

Netherton Hub 400 kV OHL Connection to New Deer and Peterhead: Tie-In

Environmental Appraisal Report Volume 1 Chapter 7A: Ecology Addendum

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Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc
Inveralmond House
200 Dunkeld Road
Perth PH1 3AQ
Tel: +44 (0)1738 456 000
www.ssen-transmission.co.uk

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7. ECOLOGY

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 This addendum chapter provides an update to **Chapter 7: Ecology (Volume 1) of the Environmental Appraisal Report (EAR)** submitted in July 2026. This addendum provides updated information following the findings of additional surveys completed in June 2026 and a subsequent update to the protected species baseline which is presented in **Appendix 7.2A: Protected Species Addendum**.
- 7.1.2 Changes to the original **Chapter 7: Ecology (Volume 1)** of the **EAR**, are highlighted in red text.
- 7.1.3 This chapter assesses the potential risks to ecology resulting from the Proposed Development. This chapter details a baseline description, identifies and assesses the effects on each ecological receptor and, where relevant, proposes mitigation, recommendations for further survey and reporting, and highlights opportunities for enhancement.
- 7.1.4 Full details of the ecology and ornithology desk study and field surveys which have informed the baseline conditions are found in:
- **Appendix 7.1: Habitats Baseline (Volume 3);**
 - **Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3);**
 - **Appendix 7.2a: Protected Species Addendum (Volume 3);**
 - **Appendix 7.3: Badger Technical Report (Confidential) (Volume 3);**
 - **Appendix 7.4: Biodiversity Net Gain Report (Volume 3);**
 - **Appendix 7.5: Species Protection Plans (Volume 3); and**
 - **Chapter 8: Ornithology (Volume 1).**

7.2 Information Sources

- 7.2.1 The following sources of information have been used to inform the baseline:
- Desk study: review of existing information on protected and priority areas, habitats and species (detailed below); and
 - Field surveys: to collect site-specific data on the baseline, undertaken across several site visits between July 2025 and **June 2026**, as detailed within **Appendix 7.1 – Appendix 7.3 (Volume 3)**.
- 7.2.2 The following guidance documents have been used to inform this appraisal:
- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Guidelines for EcIA in the UK and Ireland¹ (hereafter referred to as the 'Guidelines for EcIA');
 - CIEEM advice note on the lifespan of ecological reports and surveys²;
 - CIEEM Competency Framework³;
 - NatureScot standing advice for planning consultations on protected species⁴; and

¹ CIEEM (2024). Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland, Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine.

² CIEEM (2019). Advice Note: On the lifespan of ecological reports & surveys. Available at: <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Advice-Note.pdf>

³ CIEEM (2024). Competency Framework. Available at: <https://cieem.net/resource/competency-framework/>

⁴ NatureScot (online). Planning and development: standing advice and guidance documents. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development/planning-and-development-advice/planning-and-development-standing-advice-and-guidance-documents>

- NatureScot Developing with Nature Guidance⁵.

7.2.3 Additional sources and guidance are referenced throughout this chapter where applicable.

7.3 Methodology

Baseline

Desk study

- 7.3.1 A desk study was undertaken to identify protected and priority areas overlapping with, or otherwise connected to and within the Site (e.g., via supporting habitat or within range of a qualifying species). Freely downloadable datasets (including those available from NatureScot⁶) were reviewed for information regarding the presence of the following features, using suitable buffers in line with best practice.
- 7.3.2 A 10 kilometre (km) search buffer was used to identify, and consider connectivity to, European Sites⁷. This was extended to 20 km for Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for pink-footed goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* and greylag goose *Anser anser* interests due to their extensive ranging distances⁸⁹.
- 7.3.3 A 2 km search buffer was used for nationally and locally protected areas. A 250 m search buffer was used to identify relevant conservation priority areas such as Ancient Woodland¹⁰, Red Squirrel Strongholds¹¹, Butterfly Conservation Scottish Priority Landscapes¹², Important Invertebrate Areas¹³, Important Plant Areas¹⁴ and Buglife B-Lines¹⁵. Search radii for each feature have been informed by professional judgement and the Guideline for Ecological Impact Assessment¹⁶. The Carbon and Peatland Map 2016¹⁷ was used to identify potential for deep peat overlapping or connected to the Proposed Development which could represent priority peatland¹⁸.
- 7.3.4 The desk study was also used to identify records of protected species, priority species and invasive and non-native species (INNS) within 2 km to 5 km of the Proposed Development between 2015 and 2025 (i.e. relatively recent records). This included a review of:

⁵ NatureScot (online). Developing with Nature guidance. [Online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/developing-nature-guidance>

⁶ NatureScot (2025). NatureScot data services. [online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/information-hub/naturescot-data-services>

⁷ The term 'European Site' is being used to refer to what were previously known as 'Natura' sites. This recognises that SPAs and SACs protect species and habitats shared across Europe and were originally designated under European legislation.

⁸ SNH (2016). Assessing connectivity with Special Protection Areas.

⁹ Mitchell, C. 2012. *Mapping the distribution of feeding Pink-footed and Iceland Greylag Geese in Scotland*. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust / Scottish Natural Heritage Report, Slimbridge.

¹⁰ NatureScot (2022) (online). Ancient Woodland Inventory. Available at: <https://opendata.nature.scot/datasets/snh::ancient-woodland-inventory/about>

¹¹ Butterfly Conservation, Our conservation strategies (online). Available at: <https://butterfly-conservation.org/our-work/our-conservation-strategies>

¹² Buglife, Important Invertebrate Areas (online). Available at: <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/important-invertebrate-areas/>

¹³ Plantlife, Important Plant Areas (IPAs) (online). Available at: <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/protecting-plants-fungi/important-plant-areas/>

¹⁴ Plantlife, Important Plant Areas (IPAs) (online). Available at: <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/protecting-plants-fungi/important-plant-areas/>

¹⁵ Buglife, B-Lines (online). Available at: <https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/>

¹⁶ CIEEM (2018) Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine version 1.3. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

¹⁷ Carbon and Peatland 2016 Map. Available: <https://soils.environment.gov.scot/maps/thematic-maps/carbon-and-peatland-2016-map/>

¹⁸ Areas of Class 1, 2 or 3 soils listed on the Carbon and Peatland Map. Class 1 - Nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat. Areas likely to be of high conservation value. Class 2 - Nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat. Areas of potentially high conservation value and restoration potential. Class 3 - Dominant vegetation cover is not priority peatland habitat but is associated with wet and acidic type. Occasional peatland habitats can be found. Most soils

- Data available on National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Atlas¹⁹ up to 2 km from the Proposed Development, extended to 5 km for bats. Only datasets that were freely available for commercial use were searched²⁰.
- Sightings reported to Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels²¹ from up to 5 km from the Proposed Development.
- Information on watercourses from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) water classification hub²².
- Spatially and temporally relevant data on habitats and species publicly available from applications on the planning portal.

Field surveys

- 7.3.5 Field surveys were undertaken across the Site and surrounding area, as set out in **Table 7.1**. The area of land which is now defined as the Site has evolved through the design and planning stages to incorporate associated infrastructure such as access tracks and changes to the Limit of Deviation (LoD). Throughout the survey period, study areas were defined following best practice guidance in combination with a review of the anticipated works and objectives of the surveys (to inform the EAR).
- 7.3.6 Since completion of the habitat surveys, the Site boundary has been extended in places to reflect design changes identified after the surveys were undertaken. As a result, the field surveys covered an earlier iteration of the limit of deviation ("the Provisional LoD"). The land which falls between the Provisional LoD and the current Site boundary was therefore not surveyed in the field and has instead been mapped as a desk-based exercise by extending habitat cover from the adjacent surveyed polygons.
- 7.3.7 For protected species, the majority of the Site was surveyed between July 2025 and September 2025, with additional targeted surveys for bats, water vole, and great crested newt undertaken in June 2026. Survey buffers originally extended from the Provisional LoD. Additional surveys were undertaken in November 2025 to capture land required for associated infrastructure. Based on the information available at the time of survey in November 2025 and anticipated potential effects, the survey area for associated infrastructure for all target species was defined as up to 100 m from the centre line of access tracks requiring upgrade or creation, and from towers to be dismantled., referred to as the 'Associated Infrastructure Survey Area'.
- 7.3.8 Timings and scope of this survey effort is presented in **Table 7.1** below. For full transparency, all survey areas in relation to the Site are shown clearly on figures associated with the technical baseline appendices.

¹⁹ NBN Atlas (online). Available at: <https://nbnatlas.org/>

²⁰ NBN Atlas (online). Open Government Licence (OGL), Creative Commons no rights reserved (CCO) and Creative Commons licence with attribution (CC-BY). Available at: <https://docs.nbnatlas.org/data-licenses/>

²¹ Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (online). Available at: <https://scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings/>

²² Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) Water Classification Hub. Available online: <https://informatics.sepa.org.uk/WaterClassificationHub/>

Table 7.1: Field surveys: summary of scope, areas and dates undertaken

Target	Study area	Survey date(s)	Survey type/ brief	Guidance applied
UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) and Habitat Condition Assessment	Provisional LoD (gaps in the Site have been mapped at desk)	21 – 25 July 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 where further access had been granted within the Provisional LoD 17 – 22 November 2025 Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	Broad mapping of Primary Habitats across the full extent of survey area.	UKHab and Habitat Condition Assessment ^{23,24}
National Vegetation Classification (NVC)	Provisional LoD + 250 m and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	21 – 25 July 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 where further access had been granted within the Provisional LoD	Targeted mapping of plant communities which may be Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems (GWDTE), depending on the hydrological setting; or priority peatland.	Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) Land use and planning system guidance note ²⁵ . NatureScot advising on peatland, carbon-rich soils and priority peatland habitats in development management ²⁶ . NVC User's Handbook ^{27,28} .
Great crested newt	Provisional LoD + 250m and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	2 June 2026	eDNA Survey	Advice Note 5: Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index ²⁹ . Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the great crested newt. ³⁰

²³ UKHab Ltd. (2023). UK Habitat Classification, Version 2.0. Available at: <https://www.ukhab.org>.

²⁴ SSEN Transmission (2022). Biodiversity Net Gain Toolkit User Guide. SSEN Transmission, Perth.

²⁵ Scottish Environment Protection Agency (2024). Guidance on Assessing the Impacts of Developments on Groundwater Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems. August 2024.

²⁶ NatureScot (online). Advising on peatland, carbon-rich soils and priority peatland habitats in development management. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/advising-peatland-carbon-rich-soils-and-priority-peatland-habitats-development-management>

²⁷ Rodwell, J.S. (2006). NVC Users' Handbook, JNCC, Peterborough. Available: <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/a407ebfc-2859-49cf-9710-1bde9c8e28c7/JNCC-NVC-UsersHandbook-2006.pdf>

²⁸ Rodwell, J. S., et al. (1991 – 2000). British Plant Communities (5 volumes), Cambridge University Press.

²⁹ Amphibian and Reptile Groups of the United Kingdom (2010) ARG UK Advice Note 5: Great Crested Newt Habitat Suitability Index²⁹. ARG UK, UK

³⁰ Oldham R.S., Keeble J., Swan M.J.S., and Jeffcote M. (2000) Evaluating the suitability of habitat for the great crested newt. Herpetological Journal 10: 143-155

Target	Study area	Survey date(s)	Survey type/ brief	Guidance applied
Bat	Provisional LoD and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	21 – 25 July 2025 18 – 22 August 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 17 – 22 November 2025 Associated Infrastructure Survey Area 4 June 2026	Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA)/ Potential Roost Assessment (PRA) Potential Roost Feature (PRF) Inspection of trees	NatureScot standing advice for planning consultations – bats ³¹ . Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologist, Good Practice Guidelines ³² .
Otter <i>Lutra lutra</i> (plus incidental beaver <i>Castor fiber</i> records)	Provisional LoD + 200 m and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area.	21 – 25 July 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 where further access had been granted within the Provisional LoD 17 – 22 November 2025 Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	Search for resting sites (e.g., holt, couch) and signs of activity along watercourses and ditches (up and down stream), plus suitable terrestrial habitat	NatureScot standing advice for planning consultations – otters ³³ . Monitoring the Otter ³⁴ . Emerging studies on resting sites ^{35,36} .
Water vole <i>Arvicola amphibius</i>	Provisional LoD + 100 m and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area.	21 – 25 July 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 where further access had been granted within the Provisional LoD 17 – 22 November 2025 Associated Infrastructure Survey Area 2 – 5 June 2026	Search for burrows and signs of activity along watercourses and ditches (up and down stream), plus suitable terrestrial habitat.	NatureScot standing advice for planning consultations – water vole ³⁷ . Water Vole Mitigation Handbook ³⁸ .
		July 2025	Dropping DNA analysis	

³¹ NatureScot (online). Standing advice for planning consultations – bats. Online at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/standing-advice-planning-consultations-bats>.

³² Collins, J. (ed.) (2023). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists, Good Practice Guidelines (4th Edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

³³ NatureScot (online). Standing advice for planning consultations – otter. Online at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/standing-advice-planning-consultations-otters>

³⁴ Chanin, P. (2003). Monitoring the Otter *Lutra lutra*. Conserving Natura 2000 Rivers Monitoring Series No. 10, English Nature, Peterborough.

³⁵ Findlay, M., and White, P.J.C. (2024). Do UK Survey Licences for Otter Support Best Practice? CIEEM March 2024 Issue 123.

³⁶ Findlay, M., Briers, R.A., Ingledew, R.P., and White, P.J.C. (2022). An evidence-based approach to identifying resting sites of Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra* from camera-trap and field-sign data.

³⁷ NatureScot (online). Standing advice for planning consultations – water vole. Available: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/standing-advice-planning-consultations-water-voles>

³⁸ Dean, M, Strachan, R., Gow, D., Andrews, R., Mathews, F., Chanin, P. (2016). The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook. The Mammal Society Mitigation Guidance Series.

Target	Study area	Survey date(s)	Survey type/ brief	Guidance applied
		2 – 5 June 2026		
Pine Marten <i>Martes martes</i>	Provisional LoD + 250 m buffer and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	21 – 25 July 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 where further access had been granted within the Provisional LoD 17 – 22 November 2025 Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	Search for field signs pertaining to pine marten presence and potential dens.	UK BAP Mammals ³⁹ and NatureScot standing advice ⁴⁰ .
Red squirrel <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Provisional LoD + 50 m and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	21 – 25 July 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 where further access had been granted within the Provisional LoD 17 – 22 November 2025 Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	Search for potential dreys within trees and signs of activity.	NatureScot standing advice for planning consultations – red squirrel ⁴¹ . Practical techniques for surveying and monitoring squirrels ⁴² .
Badger <i>Meles meles</i>	Provisional LoD + 100 m and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area	21 – 25 July 2025 15 – 18 September 2025 where further access had been granted within the Provisional LoD 17 – 22 November 2025	Search for setts and above ground nests, and signs of activity.	NatureScot standing advice for planning consultations – badger ⁴³ . NatureScot best practice badger survey guidance ⁴⁴ . Scottish Badgers Good Practice Guidelines ⁴⁵ .

³⁹ Cresswell, W.J., Birks, J.D.S., Dean, M., Pacheco, M., Trehwella, W.J., Wells, D. and Wray, S. (2012). UK BAP Mammals: Interim Guidance for Survey Methodologies, Impact Assessment and Mitigation. The Mammal Society, Southampton.

⁴⁰ NatureScot (online). Standing advice for planning consultations – Pine martens. Available: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/standing-advice-planning-consultations-pine-martens>

⁴¹ NatureScot (online). Standing advice for planning consultations – red squirrel. Online at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/standing-advice-planning-consultations-red-squirrels>

⁴² Gurnell, J., Lurz, P., McDonald, R., Pepper, H., (2009). Practical techniques for surveying and monitoring squirrels. Forestry Commission. Online at: <https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2009/09/fcpn011.pdf>

⁴³ NatureScot (online). Standing advice for planning consultations – badger. Available: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/standing-advice-planning-consultations-badgers>

⁴⁴ NatureScot (2021). Best Practice Badger Survey Guidance Note. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/guidance-licensing-badgers-badger-survey-best-practice>

⁴⁵ Scottish Badgers (2018). Surveying for Badgers: Good Practice Guidelines, Version 1. Scottish Badgers, Forfar, Angus. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development/planning-and-development-advice/planning-and-development-protected-species>

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Target	Study area	Survey date(s)	Survey type/ brief	Guidance applied
		Associated Infrastructure Survey Area		

Appraisal

- 7.3.9 The appraisal methodology was formulated with cognisance of the Guidelines for EclA¹. The appraisal methodology described is considered proportionate with the anticipated impacts of the Proposed Development, baseline conditions and the planning framework (i.e., Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is not required).
- 7.3.10 The general methodology used to assess the effects of the Proposed Development on the biodiversity interests at the Site and the surrounding area is as follows:
- Describe the baseline conditions (as set out above via desk study and field surveys) and evaluate the importance of biodiversity interests;
 - Identify potential impacts⁴⁶ of the Proposed Development and their effects⁴⁷ on sensitive biodiversity features, taking account of the construction methods, programme, and embedded mitigation measures (as set out in **Chapter 2: Description of Proposed Development (Volume 1)**);
 - Identify additional mitigation measures to avoid or reduce potential effects as far as reasonably possible, and comply with any relevant legal obligations; and
 - Identify opportunities for biodiversity enhancement that would be in proportion to the scale of the Proposed Development.
- 7.3.11 The ecological importance of biodiversity features was determined based on legislative or conservation status and an evaluation, based on professional judgment, of their relative importance in the context of the Site and Proposed Development, as summarised below in **Table 7.2**:

Table 7.2: Evaluation criteria for level of ecological importance

Geographical importance	Value	Criteria
International	Very high	Extremely rare (endangered), potentially extremely vulnerable to change, of international importance or recognition, very limited potential for substitution. For example: Special Protection Areas ("SPA"), Special Areas of Conservation ("SAC"), Ramsar site; or area meeting the criteria for designation as such. Considerable extents of a priority habitat type listed in Annex I of the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora ("the Habitats Directive"), or smaller area of such habitat that are essential to maintain the viability of a larger area. Any regularly occurring population of an internationally important species, which is threatened or rare in the UK, i.e., IUCN 'Red List' species, or any species of uncertain conservation status or of global conservation concern. A regularly occurring significant population/ number of any internationally important species.
National (UK context)	High	Rare, of national importance or recognition, limited potential for substitution, highly vulnerable to change. For example: • Site of Special Scientific Interest ("SSSI"), National Park, National Nature Reserve. • Notified species/ habitats of a nationally designated site.

⁴⁶ Impact = actions resulting in changes to an ecological feature.

⁴⁷ Effect = outcome to an ecological feature from an impact.

Geographical importance	Value	Criteria
		Scottish Biodiversity List (“SBL”) habitats covering viable area, or a smaller area which is vital for the viability of a larger area⁴⁸. A regularly occurring significant population/ number of any nationally important species e.g., listed on the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Species present in nationally important numbers (e.g., >1% UK population).
Regional	Moderate	Somewhat rare or vulnerable, county/district/local importance, difficult to substitute. For example: - Internationally or nationally important habitat that is currently degraded but has the potential for restoration. - Sites falling slightly below criteria for selection as a national designated site. - SBL species regularly occurring in moderate to large populations/ numbers. - Important population of target species identified for conservation action via the Species on the Edge⁴⁹. - Species present in regionally important numbers (e.g., >1% of the regional population).
Local	Low	Locally important, difficult to substitute at a local level, rare or unusual at the local level but well represented elsewhere. For example: - Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS), Local Nature Reserve, local planning designations. - North East Scotland Biodiversity Partnership (NESBiP) Important Habitats for Biodiversity⁵⁰ and Locally Important Species⁵¹. - Areas identified of conservation interest by organisations such as Scottish Wildlife Trust, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation Trust. - Areas of Ancient Woodland and native woodland smaller than 0.25 hectares (ha). - Regularly occurring, substantial population of a species scarce in the local area. - Habitats or species considered to enrich the ecological resource within the local context (e.g., hedgerows).
Negligible	Negligible	Common and widespread semi-natural habitats and species that do not occur in levels elevated above those of the surrounding area; and areas of heavily modified or managed land uses (e.g., hardstanding used for car parking, as roads etc.).

7.3.12 Guidelines for EcIA¹ (CIEEM, 2024) states: “For the purpose of EcIA, ‘significant effect’ is an effect that either supports or undermines biodiversity conservation objectives for ‘important ecological

⁴⁸ The SBL has reduced prominence in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045 but can still be referred to as a useful indicator of species and habitat importance.

⁴⁹ NatureScot (online). Species on the Edge. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/scotlands-biodiversity/species-edge-sote/species-edge-about-programme>.

⁵⁰ NESBiP (online). Important Habitats for Biodiversity. Available: <https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/biodiversity-information-for-developers/important-habitats-for-biodiversity-in-the-north-east-of-scotland/>

⁵¹ NESBiP (online). Locally Important Species. Available: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nesbiodiversity.org.uk%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2019%2F06%2FLocallyImportantSpeciesNESBReC.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

features' or for biodiversity in general". Therefore, the assessment process does not require consideration of effects on ecological features deemed to be below a predefined nature conservation importance threshold. In this instance, features of less than Local level importance have been excluded from further assessment. Wherever possible, information regarding the extent and population size, population trends and distribution of the ecological features is used to inform this categorisation and to determine importance at the project level; where detailed criteria or contextual data are not available, professional judgement is used to determine importance.

- 7.3.13 Note, all ecological features that were determined to be important at a 'negligible' level were 'scoped out' of the assessment at this stage, with the exception of species receiving specific legal protection. This is because effects on features that are only important at a 'negligible' level would not influence the decision-making as well as the fact that a significant effect in EclA terms could not occur.
- 7.3.14 The appraisal thereafter focuses on characterising impacts and resultant effects on biodiversity interest which meet a minimum threshold of Local level importance, referred to as Important Ecological Features ("IEF"). After application of additional mitigation measures, a conclusion is determined based on any residual effects remaining on IEFs. This conclusion is based on a combination of a quantitative and qualitative assessment that relies on professional experience and judgement. Factors considered to inform the conclusion include the effectiveness of mitigation proposed, nature of the impacts described (e.g. duration, frequency and magnitude) and the susceptibility of IEF to these potential impacts. The appraisal then concludes either:
- no effects of the Proposed Development on the IEFs;
 - adverse residual effects of the Proposed Development on the IEFs; or
 - beneficial residual effects of the Proposed Development on the IEFs.

7.4 Baseline Conditions

Protected and Priority Areas for Nature Conservation

- 7.4.1 Protected areas which have been identified from the search parameters set out above are listed in **Table 7.3**. Please refer to **Appendix 8.1: Habitats Regulations Appraisal (Volume 3)** for additional information on the relevant protected areas.
- 7.4.2 The geographical level of importance assigned to each protected area which occurs within the Proposed Development's EZol is also included in **Table 7.3**. For protected areas, the EZol would be dependent on the qualifying habitats and species and how they may be connected to the Site (e.g., via foraging / territory range, presence of supporting habitat, flight paths, hydrological connectivity or other functional links).

Table 7.3: Relevant protected areas

Name/ reference	Reason for designation	Within Proposed Development's EZoI	Level of importance
Buchan Ness to Collieston Coast SPA	Article 4.2 (79/409/EC) by supporting species: - Black legged kittiwake <i>Rissa tridactyla</i> - Common guillemot <i>Uria aalge</i> - Herring gull <i>Larus argentatus</i> - European shag <i>Phalacrocorax aristotelis</i> - Northern fulmar <i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>	Yes – located approximately 5.5 km south east of Site and Associated Infrastructure. Habitats within the Site and wider 250 m buffer do not reflect habitat types which support qualifying birds of this SPA.	International
Buchan Ness to Collieston SAC	Qualifying features: Vegetated sea cliffs	No – located approximately 6 km south east of the Site, and approximately 6 km from Associated Infrastructure, designated for habitat interests which are not reliant upon or influenced by features or processes within the Site.	International
Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch SPA	Article 4.2 (2009/147/EC) by supporting species: - Sandwich tern <i>Sterna sandvicensis</i> - Common tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> - Little tern <i>Sternula albifrons</i> - Pink-footed goose	Yes – located approximately 7.8 km south east of the Site. Habitats within the Site and wider area may represent supporting habitat for wintering goose populations associated with the SPA. Further to this, studies ⁵² of foraging distribution for geese from the European Sites indicate that the Proposed Development would occupy a key foraging area.	International
Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch Ramsar	Meets Ramsar criteria for: - Common tern - Little tern - Eider <i>Somateria mollissima</i> - Lapwing - Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i> - Pink-footed goose	Yes – located approximately 7.8 km south east of the Site. Habitats within the Site and wider area may represent supporting habitat for wintering goose populations associated with the Ramsar.	International

⁵² Mitchell, C. (2012). Mapping the distribution of feeding Pink-footed and Iceland Greylag Geese in Scotland. Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust / Scottish Natural Heritage Report, Slimbridge. 54-59pp.

Name/ reference	Reason for designation	Within Proposed Development's EZol	Level of importance
Loch of Strathbeg SPA	Article 4.2 (2009/147/EC) by supporting species: • Greylag goose • Pink-footed goose • Svalbard barnacle goose <i>Branta leucopsis</i> • Whooper swan <i>Cygnus cygnus</i> • Teal <i>Anas crecca</i> • Goldeneye <i>Bucephala clangula</i> • Sandwich tern • Waterfowl assemblage	Yes – located approximately 12 km north of the Site and Associated Infrastructure. Habitats within the Site and immediate surrounding area may represent supporting habitat for wintering goose populations associated with the SPA. Further to this, studies⁵³ of foraging distribution for geese from the European Sites indicate that the Proposed Development would occupy a key foraging area.	International
Loch of Strathbeg Ramsar	Meets Ramsar criteria for: • Habitats (Eutrophic loch and dune slack pools) • Pink-footed goose • Greylag goose • Goldeneye • Sandwich tern • Whooper swan • Waterfowl assemblage • Svalbard barnacle goose	Yes – located approximately 12 km north of the Site and Associated Infrastructure. Habitats within the Site and immediate surrounding area represent supporting habitat for wintering goose populations associated with the SPA. Further to this, studies^{52,53} of foraging distribution for geese from the European sites indicate that the Proposed Development would occupy a key foraging area.	International
Southern Trench Marine Protected Area (MPA)	Qualifying interests: • Burrowed mud • Fronts	No – located approximately 9 km east of the Site and 8 km from Associated Infrastructure. No potential for transboundary effects at this distance and when considering the parameters of the Proposed Development (which exclude Horizontal Directional Drilling	International

⁵³ Littlewood, N.A. & Sideris, K. (2016). A survey of the feeding distribution of geese around the Loch of Strathbeg. Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 937. <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/Publication%202016%20-%20SNH%20Commissioned%20Report%20937%20-%20A%20survey%20of%20the%20feeding%20distribution%20of%20geese%20around%20the%20Loch%20of%20Strathbeg.pdf>

Name/ reference	Reason for designation	Within Proposed Development's EZol	Level of importance
	- Minke whale <i>Balaenoptera acutorostrata</i> - Shelf deeps - Geology and geomorphology features	(HDD) from the far north east point of the Site); all proposed works would be inland of the sand dune system.	

Priority areas

- 7.4.3 Conservation priority areas which have been identified from the search parameters set out above are listed in **Table 7.4** below. The locations of priority areas are shown on **Figure 7.1: Protected & Priority Areas for Nature Conservation**.

Table 7.4: Relevant priority areas

Name/ reference	Reason for designation	Within Proposed Development's EZol	Level of importance
Class 1 nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat	Nationally important carbon-rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat	Yes, approximately 8.4 ha of Class 1 peat overlaps with the Associated Infrastructure Survey Area. These soils are considered to be 'Areas likely to be of high conservation value' Error! Bookmark not defined. according to Nature Scot.	National

Habitats

- 7.4.4 Full details of the UKHab survey and NVC survey are presented in **Appendix 7.1: Habitats Baseline (Volume 3)**.

All UKHab Primary Habitats mapped from the relevant study area are shown on **Figure 7.1.1: Habitat Survey Results, (Appendix 7.1: Habitats Baseline (Volume 3))** and are listed in **Table 7.5**.

The location of incidental INNS recorded during surveys is also illustrated within **Figure 7.1.1: Habitat Survey Results, (Appendix 7.1: Habitats Baseline (Volume 3))** and includes one record of Japanese Knotweed *Reynoutria Japonica* within 65 m of the Site (INNS1).

Where targeted NVC mapping was undertaken within habitats which may be GWDTE (depending on the geohydrological setting), or priority peatlands, the corresponding NVC communities are included in **Table 7.5**. NVC communities are shown on **Figure 7.1.1: Habitat Survey Results (Appendix 7.1: Habitats Baseline (Volume 3))**.

- 7.4.5 The geographical level of importance assigned to each habitat type within the Proposed Development's EZol is also included in **Table 7.5**. The EZol for habitats includes any habitat that occurs within the Site and Associated Infrastructure Survey Area, as it would likely be affected by the Proposed Development's footprint.
- 7.4.6 The EZol may extend up to 250 m away for potential GWDTE because the Proposed Development would require excavations deeper than 1 m (with reference to guidance from SEPA15).
- 7.4.7 Please refer to **Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils (Volume 1)** for an appraisal of potential effects on GWDTE along with priority peat soils.

Table 7.5: UKHab Survey Results

Broad habitat	UKHab Primary Habitat	Corresponding NVC community	Within Proposed Development's EZol	Level of importance
Cropland	c1 – arable and horticulture	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible Modified and common and widespread in the surrounding area.
	c1a6 – arable field margins – pollen and nectar			Local Margins sown in rotation with wild flowers or agricultural legumes and managed to allow seasonal flowering to provide pollen and nectar resources for invertebrates qualify as a UKBAP priority habitat
Wetland	f2d – aquatic marginal vegetation	N/A	Yes – located within the Site	Negligible Common widespread in the surrounding area.
	f2f – other wetland	<i>M23b Juncus effusus/ acutiflorus-Galium palustre rush-pasture</i>	Yes – located within the Site	National Nationally important carbon-rich soils ^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}
Grassland	g3c - other neutral grassland	<i>MG10 Holcus lanatus – Juncus effusus</i> rush pasture	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is common and widespread in the surrounding area.
	g3c8 - <i>Holcus-Juncus</i> neutral grassland	<i>M23b Juncus effusus - acutiflorus-Galium palustre</i> rush-pasture/ <i>MG10 Holcus lanatus – Juncus effusus</i> rush pasture	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is common and widespread in the surrounding area.
	g4 - modified grassland	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible Modified and common and widespread in the surrounding area.
Heathland and shrub	h2a – native hedgerows	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Local

Broad habitat	UKHab Primary Habitat	Corresponding NVC community	Within Proposed Development's EZol	Level of importance
	h2a6 – other native hedgerow			This habitat type is difficult to substitute at a local level, is a NESBiP ⁵⁴ priority habitat type and is considered to enrich the ecological resource within the local context.
	h3h – mixed scrub	N/A	Yes – located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is common and widespread in the surrounding area.
Rivers and lakes	r1g – other standing water	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Local Pond habitat types are difficult to substitute at a local level, is a NESBiP ⁵⁵ priority habitat type and is considered to enrich the ecological resource within the local context.
	r2b – other rivers and streams	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is common and widespread in the surrounding area; many examples have been modified.
Urban	u1b - Developed land; sealed surface	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is a managed land use.
	u1b5 – Buildings	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is a managed land use.
	u1c – artificial unvegetated – unsealed surface	N/A	Yes – located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is a managed land use.
	u1d – suburban mosaic of develop and natural surface	N/A	Yes – located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is a managed land use, is common and widespread in the surrounding area.
	u1e - Built linear features	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is a managed land use.
Woodland	w1d - wet woodland	W1 – W7	Yes - located within the Site	Local

⁵⁴ NESBiP (online). Important Habitats for Biodiversity – Woodlands. Available: <https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Woodlandsv1-1.pdf>

⁵⁵ UK BAP Priority Habitat Descriptions (Standing Open Waters & Canals) (2008). Available: <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/dec49c52-a86c-4483-90f2-f43957e560bb/UKBAP-BAPHabitats-42-Ponds.pdf>

Broad habitat	UKHab Primary Habitat	Corresponding NVC community	Within Proposed Development's EZol	Level of importance
				This habitat type is somewhat rare and of local importance, and difficult to substitute. Although this small extent of habitat is of planted nature and relatively young, it is considered a priority habitat at the local level, as it could be classified as an NESBiP priority habitat type ⁵⁴ .
	w1f – lowland mixed deciduous woodland	W12, W14 and W15	Yes – located within the Site	Local This habitat type is somewhat rare and of local importance, and difficult to substitute. Although this habitat is of planted nature, it is semi-mature and adjoins further corridors of the same age and composition and could therefore be considered a priority habitat ⁵⁴ , and is classified as a NESBiP priority habitat type.
	w1g – other broadleaved woodland	N/A	Yes – located within the Site	Negligible Modified and common species, line of trees, and widespread in the surrounding area
	w1h – other woodland, mixed	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is common and widespread in the surrounding area.
	w2c – other coniferous woodland	N/A	Yes - located within the Site	Negligible This habitat type is common and widespread in the surrounding area, lacks species' diversity and assumed to be of non-native plantation origin.

Protected and priority species

- 7.4.8 Full details of all species considered during the baseline desk study and field surveys can be found within **Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3)** and **Appendix 7.3: Badger Technical Report (Confidential) (Volume 3)** and detailed within **Figure 7.2.1 – Figure 7.2.3 (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))**. This section summarises the key findings for the appraisal only, i.e., only protected and priority species which have been found to occur (or potentially occur) within the Proposed Development's EZol.

The geographical level of importance assigned to each species within the Proposed Development's EZol is also included in Error! Reference source not found..

Table 7.6: Summary of protected and priority species present within the Proposed Development's EZol

Species	Legal protection/ conservation status	Key baseline findings	Within EZol	Level of importance
Bats	European protected species under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) – Schedule 2. Listed as a SBL priority species.	Within the Site, seven trees were classified as having Potential Roost Features (PRFs) suitable for multiple (M) bats (PRF-M). These PRF-M features may therefore be used as a maternity colony. A further 34 trees within the Site were classified as having PRF suitability for individual (I) bats or a very small numbers of bats (PRF-I) either due to size or lack of suitable surrounding habitats. Based on the design of the Proposed Development, trees anticipated to be felled / pruned as a result of the works includes nine trees classified as PRF-I (T2, T8, T10, T24, T25, T26, T27, T28 and T42, Figure 7.2.2 (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))), and two trees classified as PRF-M (T34 and T35, Figure 7.2.2 (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))). No evidence of roosting bats was identified within any of the trees identified as potentially supporting a bat roost.	Yes	Local Presence within EZol elevates ecological resource within local context.
Otter	European protected species under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended) – Schedule 2. Listed as a SBL priority species.	Four commercially available records of otter were identified during the desk study, at the North Ugie Water, south of Millbank, South of Crimmond. The watercourses, ditches, and adjacent riparian habitat within the Site have the potential to support commuting and foraging otter, which are known to be widespread throughout Aberdeenshire. During the survey, otter field signs including otter spraint were identified along a small burn which joins downstream to the Burn of Ludquham. Three potential opportunities for resting otter (O2, O4 and O6, Figure 7.2.3 (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))) were identified during the surveys. No positive evidence of otter was recorded during the 6-week camera trap monitoring undertaken at the three identified features, and as such these are no longer considered potential resting sites.	Yes	Local Presence within EZol elevates ecological resource within local context.

Species	Legal protection/ conservation status	Key baseline findings	Within EZol	Level of importance
Water vole	Protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly: damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place that water voles use for shelter or protection; and disturb a water vole while it is using any such place of shelter or protection.	The watercourses, ditches and bankside habitat within the Site have been confirmed to support water vole. Potential burrows were recorded along two separate field ditches to the centre and west of the Site, during the July and September 2025 survey (i.e., within the water vole active season) (Figure 7.2.3, Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))). Further survey undertaken in June 2026 confirmed the presence of water vole through DNA testing of droppings collected at two locations, one in the east of the site and one in the central area. Water voles in North East Scotland have been documented to live as metapopulations, which comprise of a network of fragmented colonies with low numbers of individuals. The species can retain genetic diversity through dispersal and movement between sites and new suitable habitat within a metapopulation⁵⁶. The watercourses, ditches and bankside habitat within the Site provide suitable habitat for water vole. As such, all potentially suitable burrows will be assumed to belong to water voles on a precautionary basis.	Yes	Local Presence within EZol elevates ecological resource within local context.
Badger	Protection under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011.	Reported separately within Appendix 7.3: Badger Technical Report (Confidential) (Volume 3) .	Yes	Local Presence within EZol elevates ecological resource within local context.
Pine marten	Pine marten receives full protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as	Pine martens are known to be present throughout the north of Scotland, with incidental records of this species returned during ecological assessments of nearby infrastructure projects.	Yes	Local Presence within EZol elevates ecological

⁵⁶ Aars, J., Lambin, X., Denny, R. and Griffin, A. (2001). Water Vole in the Scottish Uplands: Distribution Patterns of Disturbed and Pristine Populations Ahead and Behind the American Mink Invasion Front. *Animal Conservation* 4, 187 – 194.

Species	Legal protection/ conservation status	Key baseline findings	Within EZol	Level of importance
	amended) and are listed within the SBL as a priority species.	An incidental single adult pine marten was recorded commuting within the Site during surveys (PM4, Figure 7.2.3 (Appendix 7.2)). Two potential denning opportunities (PM1 and PM3, Figure 7.2.3 (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))) were recorded during surveys, however no further evidence to confirm use was recorded at the time of survey. The Site has the potential to support occasional pine marten and were found to contain isolated features with suitability to support commuting and foraging, such as lines of trees and shaded ditches. Occasional small scale commercial woodland blocks were recorded within 250 m of the Site, overall suitable habitat was found to be suboptimal, fragmented and isolated. Due to the absence of substantial woodland blocks, the Site is unlikely to be relied upon regularly for locally important populations, however the presence of a small local population cannot be ruled out. As such, for the purpose of this assessment, the precautionary principal has been applied and occasional pine marten presence within the Site has been assumed.		resource within local context.
Red squirrel	Red squirrels and their dreys receive full protection under Schedules 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(as amended) and are listed as priority species in the SBL.	Records present within 2 km of the Site. No signs or resting sites recorded during surveys.	No	N/A
Scottish wildcat	The Scottish wildcat is fully protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). It is an SBL priority species.	Unlikely to be present based on known range of species, and due to limited suitability of habitats present within the Site. No signs recorded.	No	N/A

Species	Legal protection/ conservation status	Key baseline findings	Within EZol	Level of importance
Beaver	Beaver are EPS ⁵⁷ and are fully protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended).	Not known to be present in the catchment. No incidental evidence seen. Limited suitability of habitats present within the Site, and Site located outside of current known range.	No	N/A
Reptiles	Protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), against intentional or reckless killing and injury, and trade. Listed as a SBL priority species. Relevant to common lizard <i>Zootoca vivipara</i> , slow worm <i>Anguis fragilis</i> , adder <i>Vipera berus</i>	No commercially available record of any reptiles was identified during the desk study within the EZol. The Site is unlikely to qualify as a Key Reptile Site with reference to criteria in the Froglife advice note ⁵⁸ .	No	N/A
Great crested newt <i>Triturus cristatus</i>	Great crested newt ("GCN") has full protection under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended). It is an SBL priority species.	Four ponds were recorded during the surveys, plus an extra two ponds have been mapped at the desk within the Site (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3)). The terrestrial habitats connecting the ponds and the Site and surrounding 250 m area are relatively unsuitable for GCN. The ponds identified during field surveys were subject to a Habitat Suitability Index ("HSI") assessment which considers the suitability of ponds as GCN breeding sites. One pond scored 'Average', two ponds scored 'Below Average' and one pond scored 'Poor'. The pond classified as "Poor" was excluded from further survey, with Environmental DNA sampling undertaken at the remaining five ponds identified. All five waterbodies subject to eDNA surveys returned a negative result for GCN, therefore it	No	N/A

⁵⁷ European protected species | NatureScot

⁵⁸ Froglife (2015) Surveying for Reptiles. Tips, techniques and skills to help you survey for reptiles. 1st Edition available: <https://www.froglife.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Reptile-survey-booklet-3mm-bleed.pdf>.

Species	Legal protection/ conservation status	Key baseline findings	Within EZol	Level of importance
		is now considered that GCN are likely absent from the Site and surrounding area.		
Fish: Atlantic salmon <i>Salmo salar</i> , migratory brown trout <i>Salmo trutta</i> , European eel <i>Anguilla anguilla</i>	Protection under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 2003. Atlantic salmon is listed on Schedule 4 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 (as amended), which prohibits capturing or killing fish via poison or explosives, and any means of killing or taking that is indiscriminate and capable of causing the local disappearance of, or serious disturbance to, a population. Listed as a SBL priority species.	Waterbodies, including unnamed ditches and burns, have been identified within the Site and the surrounding environment. Smaller waterbodies within the Site were found to flow into larger burns downstream and outwith the Site, such as the Burn of Ludquharn, and Faichfield Burn, which are both located within the wider River Ugie catchment, which is known to support salmonoid species. Overall, smaller water bodies within the Site were found to be highly modified and relatively unsuitable to support salmonid spawning.	No	N/A
Freshwater pearl mussel <i>Margaritifera margaritifera</i>	Full protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (As Amended). Protected under the Bern Convention Appendix 3. Listed as a SBL priority species.	Unlikely to be present based on prevailing habitats and known range. No signs recorded.	No	N/A
Brown hare <i>Lepus europaeus</i>	Brown hare is protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. It is illegal to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a brown hare in its closed season	Nine records of brown hare were recorded during the desk study. An incidental record of brown hare (TN3, Figure 7.2.3 (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))) was recorded to the west of the Site during surveys.	Yes	Negligible Common and widespread species unlikely to occur in levels elevated above

Species	Legal protection/ conservation status	Key baseline findings	Within EZol	Level of importance
	without a licence; as well as offenses relating to trade. Listed as a SBL priority species.			those of surrounding area.
Common toad <i>Bufo bufo</i> , common frog <i>Rana temporaria</i>	Common toad and common frog have limited protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), against trade. Common toad is listed as a SBL priority species.	No commercially available record of any amphibians was identified during the desk study. Two incidences of common toad were recorded within the Site during protected species surveys in July 2025 (TN1 and TN2, Figure 7.2.3 (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))). Site is considered suitable for amphibians, which are relatively common and widespread.	Yes	Negligible Widespread species unlikely to occur in levels elevated above those of surrounding area.
American mink (<i>Neovison vison</i>)	Invasive species listed as schedule 9 under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	No commercially available records of the American mink were identified during the desk study within the EZol, but there have been sightings within 5 km of the Site.	No	N/A

7.5 Impacts Scoped Out

- 7.5.1 Operational impacts on biodiversity (non-ornithological) are considered unlikely to generate changes to the habitats or protected species baseline. It is anticipated that following the construction phase, surface vegetation and habitat features will be reinstated and restored within the Site.
- 7.5.2 As such all operational effects on ecology have been scoped out of this appraisal. There are no other habitat loss or activities associated with the operational phases of the Proposed Development that are likely to affect habitats or protected species (non-ornithological).

7.6 Appraisal

- 7.6.1 Based on the level of importance assigned to biodiversity interests which were identified within the Proposed Development's EZoI, the appraisal is set out in **Table 7.7** and focuses on the following non-ornithological IEFs:
- Native hedgerows
 - Wet woodland
 - Lowland mixed deciduous woodland;
 - Bats;
 - Badger;
 - Otter;
 - Water vole; and
 - Pine marten.
- 7.6.2 An appraisal of ornithological IEFs is presented separately within **Chapter 8: Ornithology (Volume 1)**.
- 7.6.3 Please refer to **Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils (Volume 1)** for an appraisal of potential effects on priority peat soils and GWDTE.
- 7.6.4 All other biodiversity interests have been scoped out of further consideration. Notwithstanding, the Schedule of Mitigation (**Chapter 13: Summary of Mitigation Measures (Volume 1)**) includes measures to ensure compliance with legislative obligations for all species, regardless of their level of importance.
- 7.6.5 The appraisal has been made in cognisance of the following relevant embedded mitigation measures:
- SSEN Transmission Species Protection Plans (SPPs)⁵⁹ for bats, badger, otter, water vole and pine marten (see **Appendix 7.5: Species Protection Plans (Volume 3)**).
 - General Environmental Management Plans (GEMPs) for soil management, working in or near water, bad weather, oil storage and refuelling, restoration, and working in sensitive habitats.
 - Key construction good practice measures (as set out in **Chapter 2: Description of Proposed Development (Volume 1)**) including:
 - Noise Management Plan;
 - Site Water Management Plan;
 - Restoration and Soil Management;
 - Dust; and

⁵⁹ Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks Transmission (SSEN Transmission) Species Protection Plan (SPP) provides guidance and agreed procedures for the protection of targeted species and their habitat during construction works at SSEN Transmission projects. SSEN Transmission SPP's detail relevant legislation, survey requirements and mitigation measures to protect the species and its environment.

- Frac-Out Response Plan.

Additional mitigative measures, to be implemented in conjunction with relevant embedded mitigative measures are outlined separately within **Table 7.7**.

Table 7.7: Appraisal of IEF within the Proposed Development's EZoI

IEF	IEF Description	Impacts and Effects	Assessment and Recommendations
Protected and priority areas	Buchan Ness to Collieston Coast SPA and SAC, Ythan Estuary, Sands of Forvie and Meikle Loch SPA and Ramsar, Loch of Strathbeg SPA and Ramsar	Potential effects from construction on European Sites which occur within the Proposed Development's EZoI.	Effects are considered in detail within supplementary information to support a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) undertaken for the Proposed Development. Findings and recommendations from the HRA are detailed within Appendix 8.1: Habitat Regulations Appraisal (Volume 3) .
Priority habitat – hedgerows and lines of trees	Native hedgerow and lines of trees were mapped surrounding field boundaries of the Site and are a feature of the wider landscape. The hedgerows were typically managed or cut to maintain a regular shape and were typically species-poor, generally comprised of hawthorn <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> with occasional hazel <i>Corylus avellana</i> and blackthorn <i>Prunus spinosa</i> .	Areas where hedgerows and lines of trees require removal for construction would result in potential habitat fragmentation and a direct loss, up to the width of the working corridor of the Proposed Development. Any areas of hedgerow and lines of trees requiring removal would be replanted and reinstated to the same hedgerow/ and lines of trees type and at least the same condition on completion of the works (BD7, see Table 7.8), therefore, these effects would be temporary and short-term. Based on the current condition of hedgerows, and lines of trees these would be readily replicated and as such, no significant effects have been predicted.	As there would be no significant effects, no additional mitigation measures are proposed at this stage to reduce effects.
Priority habitat – wet woodland	A minor area of wet woodland, adjacent to a small pond, was recorded to the north of the Site. This woodland was found to contain a canopy of alder <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> , ash <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> and willow species <i>Salix sp.</i> , with a neutral grassland field layer. The ground flora reflected more of a damp grassy understory rather than a wetland. Whilst relatively species-poor, this woodland would represent an	Areas of wet woodland may be required to be pruned/ felled to facilitate OHL installation. Felling of the woodland would result in permanent loss/ habitat reduction, as it is anticipated at the time of writing that trees would be permanently lost to maintain a wayleave of the OHL during the operational phase. The area to be lost would be relatively small and was found to be semi-mature.	Additional mitigation measures, including habitat creation and enhancement have been proposed (BD7, see Table 7.9). Overall, the loss would not result in a significant effect.

IEF	IEF Description	Impacts and Effects	Assessment and Recommendations
	important habitat for biodiversity described by NESBiP ⁶⁰ , and could continue to establish into a semi-natural wet woodland and is distinct from the other woodland in the area. It was therefore precautionarily valued as a local priority habitat.		
Priority habitat – Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	A minor area of lowland mixed deciduous woodland (0.14 ha) was recorded to the outer extent of the Site. This habitat was found to be dominated by beech <i>Fagus sylvatica</i>, with an understory of foxglove <i>Digitalis purpurea</i> and male fern <i>Dryopteris filix-mas</i>. This woodland would represent an important habitat for biodiversity as described by NESBiP⁶¹, and could continue to mature as a natural woodland corridor, providing connectivity to further suitable woodland corridors in the wider landscape. It was therefore valued as a local priority habitat.	At the time of writing, no felling is proposed within the area.	With the implementation of good construction practice, and embedded mitigative measures, including pollution prevention strategies, no significant effects are anticipated.
Protected species – bats	The habitat within and surrounding the Site provides suitable conditions for roosting and foraging bats. Woodlands, watercourses, and other linear habitat features within the Site	<u>Structures</u> At the time of writing, outside the boundary of Netherton Hub project, no direct works are planned to structures with suitability to support roosting bats identified within the Site. Depending on the final design of the Proposed Development, works may be scheduled to take	<u>Structures</u> As such, within these structures, the potential for disturbance to any roosting bats (with reference to guidance from the European Commission) Error! Bookmark not defined. is considered negligible, with no further

⁶⁰ NESBiP (online). Important Habitats for Biodiversity – Woodlands. Available: <https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Woodlandsv1-1.pdf>.

⁶¹ NESBiP (online). Important Habitats for Biodiversity – Woodlands. Available: <https://www.nesbiodiversity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Woodlandsv1-1.pdf>.

IEF	IEF Description	Impacts and Effects	Assessment and Recommendations
	are suitable for commuting and foraging. <u>Structures</u> Several structures with suitability for roosting bats were identified within the Site. Please see Figure 7.2.2: Bat Survey Results (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3)). It is possible that the use of structures within the Site by roosting bats has been under-recorded (as no additional surveys were conducted at the time of assessment). It remains possible that any of these structures (S4 – S7, Figure 7.2.2: Bat Survey Results (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))) could support roosts of bat species which occur in North East Scotland, and may support roost types of increased sensitivity to disturbance (e.g., maternity or hibernation roosts). <u>Trees</u> During targeted surveys, seven trees were classified as PRF-M	place within 30 m of structures (which is often used as a provisional disturbance buffer for bats) Error! Bookmark not defined. Outside the boundary of Netherton Hub, it is anticipated that construction related disturbance may occur to four derelict farm structures with suitability to support roosting bats (S4 – S7, Figure 7.2.2: Bat Survey Results (Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))). Potential disturbance may occur during works associated with access track creation, and through the transport of materials to the OHL footprint. The works in this location are anticipated to be short-term and temporary, with farming operations setting an existing baseline of noise from machinery (e.g., ploughing). <u>Trees</u> At the time of writing, an area of woodland west of the Proposed Development, located west of Mains of Kinmundy Farm, is due to be felled to facilitate works associated with the Proposed Development. Within this area of woodland, a single tree classified as PRF-I (T5, Figure 7.2.2: Bat Survey Results, Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3))) may be removed as part of the works. Furthermore, additional areas of trees containing PRFs were identified within the	surveys required and significant effects not anticipated. <u>Trees</u> Following mitigation guidelines⁶³, a pre-felling check is recommended to take place immediately prior to felling of any trees identified as containing PRFs (Additional Biodiversity (BD) Mitigation Measure, BD1; see Table 7.9). Licensing may be required prior to the felling of any trees. Once the licence has been granted, felling works would be undertaken following a method statement, supervised by a licenced bat ecologist. The loss of trees containing PRFs has the potential to directly affect roosting resource for bats within the Site. In the absence of additional mitigation measures, potential effects to bats would be adverse and permanent. However, it would be reasonable to consider that the six PRF-I trees scheduled for felling are part of a wider network of alternative roosting opportunities, as roost switching has been evidenced^{64,65,66} as a natural behaviour in bats. During the construction phase, it is anticipated that bats would have access to numerous alternative and comparable roosting opportunities within the wider area (six PRF trees to be felled of a total 41 PRF trees identified within the Site), and as such significant effects are not anticipated.

⁶³ Reason, P.F. and Wray, S. (2025). UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines: a guide to impact assessment, mitigation and compensation for developments affecting bats. Version 1.2. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Ampfield

⁶⁴ Andrews, H. (2018). Bat Roosts in Trees: A Guide to Identification and Assessment for Tree-Care and Ecology Professionals.

⁶⁵ Harris, S., & Yalden, D. (2008). Mammals of the British Isles: handbook. Mammal Society.

⁶⁶ Dietz, C., von Helversen, O. and Nill, D. (2011). Bats of Britain, Europe & Northwest Africa. A & C Black Publishers Ltd.

IEF	IEF Description	Impacts and Effects	Assessment and Recommendations
	and 34 trees classified as PRF-I trees within the Site.	footprint of the Proposed Development and are anticipated to be felled during works. This includes five PRF-I trees (T9, T29, T40, T41, T43, Figure 7.2.2: Bat Survey Results, Appendix 7.2: Protected Species Baseline (Volume 3)). No roosts were identified during surveys, however due to the transient nature of bat species, it is possible that bats may be occupying trees identified as containing PRFs during works. Further trees containing PRFs were identified within 30 m proximity to the Proposed Development. It is anticipated that the trees within 30 m of the Proposed Development will be retained as far as reasonably possible, however, if in close proximity to the Proposed Development, trees may be subject to pruning which would be unlikely to result in the loss of PRFs (but cannot be guaranteed). Artificial lighting may be used if overnight works are required for specialist operations. According to guidance⁶² artificial lighting can have adverse effects on bats, especially when it is located near roosts or foraging areas. Additional mitigative measures have been identified to avoid spill of artificial lighting onto habitats beyond the Site (e.g. treelines) (BD3; see Table 7.9).	Within the general landscape, farming operations set an existing baseline of noise from machinery. During the construction phase of the Proposed Development, the potential for disturbance to any roosting bats (with reference to guidance from the European CommissionError! Bookmark not defined.) are anticipated to be above baseline disturbance levels, adverse, temporary, and reversible. As such, significant effects are not anticipated. The nature of the artificial lighting would be temporary and localised, and with the application of additional mitigation, would be carefully managed as part of the SPP to avoid direct illumination of any trees/ structures with PRFs, commuting routes and foraging areas, in line with best practice recommendations. As such, any effects on bats would be negligible. With the application of embedded and additional biodiversity mitigative measures to ensure legal compliance (BD1 and BD3; see Table 7.9), no significant effects to bats have been predicted.
Protected species - badger	Given the ongoing persecution of badgers, appraisal information is reported separately within Appendix 7.3: Badger Technical Report (Confidential) (Volume 3) .		
Protected species - otter	There was evidence of otter field signs along an unnamed burn within the Site (O5).	For all other watercourses or ditches, construction activities such as watercourse crossings may result in the degradation of foraging and bathing habitat within the Site and	The potential for disturbance to otter has been assessed with reference to guidance from the European Commission Error! Bookmark not defined. , as noted above for bats.

⁶² Bat Conservation Trust (2023). Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night. Available: [Guidance Note 8 Bats and Artificial Lighting | Institution of Lighting Professionals](#)

IEF	IEF Description	Impacts and Effects	Assessment and Recommendations
		Associated Infrastructure Survey Area, through construction-related pollution or habitat loss. Suitable mitigation for works near watercourses should be embedded within the Proposed Development during the construction phase, with additional mitigation measures identified (BD8; see Table 7.9). Artificial lighting may be used during construction at specialised points (e.g. watercourse crossing and temporary track installation). This may displace/ discourage otters from foraging along watercourses or ditches within the Site during the construction period.	To enable legal compliance, given the time that may lapse between baseline surveys and construction phase, a pre-construction check is recommended to take place immediately prior to works associated with the Proposed Development (BD4; see Table 7.9). This is in addition to good construction practices. With application of general and additional mitigation measures in relation to working near watercourses, degradation or habitat loss would be temporary in nature, and as such, impacts are not considered to be significant. Unmanaged artificial lighting during the construction could potentially cause temporary effects of displacement, which is of minor adverse significance. Lighting design must be sensitive to nocturnal foraging. As such, additional mitigative measures have been identified to avoid spill of artificial lighting onto habitats beyond the Site (e.g. watercourses) (BD3; see Table 7.9). With the application of embedded and additional mitigative measures to ensure legal compliance (BD3, BD4 and B8) see Table 7.9, no significant effects to otter have been predicted.
Protected species – water vole	The watercourses, ditches and bankside habitat within the Site provide suitable habitat for water vole. Potential burrows and droppings were recorded during field surveys, and subsequent DNA analysis of the droppings returned positive results for water vole, confirming the species' presence within the Site and Water Vole Survey Area. As	At the time of writing, final design of watercourse crossings is unknown. Every effort should be made to microsite the location of watercourse crossings to avoid confirmed or potential burrows by at least 10m and, therefore avoid damage or destruction of burrows. Where a 10m exclusion zone is not possible around potential water vole burrows a license will be required from NatureScot before works can proceed (Additional Biodiversity	To enable legal compliance, given the time that may lapse between baseline surveys and construction phase, a pre-construction check for water vole is required to take place immediately prior to works associated with the Proposed Development (BD5; see Table 5.1). As works at each watercourse crossing would be temporary and short-term, with embedded mitigation for the management of artificial light, water voles may be able to disperse across

IEF	IEF Description	Impacts and Effects	Assessment and Recommendations
	such, all potentially suitable burrows will be assumed to belong to water voles on a precautionary basis.	(BD) Mitigation Measure, BD5; see Table 5.1 below). Given the species' metapopulation ecology and use of drainage ditches as dispersal routes, there is potential for temporary habitat fragmentation impacts from watercourse crossing and track installation works. This could temporarily affect water vole movement along habitat corridors. During construction, unmanaged artificial lighting could also potentially cause temporary effects of displacement, which is of minor adverse significance. Lighting design must be sensitive to nocturnal foraging. Suitable mitigation measures should be embedded within the Proposed Development to avoid spill of artificial lighting onto habitats beyond the Site (e.g. watercourses) (BD3; see Table 7.9 in Chapter 7: Ecology of the EAR).	watercourse crossing areas during nighttime when works are likely ceased, and as such, effects would not be significant. The watercourse crossing works could result in habitat degradation for water voles via pollution from run-off or sedimentation; and at the bankside where removal of vegetation may be required. Vegetation removal would be temporary and short-term, with natural re-establishment to follow. The spatial extent of habitat removal/ degradation would be negligible relative to the banksides which would remain unaffected. With the application of additional mitigative measures for pollution prevention (BD8; see Table 7.9 in Chapter 7: Ecology (Volume 1) of the EAR), habitat degradation effects would not be significant. Successful application of embedded measures and good construction practice should sufficiently reduce the risk of injury or harm to water vole. With the application of embedded and additional mitigation measures to ensure legal compliance (BD3 and BD8; see Table 7.9 in Chapter 7: Ecology (Volume 1) of the EAR) and BD5; see Table 5.1 below), no significant effects to water vole have been predicted.
Protected species – pine marten	An incidental single adult pine marten was recorded commuting within the Site during surveys. Two denning opportunities were also recorded.	Construction activity may also cause disturbance or displacement to foraging and commuting pine marten behaviour, including through increased noise, vibration, and artificial lighting. Any requirement for night-time working and artificial lighting overnight would be localised to the works area, with adherence to suitable lighting design and additional mitigative measures (BD3 ; see Table 7.9).	To enable legal compliance, given the time that may lapse between baseline surveys and construction phase, a pre-construction check for pine marten is recommended to take place immediately prior to works associated with the Proposed Development (BD6; see Table 7.9). With the application of embedded and additional mitigative measures to ensure legal compliance (BD3 and BD6, see Table 7.9),

IEF	IEF Description	Impacts and Effects	Assessment and Recommendations
		These effects would be temporary and reversible, and not significant.	no significant effects to pine marten have been predicted.
Protected species - fish	Watercourses within the Site were determined to have limited suitability to support protected fish species.	At the time of writing, final design of watercourse crossings is unknown. There is potential for construction activities, particular watercourse crossings, to impact fish or fish habitat, within the Site and further downstream, where more suitable watercourses for protected fish species are located. This could occur through disturbance of sediment, which may degrade water quality. Suitable mitigation for works near watercourses should be embedded within the Proposed Development during the construction phase (BD8; see Table 7.9).	With the implementation of good construction practice, including pollution prevention strategies outlined in the GEMP and CEMP, the risk of sediment release and watercourse contamination would be minimised. These measures are designed to safeguard water quality and mitigate potential impacts on fish species during construction. Given the application of embedded and additional mitigation measures, no significant impacts on fish populations have been anticipated during the construction phase.

7.7 Enhancements

- 7.7.1 This section summarises the positive effects for biodiversity to be delivered by the Proposed Development (**BD7**; see **Table 7.9**).
- 7.7.2 A BNG assessment has been undertaken to assess whether the Proposed Development would be able to deliver significant biodiversity enhancements on Site. The BNG assessment has calculated that the Proposed Development will result in a net loss of biodiversity units and cannot deliver significant biodiversity enhancements on Site.
- 7.7.3 At the time of writing this BNG report, no off-site location has been secured for the purposes of compensatory habitat creation and/ or enhancement, but as is set out in the Chief Planners letter of April 2025⁶⁷, it is entirely appropriate for such matters to be secured by way of planning conditions.
- 7.7.4 The applicant is expected to identify suitable areas off site where habitat losses across the Proposed Development can be offset via the creation of new compensatory habitats and/ or the enhancement of existing habitats. Therefore, the Applicant is in discussions with local landowners and is committed to engaging with landowners to identify and secure suitable areas for delivery of all relevant biodiversity enhancement measures.
- 7.7.5 Once suitable areas for habitat enhancement and/ or habitat creation are secured off site, and their management is agreed with landowners, a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) should be drafted outlining methodology and monitoring of the identified management/ restoration areas in order to discharge the planning condition that would be applied. To ensure that the required biodiversity units (BU) and linear (hedgerow) units LU-H it will be generated via the required habitat creation and/ or enhancement, the outcomes of the HMMP would be tracked against the predicted BNG values.

7.8 Cumulative effects

- 7.8.1 This ecological assessment includes impacts from noise and vibration and impacts from water quality on aquatic receptors. It also considers the combined effects of different ecological impacts on specific receptors. To assess this as part of the effect interactions assessment would effectively double count the effects.
- 7.8.2 A review of nearby developments has identified 13 cumulative developments which are potentially within the EZoI of this project and could therefore result in significant effects when considered cumulatively with this project. An assessment of each identified development is included within **Table 7.8** below, with the location of each development provided on **Figure 12.1 (Volume 2)**.

⁶⁷ Planning - 2025 progress update: Ministerial and Chief Planner letter - April 2025. Available at: [Planning - 2025 progress update: Ministerial and Chief Planner letter - April 2025 - gov.scot](#)

Table 7.8: Cumulative effects assessment

Long List ID Number	Planning Reference	Approximate Distance and Orientation from Site	Description of Cumulative Development	Cumulative Effects Assessment
01	APP/2025/1262	4.5 km south east	Consultation under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the Installation of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with a Generating Capacity of up to 500MW and Associated Infrastructure	No priority habitats have been identified as present within the boundary of this cumulative development. No evidence of protected or notable species was identified within the boundary of this cumulative development or within applicable distances from the boundary. No cumulative impacts are anticipated during the construction or operational phase given the distance to the Proposed Development No cumulative effects anticipated.
03	APP/2025/1617	1.8 km east at closest point	Onshore Transmission Infrastructure for Buchan Offshore Wind including Landfall Point, Cable Route Corridor, Cable Circuits, Erection of Substation, Control Building and Associated Works to connect to the Transmission Grid	Otter and water vole were confirmed to be present on watercourses within the cable installation area and badger were also widely recorded. Woodlands within the area have the potential to support red squirrel and contained mature trees with potential bat roost features. Several derelict buildings with potential for bat roosts were surveyed but no bats were recorded using these. An extensive range of embedded design and good practice mitigation measures have been identified which are all contained within a Schedule of Mitigation. Due to the distance of this development from the Site, no cumulative effects anticipated during either the construction or operational periods.
05	APP/2024/1714	Overlaps site boundary	National for Erection of a Strategic Electricity Transmission Hub Including 400 kV AC Substation, 132 kV AC Substation, 2 HVDC Converter Stations, Transmission Hall, Spares Warehouse, Operations Base and Associated Works	The habitats on site are of relatively low ecological value and are well represented within the wider area. Bat roosts are considered to be present however no bat roosts of high conservation significance were identified, as such no significant effects on bats is anticipated to occur. As part of the development, if a roost is to be impacted then a derogation licence from NatureScot will be required, part of which will include a detailed species protection plan which will minimise any impacts to bats.

Long List ID Number	Planning Reference	Approximate Distance and Orientation from Site	Description of Cumulative Development	Cumulative Effects Assessment
				Evidence of otter and badger was identified, however no resting places for these species were considered to be present, therefore no significant effects on these species were considered to occur. Work has started on this cumulative development already, so there is potential for temporal overlap, however this is considered to be minimal due to the scale and nature of the works that the level of temporal overlap will be minimised. Due to the application of mitigation described within the Schedule of Environmental mitigation which will be employed throughout the construction process, it is not considered likely that this cumulative development will interact with the Proposed Development. No cumulative impacts are anticipated during the operational phase given the distance to the Proposed Development. No cumulative effects anticipated.
07	APP/2025/1213	2 km north	Consultation under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the Installation of Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with an Installed Capacity of up to 400 MW and Associated Infrastructure	No evidence of protected/notable species or habitats was identified within the boundaries of this cumulative development. No cumulative impacts are anticipated during the operational phase given the distance to the Proposed Development. No cumulative effects anticipated.
08	APP/2025/1383	Adjacent	Construction of Underground Cable	This cumulative development is considered to be permitted development and as such no assessment of biodiversity features has been undertaken. The small scale of the cumulative development and with the implementation of proposed embedded and additional mitigation, which includes standard good practice for general environmental management (GEMPs) and species protection plans (SPPs). No cumulative effects are anticipated.

Long List ID Number	Planning Reference	Approximate Distance and Orientation from Site	Description of Cumulative Development	Cumulative Effects Assessment
09	APP/2023/1454	3.5 km west at closest point	National for Formation of Onshore Landfall Point, Laying of Underground Cable and Erection of Substation	Agricultural habitats were found within this site, which are widespread in the surrounding area. No important habitats were identified and the nature of the UGC means that limited impacts to habitats will occur. Field signs of badger, otter, and water vole were recorded. Where possible the Proposed Development has been designed to avoid impact to these species and as such no significant effects are anticipated. This development has not commenced yet, so there is potential for temporal overlap, however given the limited predicted impacts and distance from the development. No cumulative impacts are anticipated during the operational phase given the distance to the Proposed Development No cumulative effects are anticipated.
17	ENQ/2025/0688	Adjacent	Installation of Onshore Infrastructure forming part of MarramWind Offshore Windfarm	No ecological information is available for review associated with this cumulative development. It must therefore be assumed that there is the potential for a cumulative effect to occur during the construction of this project. The development encompasses a wide area which overlaps the Site. As this cumulative development is still in the scoping stage, the scale of impacts cannot be determined, however this project is part of the wider Marram Wind project which has been through a thorough environmental assessment. The potential for cumulative effects to occur will be minimised through the application of mitigation described within this chapter and which will be achieved through the development of a detailed CEMP. It is therefore not anticipated that cumulative effects will occur.
19	ENQ/2025/0102	2.4 km south east	Extension to Quarry	No ecology information is available for review with regards to this cumulative development. Due to the distance of this development from the Site, the scale of the anticipated works and the limited connectivity present, it is considered

Long List ID Number	Planning Reference	Approximate Distance and Orientation from Site	Description of Cumulative Development	Cumulative Effects Assessment
				that no cumulative effects are anticipated to occur during both the construction and operational phase.
20	ECU00006168 Aberdeenshire Council Ref: ENQ/2025/0715	Adjacent	Netherton Hub 400 kV OHL Connection to New Deer and Peterhead: Rebuild	No ecological information is available for review relating to this cumulative development, however it has been agreed that the cumulative development does not require a full EIA to accompany it. The overlap between this cumulative development and the Proposed Development is limited, such that any potential impacts can be minimised through the application of a suitable mitigation detailed within this chapter. No cumulative effects are anticipated to occur during both the construction and operational phases of this development.
21	ECU00006204	3 km south east	Peterhead Flexpower 500 MW BESS	No ecology information is available for review with regards to this cumulative development. It must therefore be assumed that there is the potential for a cumulative effect to be present. Due to the distance of this cumulative development from the Site and the limited connectivity present, the potential for cumulative effects to occur will be minimised through the application of mitigation described within this chapter and which will be achieved through the development of a detailed CEMP. It is therefore not anticipated that cumulative effects will occur during either the construction or operational phases of this development.
22	ECU00006137 Aberdeenshire Council Ref: APP/2025/1555	Adjacent	Construction and operation of a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) along with associated infrastructure and ancillary works, access, drainage, landscape and biodiversity enhancement.	Habitats within the boundary of this cumulative development were found to be of low ecological value and widespread within the surrounding area. Noise during construction was not considered to have a significant effect, and although there is likely to be increased traffic associated with this development during the construction phase, the small level of overlap associated with this cumulative development and the scale of the proposed works as part of the Proposed Development will not lead to a cumulative effect.

Long List ID Number	Planning Reference	Approximate Distance and Orientation from Site	Description of Cumulative Development	Cumulative Effects Assessment
				No trees with any identified PRFs for bats were identified within 50 m of the location of this cumulative development. The site of the cumulative development was found to support badger and water vole, in small numbers, for which suitable species protection plans are to be produced. Through the need to maintain favourable conservation status as part of obtaining a derogation licence from NatureScot, along with the application of mitigation detailed within a CEMP which is detailed as a required planning condition of the approval associated with this cumulative development it is concluded that no cumulative effects are anticipated to occur .
23	ECU00005165 Aberdeenshire Council Ref: APP/2025/1723	Overlaps site boundary	Application for consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to install, operate and keep installed approximately 186 km of new 400 kilovolt (kV) double circuit steel structure overhead transmission line (OHL), including downleads, to connect into new substation sites at Fanellan (NH 48321 42717) in the area of Beaully, Greens (NJ 81960 47587) in the area of New Deer and Netherton (NK 05761 45576) in the area of Peterhead. The Proposed Development also includes crossing works, temporary diversions and permanent realignment works to existing 132 kV and 275 kV OHLs, of approximately 14.7 km in total, and ancillary development and associated works. In total, the Proposed Development would comprise approximately	The BBNP OHL runs parallel along the part of the 'In' leg of the Proposed Development. Where evidence of protected species has been found or will be subject to further survey to be undertaken in 2026, there is potential for this cumulative development and the Proposed Development to interact. Any potential resting place that is discovered through additional surveys to be conducted in 2026 for the Proposed Development will require a derogation licence from NatureScot and a suitable species protection plan to be produced. Part of the conditions of a licence is to maintain the favourable conservation status of the species in question, suitable mitigation will be developed that will reduce the level of impact to not significant. The construction of this cumulative development has the potential to have a cumulative ecological impact at the closest features due to the on-site activities and increased activity associated with construction. The potential for cumulative effects to arise emphasises the importance of developing a comprehensive CEMP for the construction phase of each development. In addition, as this development is a SSEN Transmission project, there is greater potential for a coordinated ecological management approach which will be detailed within the CEMP. It is therefore anticipated that cumulative impacts can be minimised such that they will not exceed those identified in this chapter.

Long List ID Number	Planning Reference	Approximate Distance and Orientation from Site	Description of Cumulative Development	Cumulative Effects Assessment
			200.7 km of new OHL infrastructure.	Due to the nature of the development it is not anticipated that there will be any impacts to notable ecology features during the operational phase of this development. It is therefore not anticipated that cumulative effects will occur during both the construction and operational phases.
24	Not yet available	Adjacent	15.5 km of underground HVDC cable from landfall at North of St Fergus to a new HVDC Converter Station at Netherton Hub	No ecology information is available for review with regards to this cumulative development. It must therefore be assumed that there is the potential for a cumulative effect to be present. It is considered that with the inclusion of the mitigation detailed within this report, the scale of the anticipated works and the limited overlap present between this cumulative development and the Proposed Development, it is considered that no cumulative effects are anticipated to occur.

- 7.8.3 There would be no significant residual effects of the Proposed Development alone, taking account of the baseline, proposed works, embedded and any additional mitigation measures for the Proposed Development.
- 7.8.4 Similar habitats to those within the footprint of the Proposed Development are present in the wider area including in areas adjacent to these other projects (set out in **Chapter 12: Cumulative Appraisal (Volume 1)**).
- 7.8.5 Residual effects on protected areas, priority habitats, bats, badger, otter, water vole and pine marten would be negligible or sufficiently low and measures have been identified to enable compliance. There would be no potential for cumulative significant effects whether the above projects were constructed concurrently or sequentially with the Proposed Development.

7.9 Recommendations and Mitigation Measures

- 7.9.1 Additional mitigation measures have been identified primarily to ensure compliance with legal obligations and as best practice (**Table 7.9**).
- 7.9.2 All of the mitigation measures presented in (**Table 7.9**) should be implemented in conjunction with the embedded measures (e.g., SPPs, GEMPs).

Table 7.9: Additional biodiversity mitigation measures

ID	Title	Description
BD1	Pre-construction bat survey – Aerial PRF inspection and Activity Survey (Structures)	If trees or structures identified as having PRFs within the Site are to be felled / demolished or there is a risk of disturbance from works, a pre-construction survey is required, undertaken by a team of licensed and capable ecologists, following prevailing guidance³². Where it is not possible to avoid damage or disturbance to trees / structures and a roost has been confirmed, a licence from NatureScot will be obtained in advance of any construction activity. This will enable compliance with the legal protection for bats and aligns with the SPP for bats. With the implementation of the above mitigation, it is considered that no significant effects to bats will occur as a result of this Proposed Development.
BD2	Pre-construction badger surveys & licensing	Pre-construction badger surveys will be undertaken within the Site and Associated Infrastructure and up to 100 m from the final design of the Proposed Development, to confirm sett locations and activity levels. Surveys will be undertaken by a competent ecologist, following NatureScot guidance on badger survey and licensing (see Table 7.6). A specific SPP would be prepared to support any licence application and would identify site-specific mitigation and any necessary compensation (e.g. exclusion, timing restrictions, and artificial sett construction). It is anticipated that alternative setts will be available to support badgers within their territory during the temporary closure. With the implementation of the above mitigation, it is considered that no significant effects to badger will occur as a result of this Proposed Development.
BD3	Artificial lighting restrictions	Construction works will be generally scheduled for daylight hours to avoid peak periods of otter / bat activity. If works are required during the night, artificial lighting would not directly illuminate watercourses, adjacent riparian habitat and treelines within the Site and Associated Infrastructure. This is a best practice measure with

ID	Title	Description
		respect to potential presence of bat, otter, water vole and pine marten, and fish.
BD4	Pre-construction otter surveys	A pre-works survey of suitable habitat for otters within the Site plus up to 200 m from the construction area should be undertaken in advance of any construction work. Surveys will be undertaken to identify any newly established otter resting sites not identified previously and the requirement for any additional mitigation measures or licensing. Surveys should be undertaken by a capable ecologist following NatureScot standing advice⁶⁸. If identified, potential resting sites should be monitored using camera traps to confirm their use and determine whether they are being used for breeding or as natal dens. Where a resting site is confirmed as being in use, further mitigation measures will be required. If possible, works should be micro-sited to avoid these sites and establish exclusion zones of at least 30 m. If there is a confirmed breeding site within 200 m of the Site, greater stand-off distances may be required. If micro-siting is not feasible, a licence will be required to carry out the works in proximity to these sites. A specific SPP would be required to support a licence application, and this would identify specific mitigation measures and any proposed compensation. If the resting site is confirmed to be used for breeding or as a natal den, no works will be permitted until monitoring confirms that the breeding season has concluded and the cubs are fully mobile. With the implementation of the above mitigation, it is considered that no significant effects to otter will occur as a result of this Proposed Development.
BD5	Pre-construction water vole surveys	A pre-works survey of suitable habitat to support water vole up to 100 m beyond the Site needs to be undertaken in advance of construction works, to reassess water vole activity and avoid direct damage to burrows, runs or foraging habitat during the construction of the Proposed Development. Surveys should be undertaken by a capable ecologist following methodology described in the Water Vole Mitigation Handbook⁶⁸. If water vole burrows are identified within 30 m of the Proposed Development during the pre-works survey, consider if the works may be micro-sited to avoid/ retain the burrows. Where it is not possible to micro-site the works to avoid damage or disturbance to potential burrows, a licence from NatureScot will be obtained in advance of any construction activity and a water vole trapping and relocation exercise will be required under the terms of the relevant NatureScot licence. Any captured water voles may only be released into suitable habitat within the territory of the same water vole population, or into suitable habitat that is not currently occupied by another water vole population. A licence can only be issued once sufficient evidence has been provided regarding matters such as the provenance of the water voles to be released and the carrying capacity of the proposed receptor site. The feasibility, duration and overall programme implications of such a trapping and relocation exercise will depend on the scale and extent of watercourse impacts associated with the Proposed Development. This will enable compliance with the legal protection for water voles. A Species Protection Plan specific to the project would be required to support a licence application, and this would identify specific mitigation measures and any proposed compensation.

⁶⁸ Dean, M, Strachan, R., Gow, D., Andrews, R., Mathews, F., Chanin, P. (2016). The Water Vole Mitigation Handbook. The Mammal Society Mitigation Guidance Series.

ID	Title	Description
		With the implementation of the above mitigation, it is considered that no significant effects to water vole will occur as a result of this Proposed Development.
BD6	Pre-construction pine marten surveys	A survey of suitable habitat for pine marten up to 250 m from the construction area of the Site should be undertaken in advance of any construction work. This survey aims to identify any new or unrecorded potential resting sites. Potential resting sites should be monitored using camera traps to confirm their use and determine whether they are being used for resting. Where a resting site is confirmed as being in use, further mitigation measures will be required. If possible, works should be micrositied to avoid these sites and establish exclusion zones of at least 30 m and in the case of breeding sites 100 m, in line with guidance⁴⁰. If micrositied is not feasible, a licence will be required to carry out the works in proximity to these sites along with a specific SPP. With the implementation of the above mitigation, it is considered that no significant effects to pine marten will occur as a result of this Proposed Development.
BD7	BNG	Where required by the BNG assessment, off-site habitat creation and/or enhancement measures will be delivered to provide compensation sufficient to achieve the identified biodiversity net gain requirements, with an estimated requirement for 10.74 biodiversity units (area-based habitats) and 2.43 linear units (linear-based habitats). The specific habitat types, enhancement measures and locations will be determined through agreement with landowners and delivery partners and secured in accordance with BNG requirements. Habitat enhancements and enhancement measures are expected to be delivered within the same Local Planning Authority area where practicable. Habitat measures may include habitat creation, or habitat restoration/condition improvement, with management measures including, where appropriate, planting, selective thinning, removal of non-native species, grazing management, grassland creation, peatland restoration, and, in the case of hedgerows, appropriate rotational cutting. The precise measures will be determined following the identification and securing of suitable receptor sites. Once suitable locations are identified, secured and agreed these measures would be set out within a detailed Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan, 30-years in duration.
BD8	General Mitigation for Works near Watercourses	Appropriate measures to protect the aquatic environment should be implemented during the construction phase of the Proposed Development in order to eliminate or minimise risk to aquatic flora and fauna. Such measures include best environmental practice guidance outlined by the Construction Industry Research and Information Association guidance (CIRIA, 2023). Construction materials should be stored and maintained away from watercourses. Silt fences or similar should be placed around exposed ground and stockpiles, and early revegetation of the completed elements of the scheme should be undertaken to reduce further erosion. Surface water runoff from the construction sites into the watercourses should be avoided and a system of cut-off ditches or other appropriate surface water attenuation/treatment measures, silt fencing and/or bunds should be installed if required.

ID	Title	Description
		Chemicals and fuels should be stored in secure containers located away from watercourses or water bodies. No refuelling of plant or machinery should take place near the watercourse. Noise and vibration should be controlled and kept to the minimum necessary to prevent potential negative effects on fish and eels. Lighting used for construction should be switched-off when not in use and, where possible, positioned so as not to spill on to watercourses. If unavoidable, then a dark corridor should be maintained to enable fish to pass through the site unobstructed by lighting. Biosecurity measures should be implemented during the construction phase of the Proposed Development to prevent the spread of INNS. Biosecurity is defined as a set of precautions that aim to minimise the risk of moving invasive non-native species, parasites, and diseases. Measures are likely to include: • The briefing and training of workers on good biosecurity practices appropriate to their role; • Equipping workers with the necessary equipment, PPE, and substances to implement biosecurity control measures, including effective hygiene and sanitation practices. This will most frequently comprise Virkon S disinfectant tablets, sprayers, and brushes to clean and disinfect equipment and PPE prior to leaving site. • Ensure that Defra's "Check, Clean, Dry" principles are followed and ensure that all Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and survey equipment is clean and dry (and if necessary, disinfected) prior to going to and from site; and • Where possible, workers should park vehicles on hard standing areas and check/clean tyres prior to leaving site. It is concluded that with the implementation of the above mitigation measures, no significant effects upon the aquatic environment will occur as a result of the Proposed Development.