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## 14. LAND USE AND AGRICULTURE

### 14.1 Introduction

- 14.1.1 This chapter assesses the potential effects of the Proposed Development on land use and agriculture. The chapter sets out the baseline conditions, identifies sensitive receptors and considers the potential effects associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Development.
- 14.1.2 Additional information which supports this chapter is presented in the following figures and technical appendix:
- **Volume 3, Figure 14.1: Soil Series;**
  - **Volume 3, Figure 14.2: Land Capability for Agriculture;** and
  - **Volume 4, Technical Appendix 14.1: Land Use and Agriculture Baseline.**

### 14.2 Legislation, Policy, and Guidance

- 14.2.1 The National Planning Framework 4<sup>200</sup> (NPF4) categorises agricultural land in Class 1, 2 and 3.1 as prime agricultural land. Policy 5 – Soils, in the NPF4 indicates that proposals on prime agricultural land will only be supported where it is for essential infrastructure and there is a specific locational need and no other suitable site.
- 14.2.2 Local policy as set out in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan<sup>201</sup> Policy R2 indicates that brownfield sites are preferred over greenfield for development, and at Policy PR1 that there is a presumption against developments that have a negative effect on prime agricultural land, unless public economic or social benefits clearly outweigh any negative effects on the land, and there are no reasonable alternative sites.
- 14.2.3 The Scottish Soil Framework<sup>202</sup> aims to “*promote the sustainable management and protection of soils consistent with the economic, social and environmental needs of Scotland*”. The document acknowledges that there is no coherent soil protection policy in effect in Scotland.

### 14.3 Assessment Methodology and Significance Criteria

#### *Scope of the Assessment*

- 14.3.1 The assessment considers the potential for permanent or temporary land take in relation to classified agricultural land. The assessment also considers the potential permanent and temporary effects on farm viability and other farm businesses affected by the Proposed Development, and the ability of farmers and landowners to achieve any existing commitments made under relevant environmental schemes such as the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme.
- 14.3.2 The assessment considers the potential for permanent or temporary land use impacts to private residential properties (non-agricultural) and associated land parcels due to potential demolition, land take and changes to access.

#### Issues Scoped Out

- 14.3.3 The effects during operation are expected to be limited to impacts associated only with regular maintenance activities. As there will be no additional land take effects following construction, impacts to land use and agriculture are scoped out for the operation stage of the Proposed Development.

<sup>200</sup> The Scottish Government, (2023). National Planning Framework 4. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/>.

<sup>201</sup> Aberdeenshire Council, (2023). Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. Available at <https://aberdeenshire.gov.uk/planning/plans-and-policies/ldp-2023/>.

<sup>202</sup> The Scottish Government, (2009) The Scottish Soil Framework. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2009/05/scottish-soil-framework/documents/0081576-pdf/0081576-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/0081576.pdf>.

### Extent of the Study Area

14.3.4 The Study Area for the assessment of impacts on land use and agriculture comprises the Site Boundary (as shown on **Volume 3, Figure 3.1: Proposed Development**).

### Consultation Undertaken to Date

14.3.5 **Table 14-1** provides a summary of the consultation activities undertaken in support of the preparation of this assessment.

**Table 14-1 Summary of Consultation relevant to land use and agriculture**

Body / organisation	Type of Consultation / Date Received	Response	How the comments have been considered
Aberdeenshire Council	Pre-application advice request (ENQ/2023/0426) 12 May 2023	The Council noted that the Site does include various pockets of Class 3.1 prime agricultural land.	An assessment of impacts to agricultural land has been included within this chapter.
Aberdeenshire Council	Response to the EIA Scoping Report (ENQ/2023/1465) 04 January 2024	No comments or issues raised in respect of the approach to the Land Use and Agriculture assessment.	The assessment is in line with the approach set out in the EIA Scoping Report.

### Method of Baseline Data Collation

14.3.6 The assessment has mainly relied upon information from published sources and from specific liaison and consultation, including information obtained from farmers. Additional information obtained from the SSEN Transmission Lands Team and other environmental topics has also been considered.

14.3.7 Published data sources used to establish the agricultural baseline include the National Soil Map of Scotland<sup>203</sup>, data from the James Hutton Institute<sup>204</sup> and localised soil series mapping from The Macaulay Institute for Soil Research<sup>205</sup>. A baseline report detailing the Land Capability for Agriculture (LCA) assessment is included in **Volume 4, Technical Appendix 14.1: Land Use and Agriculture Baseline**.

14.3.8 Data logs and photographs produced during site visits undertaken by the Ecology and Ground Investigation teams have also been considered in light of the published information.

14.3.9 The location and number of residential properties that would be affected by the Proposed Development were initially identified through the design process by the SSEN Transmission Lands Team, as well as baseline resources such as using Ordnance Survey (OS) mapping and Google Earth.

14.3.10 Farm Impact Assessment (FIA) questionnaires have been sent to all affected farm holdings, either directly or via a land agent to gather baseline information on farm holdings and their use (**Volume 4, Technical Appendix 14.2: Example Farm Impact Assessment Questionnaire** includes a copy of the questionnaire adopted to understand the use of farms). There has also been regular discussions and meetings between landowners and SSEN Transmission representatives throughout the project.

<sup>203</sup> Scottish Government, (2023). National Soil Map of Scotland. [Online] Available at <https://soils.environment.gov.scot/maps/soil-maps/national-soil-map-of-scotland/>.

<sup>204</sup> The James Hutton Institute, (2024). [Online] Available at <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/learning/exploringscotland/soils>.

<sup>205</sup> The Macaulay Institute for Soil Research (1962). Soil Survey of Scotland. Peterhead & Fraserburgh – Sheets 87 & 97. Available at View map: Macaulay Land Use Research Institute, Sheets 87 & 97 - Peterhead & Fraserburgh - Soil Survey of Scotland, 1950s-1980s (nls.uk).

### *Determining Magnitude of Change and Sensitivity of Receptors*

- 14.3.11 The sensitivity of agricultural land to change is assessed according to its LCA classification. Class 1 land is capable of producing a very wide range of crops with no or very minor physical limitations affecting agricultural use. Class 2 land is capable of producing a wide range of crops, with minor physical limitations affecting agricultural use. Class 3.1 is land capable of producing a moderate range of crops with high yields of cereals and grass and lower yields of potatoes and other vegetables. These classes are collectively considered to represent the prime agricultural land. Classes 3.2, 4, 5, 6 and 7, and their subdivisions, are not prime agricultural land. The differentiation is reflected in the sensitivity criteria.
- 14.3.12 The sensitivity of farm holdings to change is determined according to the degree of disruption caused by the construction and presence of the Proposed Development.
- 14.3.13 The magnitude of change to agricultural land reflects the area of land that is required either permanently or temporarily by the Proposed Development and therefore removed from agricultural use. The magnitude of change to farm holdings reflects practical considerations such as land severance and loss of buildings or infrastructure.
- 14.3.14 The criteria for defining receptor sensitivity for the purpose of the assessment on Land Use and Agriculture are provided in **Table 14-2**. All residential private properties (non-agricultural) are considered as High sensitivity for the purpose of this assessment.

**Table 14-2 Criteria for Determining Receptor Sensitivity**

Sensitivity of Receptor	Agricultural Land LCA Classification	Farm Holdings
High	Classes 1, 2 and 3.1	Farm types in which the operation of the enterprise is dependent on the spatial relationship of land to key infrastructure, and where there is a requirement for frequent and regular access between the two, or dependent on the existence of the infrastructure itself, e.g. dairying, irrigated arable cropping and field-scale horticulture, and intensive livestock or horticultural production.
Medium	Class 3.2	Farm types in which there is a degree of flexibility in the normal course of operations, e.g. combinable arable farms and grazing livestock farms (other than dairying).
Low	Classes 4 and 5	Off-lying areas of commercial land and non-commercially farmed land.
Negligible	Classes 6 and 7	None.

- 14.3.15 The criteria for defining the magnitude of change for the purpose of the assessment on land use and agriculture are provided in **Table 14-3**.

**Table 14-3 Criteria for Magnitude of Change**

Magnitude	Agricultural Land	Farm Holdings	Private Residential Properties
High	Development would directly lead to the loss of over 50 ha of agricultural land.	The Proposed Development results in the loss of the farm holding or renders the residual land holding non-viable.	Loss of resource and/or quality and integrity of resource; severe damage to key characteristics, features or elements, e.g. direct acquisition and demolition of buildings and direct development of land.
Medium	Development would directly lead to the loss of between 20 ha and 50 ha of agricultural land.	The Proposed Development results in changes being required to the management of the residual farm	Partial loss of/damage to key characteristics, features or elements, e.g. partial removal or substantial amendment to access or acquisition of land compromising viability of property.


**Scottish & Southern**

Magnitude	Agricultural Land	Farm Holdings	Private Residential Properties
TRANSMISSION		holding in order that it can remain viable.	
Low	Development would directly lead to the loss of between 5 ha and 20 ha of agricultural land.	The Proposed Development does not affect the ongoing management of the residual land.	A discernible change in attributes, quality; minor loss of, or alteration to, one (maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements, e.g. amendment to access or acquisition of land resulting in changes to operating conditions that do not compromise overall viability of property.
Negligible	Development would directly lead to the loss of less than 5 ha of agricultural land.	No impact on the farm holding.	Very minor loss or detrimental alteration to one or more characteristics, features or elements, e.g. acquisition of non-operational land or buildings not directly affecting the viability of property.

14.3.16 The significance of the effect is then determined according to the matrix as set out in **Table 14-4**. Effects that are Major or Moderate are considered to be significant in EIA terms.

**Table 14-4 Effect Significance Matrix**

		Sensitivity of Receptor/Receiving Environment to Change/Effect			
		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Magnitude of Change/Effect	High	Major	Major	Moderate	Negligible
	Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

*Limitations and Assumptions*

14.3.17 No site-specific surveys have been undertaken for the purpose of this assessment. It is assumed that the existing published data is an accurate reflection of site conditions.

14.3.18 The information provided in the returned FIAs is incomplete in some cases. Where information is missing, the assessment has relied upon information obtained from the SSEN Transmission Lands Team and through information provided through site visits by other environmental topic teams. Multiple attempts were made to acquire the FIA information including with land agents via Microsoft Teams meeting, telephone calls and emails. In these cases where FIA information has not been provided, the assessment has relied upon information obtained through baseline sources, SSEN Transmission Lands Team, and through site visits made by other environmental topic teams. Where an FIA has not been returned, the area of agricultural land attributed to that holding has been based on publicly available Land Registry information provided by the SSEN Transmission Lands Team, it is assumed to be suitable for the purpose of assessment.

#### 14.4 Baseline Conditions

*Land Use and Residential Properties*

14.4.1 The area where the Proposed Development is located is an extensive, open, agricultural landscape bounded by post and wire fences with hedgerows and mature trees, with land use predominantly farmland. The site has predominantly remained undeveloped, with no settlements within the Site Boundary.

14.4.2 However, there are dispersed buildings used as farmhouses and a single residential property and garden (Roer Teach). There is one residential property associated with Inverveddie House and two associated with Netherton Farm House, although these are currently disused. There are an additional four private properties outwith the

proposed Site Boundary; at Tiffery, Longleys, Inverveddie Cottage and Langfield House. The Applicant is in advanced negotiations to acquire/have acquired these properties.

- 14.4.3 There is a National Grid Gas Transmission high pressure main that runs through the north area of the Site, crossing the north and northwest Site Boundary. This would be maintained within the Proposed Development with an identified corridor. There are also existing overhead electricity lines that connect to existing buildings on the Site that would be removed as part of the Proposed Development.

#### *Agricultural Land*

- 14.4.4 The Site extends to approximately 230 ha, primarily of agricultural land. The centre and southeast of the Site are mainly under grass whilst the north and west are in arable use. The topography is generally characterised by a north-facing slope which also facilitates drainage of the land.
- 14.4.5 The underlying geology across most of the Site is Forest of Deer Pluton, comprising dark granite. In a small area in the west of the Site the bedrock geology unit has variable characteristics and includes quartzite, mudstone, siltstone, sandstones and limestone. Superficial deposits cover most of the Site and comprise poorly sorted gravelly and sandy sediment.
- 14.4.6 The mapped soil information (**Volume 3, Figure 14.1**) shows the Tarves association across the Site, within which are four series:
- Pitmedden series – variably calcareous gleys, poorly drained;
  - Tarves series – brown forest soils, freely draining;
  - Thistlyhill series – brown forest soils, imperfectly drained; and
  - Pettymuck series – peaty gleys, very poorly drained.
- 14.4.7 The mapped LCA information (**Volume 3, Figure 14.2**) shows the agricultural land at the Site as mostly Class 3.2 (164.3 ha, or 72%) and the remainder as mostly Class 3.1 (58.0 ha, or 26%), which is prime agricultural land, with a small area of Class 4.2 (4.7 ha or 2%) in the north.
- 14.4.8 The prime agricultural land (Class 3.1) corresponds to the well-drained sandy soils and imperfectly-drained sandy clay soils. The lower quality land (Class 3.2) corresponds with poorly-drained and very poorly-drained sandy clays over silty clays and the Class 4.2 with alluvial soils.

#### *Farm Holdings*

- 14.4.9 Land from three separate farm holdings and a residential property would be required permanently for the Proposed Development, as detailed in **Table 14-5**. Temporary land take would be required from an additional three holdings for the installation of drainage pipes, however it is envisaged that the land will be reinstated immediately with no lasting effects.

**Table 14-5 Farm Holdings**

Holding Name	Holding Type	Tenure	Area Farmed* (hectares)	Agri-Environment Schemes	Other Enterprise
Netherton Farm	Cattle grazing – two herds of 30 cattle	Owner-occupied	127 ha*	Unknown	None
Inverveddie Farm	Combinable arable	Owner-occupied	184 ha	None identified in FIA	Agricultural machinery manufacturing and sales; haulage company and grain store business.
Cairngall Farms	General cropping (potatoes and grain) and dairy cattle	Owner-occupied	305 ha*	Unknown	Salmon and other river fishings

Holding Name	Holding Type	Tenure	Area Farmed* (hectares)	Agri-Environment Schemes	Other Enterprise
Monyruiy	General cropping and combinable arable; some grass (sheep)	Owner-occupied	126 ha	None identified in FIA	Two 225 kW wind turbines
Messrs Nicol	Unknown	Unknown	26 ha*	Unknown	Unknown
Messrs Alexander	Arable	Owner-occupied	106 ha*	Unknown	Unknown

\* Values have been obtained from the SSEN Transmission Lands Team, derived from Land Registry data.

#### *Future Baseline*

14.4.10 If the Proposed Development was not to proceed, there would be no change to the baseline conditions in future. Climate change and technological developments may have an effect on future land management practices, however these are unknown and therefore cannot be included in any assessment.

14.4.11 The Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan sets aside land for future development, such as housing and employment land, in the Council area, as well as the broad principles for future development. There is no designated development land within the Site Boundary, with the closest being approximately 1.5 km to the east of the Site at Longside Airfield, which is designated as employment land.

## **14.5 Assessment of Effects, Mitigation and Residual Effects**

### *Mitigation by Design*

14.5.1 As detailed, in **Volume 2, Chapter 4: Site Selection and Alternatives**, a holistic approach to the selecting the Proposed Development Site has been undertaken, which has sought to maximise the potential efficiencies from a single co-ordinated and co-located Site for both alternating and direct current transmission infrastructure. The location of the Site therefore represents the optimum location within the region for such with due regard to the influence of technical and environment constraints. Furthermore, the scale, form and layout of the Proposed Development also represents the most efficient solution to delivering the Proposed Development, which seeks to minimise potential environmental and amenity effects.

14.5.2 Following construction, agricultural land not required through the operational phase (particularly the areas used temporarily for drainage works) will be reinstated to ensure it can return to existing agricultural use where this is the agreed end use; and land not required for built development will retain soils to ensure it is suitable to meet the various habitats proposed within the Site, such as mixed and broadleaved woodland planting, wet woodland, and acidic and marshy grassland.

### *Construction Phase*

14.5.3 The construction of the Proposed Development would involve the progressive loss of agricultural land. The permanent built aspects of the Proposed Development comprise a HVDC switching station, two HVDC converter stations, a 400 kV and 132 kV substation, operations and spares buildings, underground cabling and site drainage and soft landscaping and a welfare area. Temporary aspects of the design required during construction include laydown areas and a temporary construction compound that includes welfare area. Other than approximately 15.6 ha of land required temporarily for the installation of drainage pipes, it is assumed that all of the agricultural land within the Site Boundary would be lost to the Proposed Development.



#### Agricultural Land Quality

- 14.5.4 The Proposed Development would result in the loss of 58.0 ha of agricultural land in Class 3.1 and 153.4 ha of agricultural land in Class 3.2 in the permanent development area. The areas required temporarily for the installation of drainage pipes would extend to 10.9 ha of Class 3.2 and 4.7 ha of Class 4.2.
- 14.5.5 The Class 3.1 agricultural land is a resource of high sensitivity, the Class 3.2 is of medium sensitivity and the Class 4.2 is of low sensitivity. The magnitude of change to both Classes 3.1 and 3.2 is high. The Proposed Development would have a direct, permanent, **Major Adverse** effect on Class 3.1 and 3.2 agricultural land, which is **significant**.
- 14.5.6 The areas required temporarily for the installation of the drainage pipes to the north and west of the permanent development area are mapped as Class 3.2 and 4.2. The land is a resource of medium to low sensitivity and the magnitude of change is low, with the land required for a short period to install the pipes, following which it would be returned to agricultural use. The Proposed Development would have a direct, temporary, **Minor Adverse** effect on the Class 3.2 and 4.2 land required for the drainage pipes, which is **not significant**.
- 14.5.7 Although the area required permanently would be a high magnitude of change, the permanent loss of agricultural land would represent 0.03 % of Aberdeenshire's farmland. Moreover, Aberdeenshire produces around 26 % of Scotland's arable crops, despite having only 9 % of the country's agricultural land. Aberdeenshire therefore contains a relatively high proportion of prime land. In this context, the Proposed Development would have a **Negligible (not significant)** impact on Aberdeenshire's agricultural output.

#### Farm Holdings

- 14.5.8 The Proposed Development would permanently require land associated with three farm holdings. Land would be required temporarily from three additional farm holdings to install new drainage pipes.
- 14.5.9 Nethererton Farm is a holding of medium sensitivity. The Proposed Development would result in the permanent loss of approximately 89 ha (estimated from Land Registry data to represent 70% of the farm area) of grazing land. Through consultation with the landowner the cattle herds will be moved to Parkhill Farm which lies adjacent and is under the same ownership. Farm buildings used for storage and feeding would also be lost and facilities for this would need to be found elsewhere. There would therefore be a medium magnitude of change. The Proposed Development would have a permanent **Moderate Adverse** effect on Nethererton Farm, which is **significant**.
- 14.5.10 Inverveddie Farm is a holding of medium sensitivity. The Proposed Development would permanently require 29 ha (16% of the farm area). It is understood that the diversification enterprises are mainly located outside of the Site Boundary, however the FIA has identified temporary disturbance to the grain store as a result of the site of the farm buildings being required permanently. As the Proposed Development would require changes to the management of the residual land, the magnitude of change is considered to be medium. The Proposed Development would have a permanent **Moderate Adverse** effect on Inverveddie Farm, which is **significant**.
- 14.5.11 Cairngall Farms is a holding of high sensitivity due to potatoes forming around two-thirds of the crop rotation. The dairy herd is also a high sensitive enterprise but is understood to be grazed and housed outside the Site Boundary. The Proposed Development would require the permanent use of 98 ha (estimated from Land Registry information to represent 32% of the farm area). There is a potential for additional land to be purchased to continue with the crop rotation however it is not certain that suitable, comparable land would be available and therefore the magnitude of change would be medium. The Proposed Development would have a permanent **Major Adverse** effect on Cairngall Farms, which is **significant**.
- 14.5.12 Monyruy is a holding of medium to high sensitivity due to potatoes within the crop rotation. The Proposed Development would require the temporary use of 9 ha (7% of the farm area), which would be a temporary low magnitude of change, leading to a temporary **Minor Adverse** effect on the farm, which is **not significant**.



- 14.5.13 Land owned by Messrs Nicol is assumed to be a holding of medium sensitivity. The Proposed Development would require the temporary use of 2 ha (estimated from Land Registry information to represent 7% of the farm area), which would be a temporary low magnitude of change, leading to a temporary **Minor Adverse** effect on the farm, which is **not significant**.
- 14.5.14 Land owned by Messrs Alexander is a holding of medium sensitivity. The Proposed Development would require the temporary use of 0.2 ha (estimated from Land Registry information to represent 0.2% of the farm area), which would be a temporary negligible magnitude of change, leading to a temporary **Negligible Adverse** effect on the farm, which is not significant.
- 14.5.15 Additional adverse effects may also arise if agricultural drainage systems were damaged during construction which could potentially impact land within and outside the Site Boundary. Provided there was an assurance to rectify damage incurred to drains, any effect of disruption is anticipated to be minor, which is **not significant**.
- 14.5.16 The possibility of transmission of agricultural pests and notifiable diseases also needs to be considered, in particular at Netherton Farm where Japanese knotweed is confirmed to be present, although this will be removed prior to construction following specialist advice. The detailed planning of soil movements throughout the construction stage will need to take account of any residual risk on the basis of the specialist advice.
- 14.5.17 The design process initially considered agricultural and other land uses in the site selection process. Ongoing consultation with landowners will further inform the design. Any land disturbed during the construction phase of the Proposed Development but not required throughout the operation phase will be reinstated.
- 14.5.18 Prior to additional mitigation measures, the Proposed Development would have direct, permanent, **Major Adverse (and significant)** effect on agricultural land. There would be a permanent **Major Adverse (significant)** effect on one holding and a permanent **Moderate Adverse (significant)** effect on two holdings. The temporary effects on three farm holdings would be **Minor Adverse** or **Negligible (not significant)**.

#### Private Residential Properties

- 14.5.19 Roer Teach (with a land area of approximately 0.5 ha), is located within the Proposed Development Site Boundary in the southern part of the Site. The property consists of a residence and garden which would be permanently taken for the Proposed Development. Residential properties are considered high sensitivity, and there be a high magnitude of change as the full property would be required for the Proposed Development. Therefore, the Proposed Development would have a permanent **Major Adverse** effect on Roer Teach, which is **significant**.
- 14.5.20 There is also one residential property associated with Inverveddie Farm and two associated with Netherton Farm that would be demolished for the Proposed Development. Residential properties are considered high sensitivity, and there be a high magnitude of change as the full property would be taken for the Proposed Development. Therefore, the Proposed Development would have a permanent **Major Adverse (significant)** effect on these properties, even though the residential properties associated with Netherton Farm are currently disused.
- 14.5.21 There are an additional four private properties outwith the proposed Site Boundary; at Tiffery, Longleys, Inverveddie Cottage and Langfield House. The Applicant is in advanced negotiations to acquire/have acquired these properties. There would not be any land take or demolition required from any of these properties either during the temporary construction period or permanently for the operation of the Proposed Development. However, it is possible that there would be a permanent change to their existing use as residential properties. Residential properties are considered high sensitivity, and there would be low magnitude of change due to acquisition of property that changes its use but does not compromise its overall viability. This is predicted to result in permanent **Moderate Adverse (significant)** effect to these four properties.

#### Additional Mitigation Measures

14.5.22 There are no measures available to mitigate the permanent loss of agricultural land and residential properties. Mitigation of the effects of land loss from farm holdings are largely outside the scope of this assessment and relate to private negotiations between the parties.

14.5.23 SSEN Transmission General Environmental Management Plans (GEMPs) will be in effect and can be used as a measure to safeguard the soils that will need to be disturbed and moved (GEMPs are provided in **Volume 4, Technical Appendix 3.2: General Environmental Management Plans (GEMPs) and Species Protection Plans (SPPs)**). A Soil Management plan (TG-NET-ENV-511) and Restoration plan (TG-NET-ENV-522) form part of the GEMPs and include broad principles to be followed for the handling and storage of agricultural soils to ensure impacts on the soil resource are minimised during construction and reinstatement. Other plans that form part of the GEMP that are relevant to mitigating effects on agricultural land are the Dust Management Plan (TG-NET-ENV-520) to control dust arisings on adjacent crops; and the Biosecurity Plan (TG- NET-ENV-521) to control the spread of plant and animal diseases, parasites and non-native species.

14.5.24 Other good practice measures will be put in place to mitigate adverse effects on landowners and farmers during construction. These measures will include:

- maintaining details of the owners, occupiers and agents for land adjacent to the Site Boundary;
- maintaining details of the husbandry associated with the areas of land adjacent to the Site Boundary;
- agreeing access arrangements with landowners and tenants prior to the commencement of construction and maintaining access to all agricultural land holdings outwith/adjacent to the Site Boundary during construction;
- identifying field drainage layouts and outfalls into watercourses or ditches and ensuring these are not severed by construction works;
- identifying and maintaining fixed water supplies for livestock on land adjacent to the Site Boundary;
- providing and maintaining appropriate stock-proof fencing where adjacent land to the Site Boundary is in use for grazing livestock;
- reinstating any agricultural land which is used temporarily during construction; and
- providing a method statement for stripping, handling, storage and replacement of soils to reduce risks associated with soil degradation on areas of land to be returned to agriculture following construction.

#### Residual Effects

14.5.25 Due to the area required and the inclusion of Class 3.1 quality land, the residual effect of the Proposed Development on agricultural land remains **Major Adverse**, which is **significant**. There would also be significant residual permanent effects on three of the agricultural land holdings and eight private residential properties.

#### *Operational Phase*

14.5.26 There are no effects anticipated to arise in relation to Land Use and Agriculture during the operational phase of the Proposed Development. Effects have been scoped out of the assessment.

#### *Cumulative Effects*

14.5.27 The effect of the Proposed Development on agricultural land is assessed as **Major Adverse**. No additional Cumulative Development would result in a different cumulative effect. However, a total of six Cumulative Developments within a 3 km radius of the Site have been identified as potentially affecting agricultural land use (please refer to **Chapter 5, Table 5-2 Cumulative Developments** for more information on the Cumulative Developments within the cumulative Study Area).

14.5.28 Four of the Cumulative Developments are other SSEN Transmission projects that would connect into the Proposed Development. Two Cumulative Developments are for the laying of underground transmission cables: Spittal to Peterhead HVDC Underground Cable is anticipated to comprise a 13 km route with an approximate

50 m construction corridor (approximately 65 ha affected land during construction); and Eastern Green Link 3 HVDC Underground Cable is anticipated to have a 9 km route also with an approximate 50 m construction corridor (approximately 45 ha affected land during construction). The preferred routes are still under consultation.

- 14.5.29 An initial Red/Amber/Green (RAG) assessment has been undertaken for Spittal to Peterhead Underground Cable options. The northern options for the route have been assessed as Green, or low impact on agriculture, however two options would pass through peatland which would be a high impact for soil resources. The southern route options have been assessed as Red, or high potential for the option to be constrained by agriculture due to the requirement to cross Classes 3.1 and 3.2 agricultural land, although it is indicated that detailed routing would avoid Class 3.1 where possible.
- 14.5.30 The onshore cable options for Eastern Green Link 3 HVDC Underground Cable have been subject to the same RAG assessment, and all are assessed as Amber, or medium potential for the option to be constrained, for agriculture.
- 14.5.31 Effects on agricultural land and farm holdings from both proposed cable routes would be temporary and short-term. The cables would be buried underground, and the agricultural use should be reinstated as soon as the cable is laid. At standard cable burial depths it is unlikely to affect the ability to farm on top of the cable, however, if there was any potential conflict with deeper farming activities, further investigation would be undertaken by SSEN Transmission to mitigate impacts. Therefore, there are no significant cumulative effects to consider.
- 14.5.32 The further two SSEN Transmission projects involve overhead transmission lines. The Netherton/Peterhead 400 kV OHL Diversion and Repurposing would require the removal and replacement of some overhead line towers as the overhead line connection between the existing 400 kV substation at New Deer and existing 400 kV substation at Boddam, Peterhead, would be diverted into Netherton Hub.
- 14.5.33 The Beauly to Peterhead Overhead Line is split into 11 sections, each with multiple route options. A RAG assessment of each of the preferred routes within each section indicates that six would be subject to Red, or high constraints, and five would be subject to Green, or low constraints, in terms of agriculture.
- 14.5.34 In both cases, the effects on agricultural land and farm holdings would mostly be temporary and short-term, other than for very small areas for the overhead line tower footprints. Therefore, there are no significant cumulative effects to consider.
- 14.5.35 The onshore aspects of the Green Volt Offshore Windfarm (reference APP/2023/1454) affect agricultural land predominantly in Class 3.2, which is of medium sensitivity, although the EIA report notes that the land is used for growing vegetables and potatoes which suggests the land is of a higher class than assessed. No significant effects on agriculture were identified, and therefore there are no significant cumulative effects to consider.
- 14.5.36 The proposed mineral extraction site at Bridgend Quarry (reference APP/2020/0897) has commenced, therefore there is no further assessment for agriculture.

## 14.6 Summary

- 14.6.1 The Site extends to approximately 230 ha, primarily of agricultural land. The mapped information shows the agricultural land at the Site as mostly Class 3.2 (164.3 ha, or 72%) and most of the remainder as Class 3.1 (58.0 ha, or 26%), which is prime agricultural land, with a small area of Class 4.2 (4.7 ha or 2%).
- 14.6.2 The agricultural land is a resource of mostly high (Class 3.1) and medium (Class 3.2) sensitivity, with Class 4.2 being of low sensitivity. The magnitude of change is high, resulting in a permanent **Major Adverse (significant)** effect of the Proposed Development on agricultural land. There are no mitigation measures available. However, within the Aberdeenshire context, the permanent loss would represent just 0.03% of agricultural land in Aberdeenshire, which is a highly productive agricultural area. In this context, the Proposed Development would have a **Negligible (not significant)** impact on Aberdeenshire's agricultural output.

- 14.6.3 The Proposed Development would permanently require land associated with three farm holdings and temporarily require land from an additional three holdings. Due to differences in enterprise type and the proportion of the holding lost, there would be a permanent **Major Adverse effect (significant)** on one holding; and a permanent **Moderate Adverse effect (significant)** on two holdings. The temporary effects on three farm holdings would be **Minor Adverse** or **Negligible** (not significant). Mitigation of the effects on farm holdings lie outside the scope of the assessment and relate mainly to private negotiations between the parties.
- 14.6.4 The Proposed Development would require the demolition of three residential properties associated with farms within the Site Boundary (two of these properties are currently disused), resulting in a permanent **Major Adverse effect (significant)** to these properties. A further residential property and garden within the Site Boundary would also be required for the Proposed Development and would receive a **Major Adverse effect (significant)**. There would be a **Moderate Adverse effect (significant)** to four properties outwith the Site Boundary due to acquisition and potential change of use.
- 14.6.5 Due to the scale of the Proposed Development and the resultant **Major Adverse (significant)** effects, there is no change to the effect when Cumulative Developments are considered, although six potential schemes have been identified that also require the use of agricultural land.