visual sensitivity criteria

Level of sensitivity	Typical characteristics
High	<p>A view or overall visual amenity which is an important reason for receptors being there (and therefore most views or overall visual amenity for highly susceptible receptors).</p> <p>A well balanced view containing attractive features and notable for its scenic quality.</p> <p>A view which is experienced by a large number of people and/ or recognised for its scenic qualities.</p>

Level of sensitivity	Typical characteristics
Medium	<p>A view or overall visual amenity which plays a relatively small part in the reason why a receptor would be there (and therefore most views or overall visual amenity for receptors of medium susceptibility).</p> <p>An otherwise attractive view that includes noticeable discordant features or overall visual amenity where there are noticeable visual detractors.</p>
Low	<p>A view or overall visual amenity which is unlikely to be part of the receptor's experience or reasons for being there (and therefore most views or overall visual amenity for receptors of low susceptibility).</p> <p>An unattractive view or overall visual amenity where there are many visual detractors.</p>
Negligible	<p>A view or overall visual amenity which is irrelevant to the receptor's experience or reasons for being there.</p>

1.3 Assessing Magnitude of Change

- 1.3.1 The magnitude of landscape and visual change depends upon a combination of factors including the size, scale and nature of change in relation to the context; the geographical extent of the area influenced; and its duration and reversibility, as summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Magnitude of Landscape and Visual Change

Value	Size, Scale and Nature	Extent	Duration and Reversibility
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupies much of the view. Obstructs a significant portion of the view. Forms a large or very noticeable or discordant element in the view. Considerable change to key features or many existing elements of the landscape. Introduces elements considered totally uncharacteristic to the existing landscape. A very noticeable change to the character of the landscape. 	Ranging from notable change over extensive area to intensive change over a more limited area.	Long term; permanent / non-reversible or partially reversible.
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occupies a noticeable portion of the view Obstructs a significant portion of the view. Forms a large or very noticeable or discordant element in the view. Some considerable change to existing landscape elements and /or landscape character; discernibly changes the surroundings of a 	Moderate changes in a localised area.	Medium term; semi-permanent or partially reversible.

Value	Size, Scale and Nature	Extent	Duration and Reversibility
	receptor, such that its baseline is partly altered. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readily noticeable. 		
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupies a small portion of the view; • small change to existing landscape elements and / or landscape character; • slight, but detectable impacts that do not alter the baseline of the receptor materially. • Not readily noticeable. 	Minor changes in a localised area.	Short term / temporary; partially reversible or reversible.
Negligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupies little or no portion of the view; • Hardly noticeable. • Limited or no change in existing landscape elements and / or landscape character; • Barely distinguishable change from baseline conditions. 	No change discernible.	Short term / temporary reversible.

1.4 Level of effect and significance criteria

- 1.4.1 The level of landscape and visual effect and whether it is significant or not is assessed based on the sensitivity of the affected receptor, and the magnitude of change caused by the Proposed Development, as set out for each above. The combined sensitivity and magnitude used to determine the level of effect and whether significant or not is summarised in Table 8 below. Note that effects can be either beneficial or adverse and in some cases neutral (neither beneficial nor adverse).

Table 8: Level of Landscape and Visual Effect

Magnitude	Sensitivity		
	High	Medium	Low
High	Major	Major to Moderate	Moderate to Minor
Medium	Major to Moderate	Moderate	Minor
Low	Moderate to Minor	Minor	Minor

- 1.4.2 The cells shaded in dark blue are generally considered to be significant. The light blue shaded cells denote effects which may be significant, or not significant, depending on the project being assessed and factors relating to the context and the specific landscape or visual receptor in question. Unshaded areas denote effects that would not be considered significant.
- 1.4.3 It should be noted that this matrix is intended as a framework only and that the level of effect will vary depending on the circumstances, the type and scale of development proposed, the baseline context and other factors.
- 1.4.4 The gradations of magnitude of change and level of effect used in the appraisal represent a continuum; the assessor uses professional judgement when gauging the level of effect and

determining whether it is significant or not. Table 9, below, gives typical descriptors of the levels of landscape and visual effects.

Table 9: Level of landscape and visual effect

Level of Effect	Landscape effect	Visual effect
Major	Considerable change over an extensive area of a highly sensitive landscape, fundamentally affecting the key characteristics and the overall impression of its character.	<p>The development would be a prominent feature or a noticeably discordant or enhancing feature substantially affecting overall visual amenity, or would result in a clearly noticeable change to a highly sensitive and well composed existing view.</p> <p>A clearly noticeable or substantial improvement or deterioration of the existing view.</p>
Moderate	Small or noticeable change to a highly sensitive landscape or more intensive change to a landscape of medium or low sensitivity, affecting some key characteristics and the overall impression of its character	<p>The development would be a noticeable feature or a somewhat discordant or enhancing feature affecting overall visual amenity, or would result in a noticeable change to a highly sensitive and well composed existing view, or would be prominent within a less well composed and less sensitivity view.</p> <p>A noticeable improvement or deterioration of the existing view.</p>
Minor	Small change to a limited area of landscape of high or medium sensitivity or a more widespread area of a less sensitive landscape, affecting few characteristics without altering the overall impression of its character.	<p>The development would be a visible but not particularly noticeable feature or a slightly discordant or enhancing feature affecting overall visual amenity, or would result in a small change to a highly sensitive and well composed existing view, or would be noticeable within a less well composed and less sensitivity view.</p> <p>A small improvement or deterioration of the existing view.</p>
Negligible	No discernible improvement or deterioration to the existing landscape character.	No discernible improvement or deterioration in the existing view.