Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV OHL

Report on Consultation

November 2023

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of this document

The purpose of this Report on Consultation (RoC) is to document the consultation responses received as part of our route consultation process for the proposed Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV overhead line (OHL) project, and where appropriate, show how the option taken forward to the next stage has been informed by this process.

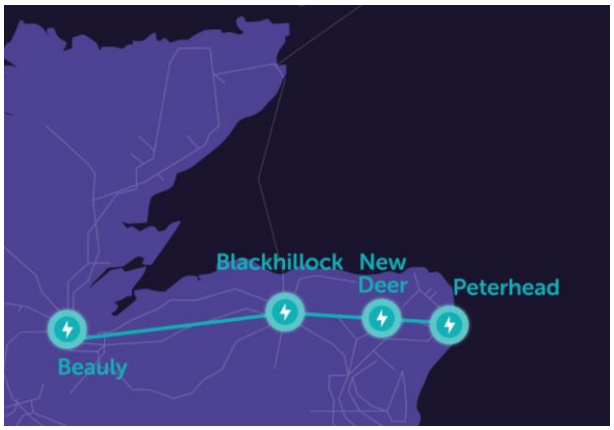
This Report details the consultation process undertaken, including details of consultation methods and advertising, those consulted and/or contributing to the process and it also documents the feedback received, including objections, concerns, questions and statements of support. It sets out clearly how stakeholder feedback has influenced decisions made regarding the option taken forward. The report concludes by confirming these key decisions and any resulting adjustments made to the Preferred Route which was presented at consultation, confirming the Proposed Route to be progressed.

1.2. Project Overview

Based on the requirements outlined in National Grid ESO's Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design, we have developed proposals to reinforce the transmission system between Beauly and Peterhead via Blackhillock and New Deer. To facilitate this, we are proposing to establish a new 400kV overhead line (OHL) between Beauly, Blackhillock, New Deer and Peterhead. This also requires four new 400kV substations to be constructed near Beauly, Blackhillock, New Deer and Peterhead to enable future connections and export routes to areas of demand. These are being progressed as five separate projects but projects which are intrinsically linked and which were all presented during the consultation process. This Report on Consultation relates to the proposed Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV OHL.

Please refer to the following webpages for a summary Report on Consultation and project specific Reports on Consultations for the proposed new Beauly Area 400kV substation, Blackhillock 400kV substation, New Deer 2 400kV substation and Netherton Hub 400kV substation, near Peterhead:

- Beauly Area 400kV Substation
- Blackhillock 2 400kV Substation
- New Deer 2 400kV Substation
- Netherton Hub



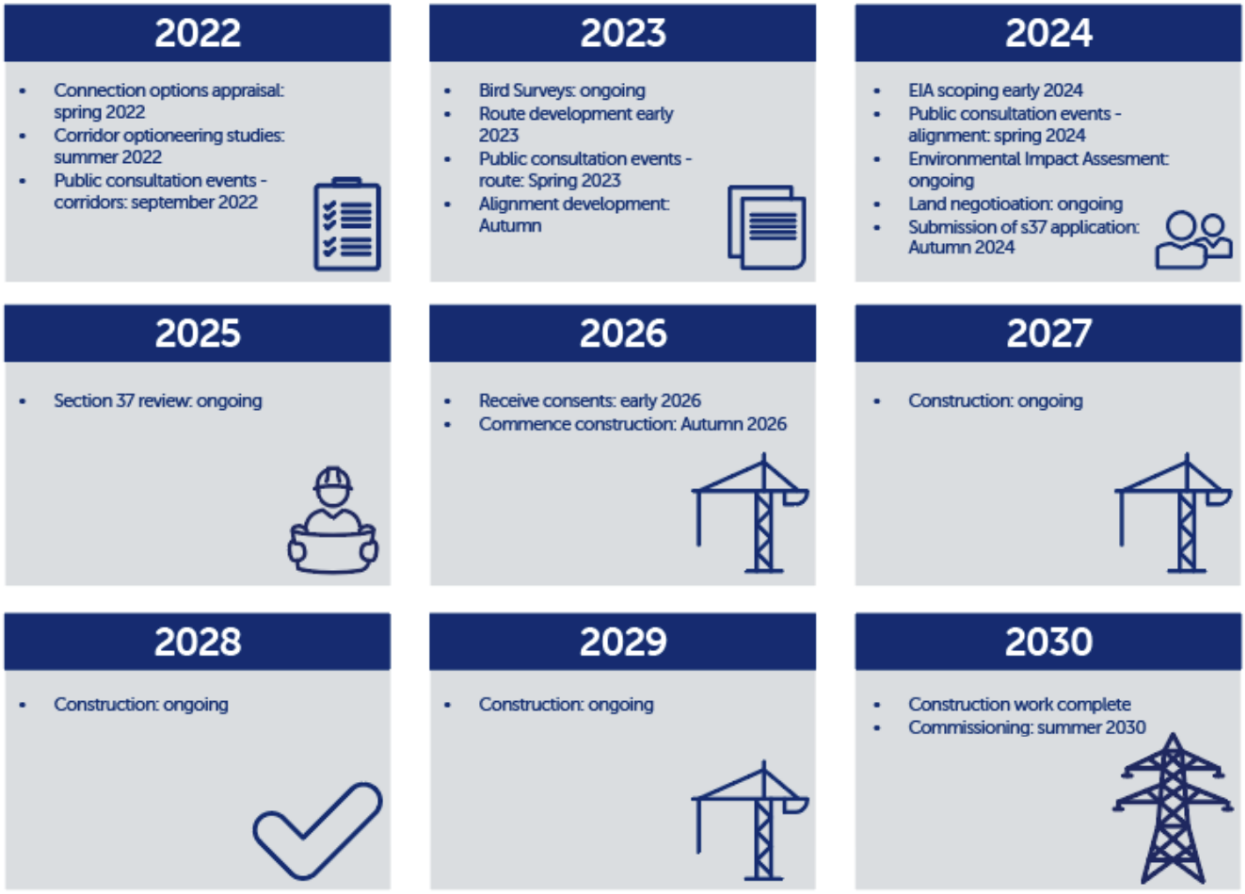
New SSEN Transmission projects between Beauly and Peterhead

The proposed 400kV OHL between Beauly, Blackhillock, New Deer and Peterhead forms part of the Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment (ASTI) projects. The new 400kV OHL, approximately 180 km in length, will connect into the proposed new 400kV substations at Beauly, in Highlands, Blackhillock in Moray and New Deer and Netherton, near Peterhead in Aberdeenshire. These new substations will connect to the existing 400kV substations in each of the areas.

The consideration of the entire OHL route was divided into eleven geographical sections to help manage the appraisal and reporting process as follows:

- Section 1 – Beauly Area substation to south of Beauly;
- Section 2 – South of Beauly to south of Inverness;
- Section 3 – A9 and River Nairn crossing;
- Section 4 – South of Culloden to Ferness;
- Section 5 – Ferness to South of Forres;
- Section 6 – South of Forres to Kellas;
- Section 7 – Kellas to Teindland;
- Section 8 – Teindland to Keith;
- Section 9 – Keith to south of Turriff;
- Section 10 – South of Turriff to New Deer; and
- Section 11 – New Deer to Peterhead.

1.3. Project Timeline



Find out more about our 2030 projects: www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/2030-projects/

1.4. What we were consulting on

As a stakeholder-led business, we understand the importance of involving communities and key stakeholders throughout each stage of our development process. Relevant and insightful stakeholder feedback collected during consultations is critical to ensuring that our decision making is informed, and stakeholder concerns are taken into consideration at each stage of the project's development.

During this consultation, we presented options regarding our OHL route for the proposed Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV OHL project. The consultation included information regarding technology options, environmental and technical considerations, the project development process and options including an indication of our preferred route options for each section, which provides the best balance of environmental and technical considerations from our internal assessments.

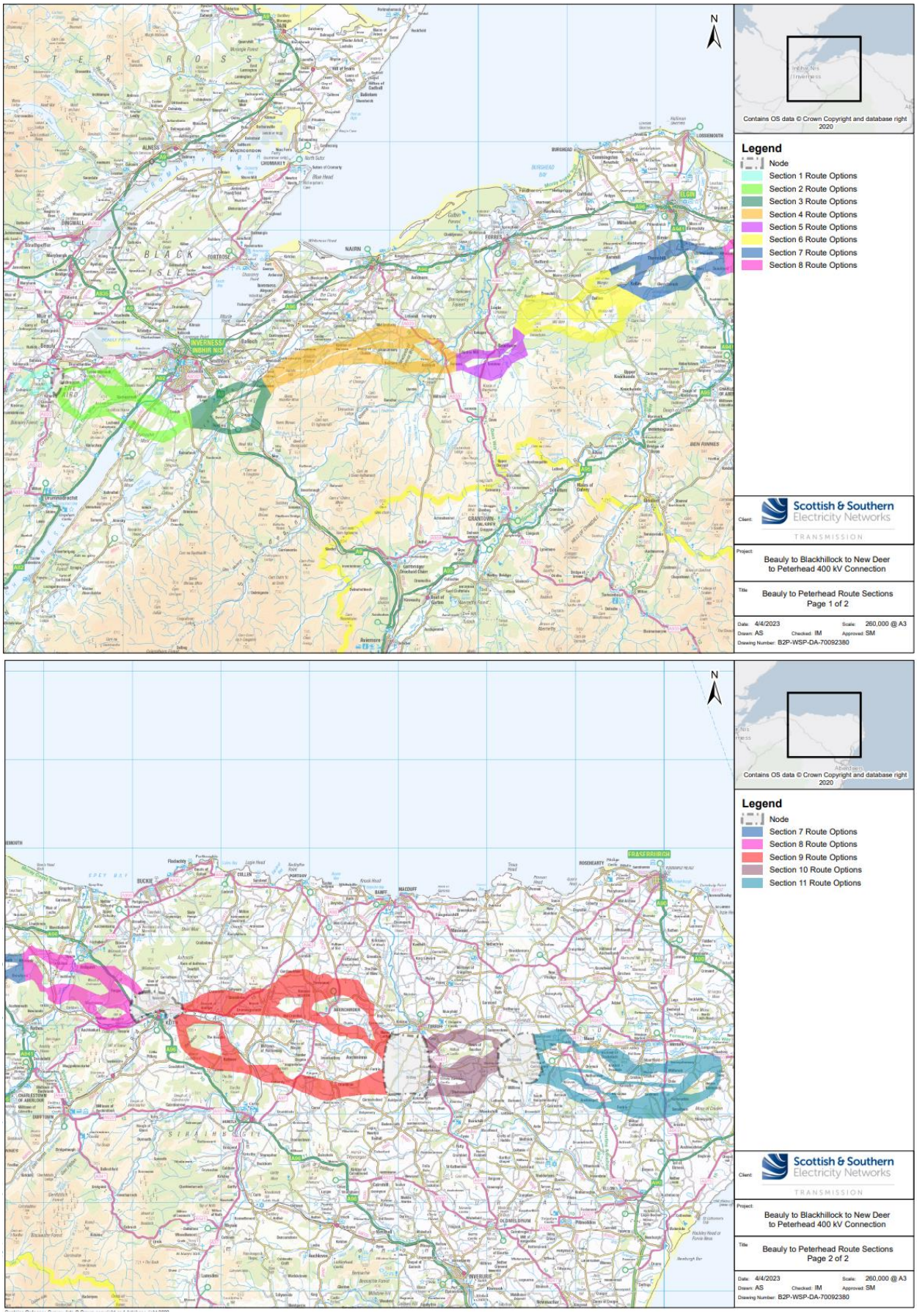


Figure 1.1 – Route Options

2. The Consultation Process

2.1. Who we consulted with

Our consultation process sought to capture the views of anyone who had an interest in our proposals, and we invited comments from all. During our engagements we aimed to ensure that we captured the views of:

- statutory consultees
- non-statutory consultees
- community members and local organisations; including local elected members
- landowners and occupiers

2.2. Consultation feedback period

The public consultation period was open from 14 April 2023 until 9 June 2023. In response to calls for an extension to the consultation period, the consultation deadline was extended twice, finally closing on 30 June 2023. Statutory and non-statutory consultees were invited to provide feedback on our Consultation Document between 6 April and 9 June 2023. Where possible, affected landowners were contacted ahead of the consultation period opening to the public to discuss land related considerations or concerns.

2.3. The advertising process

The consultation events were advertised extensively using the following methods:

- Regional and local newspapers, Press & Journal, Inverness Courier, Banffshire Herald, Huntly Express, Banffshire Advertiser, Banffshire Journal, Northern Scot, Forres Gazette.
- Our social media channels and the dedicated project webpage.
- Community Councillors and Local Elected Members were emailed in advance with information they could share within their local area.
- An email was sent to 474 individuals signed up to the project update mailing list.
- A postcard invite sent to 28,230 homes and 849 businesses within communities potentially impacted by our proposals. Please refer to Appendix B: Public Consultation Event postcard invite.

2.4. Stakeholder participation

A series of in-person consultation events were held between 17 and 27 April 2023, where local stakeholders could meet with the project team to discuss the proposals in more detail.

Date	Event	Recorded attendance
17 April 2023	Balmoor Stadium, Peterhead	153
18 April 2023	New Deer Public Hall, New Deer	158
19 April 2023	Baden Powell Centre, Turriff	57
20 April 2023	Longmore Community Hall, Keith	114
21 April 2023	Stewarts Hall, Huntly	60
24 April 2023	UHI Moray, Elgin	65
25 April 2023	Forres Town Hall, Forres	100
26 April 2023	Nairn Arts Centre (additional coffee morning in response to requests)	22
26 April 2023	Kingsmill Hotel, Inverness	96
27 April 2023	Phipps Hall, Beauly	170

Attendance figures reflect the number of people who had registered attendance at a consultation event. For busier events, the number of attendees can often be considerably higher than recorded.

Virtual events

Not all participants in the consultation engaged via the in-person events, with many choosing to visit the project website to access information relating to the proposals prior to submitting feedback.

A virtual exhibition space was made available throughout the consultation and was widely accessed by stakeholders.

During the consultation period, from 14 April until the feedback period closed on 30 June, the project webpage stats were as follows:

- 3,031 unique users viewed the Beauly Blackhillock New Deer Peterhead project webpage a total of 4,473 times.
- 185 unique users viewed the Virtual Consultation Room a total of 217 times.

Stakeholder meetings

In the weeks before, during and after the consultation events, various meetings were held with other key stakeholders, including statutory and non-statutory consultees, councillors and community councils, to discuss the project proposals. The materials presented at these engagements were similar to those provided at the public consultation events, often on a more site-specific basis where stakeholders had a particular area of interest in relation to proposals.

Date	Meeting Type	Stakeholder group in attendance
20 February 2023	In-person consultation meeting at Culloden Visitor Centre	Historic Environment Scotland and National Trust for Scotland
12 April 2023	Virtual Statutory Consultee Meeting (Microsoft Teams Meeting)	Statutory Consultees including the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit, Aberdeenshire Council, Historic Environment Scotland and NatureScot
12 April 2023	Councillors Information Event – (Microsoft Teams Meeting)	Councillors from across all affected Local Authorities
19 April 2023	Virtual Statutory Consultee Meeting (Microsoft Teams Meeting)	Statutory Consultees including the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit, The Highland Council, The Moray Council, Historic Environment Scotland, NatureScot, SEPA and Scottish Forestry
27 June 2023	Longside Community Council - public Meeting	Community Council and general public

2.5. Feedback volume

Feedback from our stakeholders was welcomed via a range of methods. This included online or hard copy feedback forms, email or letters, notes from the consultation events or stakeholder meetings or from any relevant telephone conversations.

Responses to public consultation

Responses from statutory and non-statutory consultees:

Eight statutory consultees and 54 non-statutory consultees were contacted and requested to provide feedback on the proposals. Twenty-one responses were received, with a summary of each listed in the Specific Project Related Feedback tables and full details provided in Appendix A.

Stakeholder representations

A number of other non-statutory organisations, that we did not directly approach, have responded to the consultation through the public consultation channels, such as the Marnoch and Deveron Valley Protection Society, the West Loch Ness Farm Cluster and the Highland Gliding Club. All their comments have been taken into consideration and were analysed for this Report on Consultation, along with the public consultation responses. The list of organisations considered as non-statutory consultees will be reviewed and updated for the next stage of the project.

3. Consultation Feedback and Our Response

3.1. Common Themes

Across all of our Pathway to 2030 project consultations, we received feedback covering a number of common themes. Although some of this feedback related to topics which fell outside of the scope of our consultations, we recognise that it is important to address the points that our stakeholders took the time to raise, which we have summarised in this section. In addition we have also developed a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) that can be viewed here.

Project Need

The need for these projects has been independently assessed by both the GB Electricity System Operator, National Grid ESO (ESO); and the GB energy regulator, Ofgem.

Some responses questioned whether these projects are needed at all. In many cases, those questioning the need have done so as the electricity these projects will connect and transport is not all needed in the north of Scotland.

Under our licence, we have a legal obligation to provide connections to electricity generators looking to connect to our network and we do not determine the location of new electricity generation. This is led by generators themselves, often underpinned by Government targets and policies.

These projects - which are part of a major upgrade of the electricity transmission network across Great Britain - are needed to unlock the north of Scotland's vast renewable electricity resources and transport that power to demand centres across the UK.

The renewable electricity these projects will transport will play a key role in meeting UK and Scottish Government renewable energy and climate change targets. They will also help secure the country's future energy independence by reducing dependence on imported power from volatile wholesale energy markets.

For more details on why these projects are needed and how this need has been assessed, we have published a short briefing paper.

Technology Choice

Several respondents have questioned the technology choice, particularly why the infrastructure cannot all be installed subsea or underground, instead of overhead line steel lattice towers.

Due to the significant volume of power we need to connect and transport from generation source to areas of demand the ESO concluded that there is a need for both onshore and offshore network reinforcements.

The ESO's and Ofgem's independent assessment of need for this project and our wider Pathway to 2030 programme was also based on the technology choices we are progressing.

Underground cabling is highly sensitive to ground conditions and terrain. There can be significant and lasting environmental impacts and future land use constraints associated with undergrounding; together with the technical challenges of operating, maintaining and in the event of a fault, restoring power.

Cost is also an important consideration, with subsea and undergrounding significantly more expensive than overhead. As the cost of investing in the electricity transmission network is ultimately recovered by electricity bill payers across GB, cost is one of the key factors in the ESO's and Ofgem's assessment of need, and in Ofgem's future assessment of the costs we are allowed to recover for these projects.

Environmental impacts

We have received feedback highlighting concerns about potential environmental impacts, particularly on local biodiversity.

As one of the greatest risks to our natural environment and biodiversity is climate change, these projects are part of the solution if we are to tackle the climate emergency and deliver net zero emissions in Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

However, we do recognise that in delivering these critical projects, there will be unavoidable impacts and we would like to reassure stakeholders that we take our environmental responsibilities extremely seriously.

To deliver our projects in the most sensitive way possible we ensure environmental factors are considered at every stage in the development of each project, along with technical requirements and economic considerations. A key way we do this for the environment is to follow the mitigation hierarchy. Firstly, we seek to avoid sensitive areas wherever possible and where impacts are likely to occur we seek to minimise these, provide mitigation and identify opportunities to restore.

In addition, all of our consent applications will be accompanied by detailed environmental assessments which are prepared by external specialists. These assessments will consider impacts on a wide range of environmental topics (many of which have been highlighted in the stakeholder responses to this consultation) and identify measures that may be required to mitigate any impacts.

We also acknowledge that minimising impacts is not enough on its own, and we have therefore committed to delivering a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on all our projects; as well as compensatory planting for any trees felled during the construction phase, where possible with native species. Where our projects are unable to completely avoid irreplaceable habitats (for example peatland or ancient woodland), we have also introduced a commitment to restore more habitat than we affect.

You can find out more about how we are delivering a positive environmental legacy by clicking here.

In the following section of this Report on Consultation, we will address any specific environmental feedback relevant to the options we consulted on.

Socio-Economic impact

Several community responses highlighted concerns about the impact on the local community, including visual and tourism impacts. We have also been asked what local benefits these projects will provide.

We acknowledge that there will inevitably be a visual impact on some local communities and are committed to do all that we can to minimise and mitigate this as part of the ongoing development of this project. The environmental assessment that will accompany our consent applications will also consider landscape and visual impacts.

From a tourism perspective, as part of our consent application, we intend to consider socio-economic and tourism impacts as part of the suite of documentation to be submitted to relevant consenting authorities. This will ensure that appropriate consideration is given to these issues in the consenting process.

These projects will also provide significant benefits to local and national economies. Independent socio-economic analysis undertaken on our Pathway to 2030 projects has estimated that they will collectively support around 20,000 jobs across the UK, around 9,000 of which are expected in Scotland, adding billions of economic value to the economy.

We also expect these projects to deliver significant local benefits, including direct and indirect job opportunities, alongside supply chain opportunities for local businesses. We will set out more details of these opportunities in due course, including 'Meet the Buyer' events to introduce local businesses to the opportunities presented through our main supply chain partners.

We are also committed to introducing community benefit funding, recognising the important role host communities will play in delivering the infrastructure required to meet our national endeavours to build a cleaner, more secure and affordable energy system for homes and businesses across Scotland and Great Britain in the long-term.

In the following section of this Report on Consultation, we will address any specific community feedback relevant to the options we consulted on.

Consultation process

We have received some feedback that our consultation process was not well promoted to affected communities or wider stakeholders and concerns around the timescale provided for feedback to be given.

As we set out in the 'Consultation Process' section of this Report on Consultation, we held a number of public consultation events, public meetings and bilateral and group engagements, using a range of methods to promote our consultations to our stakeholders.

Even at this early stage of development, where our consultation activities are voluntary, we fully recognise the importance of gathering stakeholder input to help inform our development plans. In response to stakeholder feedback, we introduced extensions to our consultation period to encourage anyone interested in these projects to provide their feedback. In addition, we would like to highlight that there will be further opportunity to comment on our proposals through the consenting process and would encourage all stakeholders to fully engage in that formal consultation exercise.

We fully recognise there is always room for improvement and as we look forward to the next round of public consultations, we are committed to apply learning from our first round of consultations to increase awareness, accessibility and coverage of consultation events. We will continue to welcome feedback on how we can further improve how we consult with our stakeholders on our projects.

3.2. Specific Project Related Feedback

Introduction

This section of the Report presents a summary of the project-specific feedback received for the proposed Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV OHL Project, and our response to the questions and themes emerging from the consultation process. Feedback has been grouped into either Project-wide feedback, for comments which were applicable to all sections of the OHL routes, or section-specific feedback, for comments relating to location-specific features and relevant to specific sections of the OHL route only. Within each section, feedback has been grouped into one of three project themes as follows:

Project Themes	Examples
Environmental Impact	Physical environment, biodiversity, habitat, protected species
Community Impact	Landscape and visual impact, health, local recreation, construction impacts, operational noise
Economic Impact	Tourism, job creation, agriculture

The stakeholders have been grouped into the categories outlined in the table below:

Stakeholder Group	Examples
Statutory Consultees	Historic Environment Scotland (HES), SEPA, NatureScot, Local Authorities
Non-Statutory Consultees	RSPB, Scottish Water, Forestry and Land Scotland
Community members and local organisations	Homeowners, local businesses, Residents Associations, elected members
Landowners & occupiers	Landowners, crofters, tenant farmers, occupiers of properties in closest proximity to substations

3.3. Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The consultation period has been very short, suggesting that the main decisions have already been taken. The period is not long enough for communities to properly digest the information and provide feedback.	Community members and local organisations	Following public consultation events, we usually adopt a 28-day feedback period. This provides an opportunity for stakeholders to raise questions or request further information before submitting their feedback. Early feedback raised concerns in relation to the consultation period from both community and statutory consultees, and as a result, we extended the feedback period until Friday 30 June, a total of 11 weeks from the start of the consultation. Although the consultation process has a defined period for feedback, the Community Liaison Manager will accept feedback throughout the development period of the project and ensure this is passed to the project team for consideration.
It seems like decisions on route options have already been taken and the consultation is a tick box exercise for SSEN Transmission	Community members and local organisations	In September 2022, we carried out Corridor Stage Consultation, the very first stage of the process for developing a new OHL of this scale. This introduced the project at this early stage of development and presented an opportunity for the public and statutory stakeholders to input into the corridor options and raise any initial concerns. A number of changes were made to our original Preferred Corridor as a result of consultation feedback that was received at this early stage as documented within our Corridor Report on Consultation, which is available for download in the Project Documents section of the project website.

		The second round of consultation events in April 2023 presented the route options that have been identified for the OHL, and our assessment of those route options in terms of environmental, engineering and cost considerations. The purpose of the consultation period is to gather feedback on our Preferred Route and the alternative route options from statutory and non-statutory consultees, landowners, local residents and members of the public. The feedback received has been reviewed in detail to determine if there are any further considerations that need to be taken into account to inform selection of the Proposed Route, and identify areas where alternative route options need to be considered. The 'Summary of Key Decisions' section of this report details the sections of the OHL route where changes have been made to our Proposed Route as a direct result of consultation feedback received.
There has been very little community consultation until this point. People should have had a chance to input into the OHL corridors and routes. I am concerned about a general lack of public knowledge/debate about the proposals.	Community members and local organisations	Due to the size and scale of the project, we use multiple methods to advertise our public consultation events. The September 2022 Corridor Stage Consultation events were advertised in both local and regional newspapers over multiple dates. In addition, we instructed the delivery of over 29,000 postcard invites to both domestic and commercial properties within the identified corridors. We are aware that some people might not have received these and have followed up with our supplier who raised these issues with distributors. We also notified community councils and all elected members within the corridors. For further details on the Corridor Stage of consultation, engagement levels and a summary of feedback, please refer to the Corridor Report on Consultation which is available for download in the Project Documents section of the project website.

		Now that we have conducted early engagement on this project, we have a significant number of people on our project mailing list, both from attendees at the event and from people accessing the project web page. In response to feedback, we will endeavour to further publicise future events within local communities in shops, libraries, public buildings and notice boards, as well as a postcard invitation posted to properties identified as potentially affected.
Why were the events held in locations where people were unlikely to be affected?	Community members and local organisations	Given the scale of the project, we tried to identify the main towns and locations at each point of the project and utilise the most accessible public venues to host the events. Following feedback at Corridor Stage Consultation of the project we added events in Nairn and Huntly for the Route Stage Consultation. As the OHL alignment is further refined, we aim to have more targeted engagement with those directly impacted by the project. If you have a suggestion of a suitable alternative venue to host future events, please get in touch with the Community Liaison Manager, Ryan Davidson, BBNP@sse.com or 07901133919.
Concerns raised about people not aware of the project and that some elderly people in the area might not have access to the internet to review documents.	Community members and local organisations	We understand not all stakeholders will have internet access to relevant project documents. Our Community Liaison Manager can be contacted by phone on 07901133919 or by letter requesting copies of any hard copy documentation they may require. Letters should be addressed to: Ryan Davidson, Community Liaison Manager, SSEN Transmission, 1 Waterloo St, Glasgow G2 6AY.

		We also plan to work with local host venues when carrying out further consultation or information sharing events, to leave hard copies in public halls and buildings, where permitted, for those who are not able to access documents online.
Maps used in your consultations are outdated and don't show my property. How can you develop route options if you don't know where all the properties are?	Community members and local organisations	It was brought to our attention during the events that the illustrative Ordnance Survey base maps utilised during our consultation events were outdated. The Ordnance Survey base maps utilised were from early 2022. Ordnance Survey update their maps on an ongoing basis, but only issue new versions of the map tiles once there are several changes within a map tile extent. Therefore, although some areas (e.g new housing) may have been there for several years, Ordnance Survey may not yet have issued an updated version of the map tile showing this. We would like to apologise for any alarm this may have caused and offer assurances that these Ordnance Survey base maps did not inform project assessments. The data utilised in determining the potential routes for the development (such as the Optioneer software which was presented on the TV screens) is based on the most up-to-date data available to us. Going forward, we will commit to ensuring illustrative maps used for consultations are based on the most recent Ordnance Survey data sets available.

Concerns were raised about proximity of the new OHL to properties, and the potential for the OHLs to be built going over the top of, or in close proximity to, new residential properties that have been recently built, are under construction or recently consented.	Community members and local organisations	One of the key factors considered when carrying out the routing of the proposed OHL is proximity to nearby residential properties, and we aim where possible to ensure that OHL infrastructure is no closer than 170 m to properties. To identify properties along the route, an up-to-date OS Addressbase dataset is being used. This dataset provides accurate locations of properties based on Local Authority, Royal Mail and Ordnance Survey information. Buffers have then been applied to each of these properties to allow us to clearly identify where they are situated so they can be avoided. In addition to this dataset, a search has also been carried out identifying any possible future properties that have been submitted to local councils for planning permission along the route. This will continue to be monitored as the alignment options are further developed, ensuring the OHL alignment maintains a suitable separation from all existing, in-construction or consented residential properties.
What consideration has been given to proximity to larger residential areas and local amenities such as village schools?	Community members and local organisations	Similar to residential properties, the OS Addressbase data set allows us to identify the location of certain types of buildings including those termed “educational”. Although no specific offset has been applied to these buildings, due to them typically being situated within local villages or towns they are often located in proximity to other residential buildings which do have an offset applied, and therefore this offers separation between any proposed OHL alignment and the area surrounding the schools.

		This will continue to be considered as the alignment options are further developed and we will ensure that suitable separation is provided. Similarly, the same applies to local amenities within villages, these tend to be identified within the OS dataset and allow us to identify areas of significance to be avoided.
Why can the OHL from Beauly to Peterhead not go via subsea around the coast?	Community members and local organisations	The decision to eliminate subsea cables from our corridor assessment was driven by wider network requirements, as detailed in our FAQs. In the initial identification of the requirement for this project, many onshore and offshore reinforcement options were assessed by the Electricity System Operator (ESO) in the 'Pathway to 2030' Holistic Network Design (HND) study. The HND study identified the need for both an offshore solution, as well as the onshore reinforcement solution between Spittal and Peterhead. This is because, to fully utilise offshore subsea links, the onshore network is also required to be strengthened. Further details of the ESO's HND and key considerations in selecting technologies is provided in our FAQs.
There has been a lack of information on your alternative solutions. Lack of information and detailed studies of proposed and alternative routes and alternative options.	Community members and local organisations	The three typical technology options considered for the transmission of electricity are OHLs, onshore cables and offshore subsea cables. The reason for selecting OHLs as the preferred technology choice has been discussed within the preceding sections, however in summary this choice is based on the technical challenges and costs associated with both onshore and offshore cables for routes of this length and the requirement to connect to multiple substations along the route. Looking specifically at OHLs, there are multiple options under this technology bracket to be considered.

		Some of these considerations relate to structure type, conductor (wire) type and number of conductors to be supported by the structure. We have selected a tower suite for supporting the conductors on this circuit that is capable of carrying larger conductors to allow for the larger capacity requirement of the circuit, whilst being able to maintain the statutory clearances required for operating at 400kV. This structure type has already been used on the network for the Beauly to Denny 400kV OHL and is preferred from a technical perspective. In terms of conductor design, the selection and the number of conductors the towers will support is currently still under review. This depends on a variety of factors such as the strength capability of the towers carrying different sizes and numbers of conductors. Where we mention deciding the number of conductors the towers will carry, the tower itself will still only have three arms on each side, however multiple individual conductors can be bundled together to increase the power transfer capability of the circuit. Currently we are progressing through the routeing process which has four key stages (0 to 3), each increasing in detail and resolution. The project is currently going through stage 2 (route selection) which aims to identify a Proposed Route which is considered to have the best opportunity to achieve an economically viable, technically feasible and environmentally sound alignment within it. As the project progresses through the final stage of route optioneering, different alignment options under consideration will be identified within the Proposed Route and these will be presented to members of the public to obtain feedback at the next round of consultation events, to aid in deciding the Proposed Alignment to be taken forward for consent application.

How big are the towers going to be?	Community members and local organisations	The height of the towers used for the proposed OHL depends on the surrounding topography. The key factor that typically dictates the height of the structure is our statutory obligation to adhere to minimum clearances to ground. This is to ensure the safety to members of the public and our own operational teams as set out in the ESQCR (Electrical Safety Quality and Continuity Regulations). In addition to this, we also comply with the government guidelines for exposure to EMFs and tower heights may also be driven based on this requirement. The tower suite being considered for use on this project has tower heights ranging from 42 m to 68 m. Based on the general topography observed it is believed that the average tower height will be in the region of 57 m, with some towers having a requirement to be taller and some may be shorter than this. As the project progresses, further work will be done to identify specific requirements in terms of tower heights, but due to no alignment being identified at this point only an estimate can be provided. It should be noted that in certain locations, such as the Caledonian Canal, specific crossing towers may be required which will exceed the maximum height of the standard tower suite and could be in the region of 90 m in height. This is to ensure that all statutory clearance requirements are maintained.
Why is a lattice style tower being proposed for this project instead of a T-pylon?	Community members and local organisations	The choice of structure to support large powerlines must consider a wide range of different factors. These include structural design, constructability, visual impact, community impact, environmental impact, cost, manufacturing, flexibility for routing, suitability for terrain, reliability, safety and maintainability.

		The lattice steel tower is recognised globally as finding a reasonable point of balance between these different, often conflicting needs. The T-Pylon has been designed and developed to suit the needs of National Grid and their operating area in England and Wales. Unfortunately, this means it not readily suitable for use in the north of Scotland. Further details are available within our FAQ.
How will SSEN Transmission mitigate impacts to local roads as a result of construction traffic?	Community members and local organisations	A Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment will be conducted as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment, including a Construction Traffic Management Plan. This will be conducted by Traffic and Transport specialists.
How will SSEN mitigate the noise of the project?	Community members and local organisations	Detailed noise surveys and assessments will be undertaken to identify and address any potential construction and operational noise impacts on nearby sensitive receptors. A key objective in routeing the OHL is to avoid proximity to as many residential properties as possible, which will reduce the potential for significant noise impacts. Appropriate noise limits, both during construction and operation, will be agreed in consultation with local authorities and the proposed development will not be permitted to exceed these limits.
Why have you not engaged and consulted with landowners who might be affected by the project? This should include owners who are not occupiers.	Landowners & occupiers	From early 2023 onwards, we have been contacting potentially affected landowners and occupiers. The vast majority of landowners and occupiers within our Proposed Route should have received communication from our Land Team. If you have not received any communication and you are an affected landowner or occupier, please contact our land team who will be happy to discuss the project in more detail with you. Beauly – Blackhillock - Alistair.G.Nicolson@sse.com Blackhillock – Peterhead - michael.forrest@sse.com

Some people didn't receive Landowner Information Questionnaires (LIQs) or did receive LIQs when they shouldn't have as they nowhere near the OHL route.	Landowners & occupiers	As part of the project, we are working to gather landownership information by identifying owners and occupiers of land within the Proposed Route. The main purpose of this activity is to ensure that everyone who could potentially be affected by or is within the vicinity of the route is kept informed of the project and can be consulted on the proposals.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
How is the scoring weighted against Engineering and Environmental considerations?	Community members and local organisations	Each topic area within the environmental, technical, and cost categories is considered in terms of the potential for the route option to be constrained, and a Red/Amber/Green (RAG) rating applied as appropriate. A comparative appraisal is then completed where the RAG ratings for each topic are used to examine any differentiators between the options being considered. Our FAQ, describes our Optioneering process and how the weighting of criteria is assessed in more detail.
What is SSEN Transmission doing to protect wildlife and the local environment?	Community members and local organisations	There are several environmental policies and legislation which need to be carefully considered in the development of new electricity transmission network infrastructure, in particular those associated with local, national and international designations. As a responsible developer, we take our environmental responsibilities very seriously and follow a mitigation hierarchy of 'avoid, minimise, mitigate and restore'. As mentioned in the Common Themes section, we are committed to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on all our projects; as well as compensatory planting for any trees felled during the construction phase, where possible with native species. Robust policies are also in place to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats, like peatland and ancient woodland. As part of the process of identifying potential route options we considered all the environmental designations in our search area, including Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special

		Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Ramsar (wetland) sites and nationally or locally designated sites such as RSPB reserves and local nature reserves. We have identified route options that seek to avoid or minimise interaction with these protected areas as much as possible. Surveys will be conducted as the project develops so that all wildlife, including plants, birds and protected species (both terrestrial and aquatic) which may be potentially affected are identified and appropriate action can be taken in line with our mitigation hierarchy. Where there is potential for impact, these surveys will help to identify appropriate mitigation to minimise the impact. During the consultation process, we have been made aware of several areas of sensitivity for various species along our potential route options. We have been sharing this information with our environmental consultants who undertake all species and habitat surveys and assessments on our behalf. We welcome further similar feedback from local communities that we can incorporate into our assessments.
How has wildlife been considered in the environmental assessments of the route options?	Community members and local organisations	The assessment methodology is described within the Route Selection Consultation Document and materials. Appraisal of route options involved systematic consideration against environmental, engineering and economic criteria. Wildlife was considered under the Natural Heritage environmental criteria. Assessment of wildlife has been primarily desk based, with supporting surveys. The rationale to our survey approach to date has been to focus on areas of highest potential to support species of conservation concern and potential vulnerability to impacts associated with OHLs.

		Consequently, surveys have focussed on areas of woodland, open moorland, and riparian corridors, which are predominantly distributed throughout the western half of the route (east Inverness-shire and Moray). This approach has been accepted by NatureScot. The survey effort will naturally increase for the alignment selection stage, leading into the Environmental Impact Assessment stage.
How will you achieve a net gain of biodiversity, and exactly how long it will take to reach this net gain? Where will this net gain be?	Community members and local organisations	Our approach to delivering Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is detailed on our website within 'A Network for Net Zero: Our Approach to Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain, December 2019'. In July 2023 we announced the following updates to our commitments for Nature and Biodiversity: • Our commitment to deliver BNG (of 10%) on all projects will be effective immediately (previously 2025); and • Where impacts on irreplaceable habitats (ancient woodland and blanket bog) are unavoidable, we will ensure that we restore more habitat than is lost. At this stage in the project, we have identified areas of irreplaceable habitat and high biodiversity value within each of the route options, and this information has fed into the wider assessment of route options through completion of our BNG optioneering toolkit. The project is still undergoing design to allow detailed biodiversity calculations to be undertaken, therefore we cannot provide the particulars of how much, how, where, or how long it will take for net gain to be realised at this time, but appropriate detail will be provided to accompany our application for Section 37 consent.

		We welcome suggestions and notes of interest for potential partners seeking support with habitat creation and enhancement which can support our delivery of biodiversity net gain. These can be submitted by email to bbnp@sse.com.
Concerns were raised about damage to peatland and forestry habitats and the risk of loss of biodiversity.	Community members and local organisations	Where possible, peatland and forestry habitats will be avoided. However, over the vast length of the proposed development this will not always be possible. Peat depth surveys will take place in early 2024 to help inform alignment development. Habitat surveys have already begun and helped to inform the routeing assessment. Habitat surveys will continue in further detail for the alignment and Environmental Impact Assessment stages. Impacts to woodland and forestry have been considered as part of our assessment process in both the corridor and route options appraisals. Woodland and forestry impacts will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. A specific chapter on forestry will be included within the Environmental Impact Assessment report, however we will be able to provide further detail on potential impacts to forestry at the alignment stage. Please refer to the response above for detail on biodiversity.
If the new OHL could follow or replace existing OHLs in the local area, this would reduce visual impacts of the new OHL.	Community members and local organisations	From a landscape and visual perspective, it is sometimes preferential to parallel a new OHL with an existing OHL to keep the potential effects in the same area, as long as it is designed within specific parameters.

		A team of landscape architects are working closely with us to understand and assess potential landscape and visual impacts across the proposed development. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Opportunities for rationalisation of existing OHL infrastructure in areas with potential for significant landscape and visual impacts will also be considered in further detail as the project progresses through OHL alignment selection and subsequent Environmental Impact Assessment.
Concerns were raised about previous storm damage to OHL infrastructure, and the resilience of future OHLs to climate change and storms.	Community members and local organisations	Damage to overhead electricity infrastructure has generally impacted the local electricity distribution network, which is largely made up of wooden poles. We have well-defined asset management strategies, including thorough inspection, diligent maintenance and refurbishment practices and have recently intensified our endeavours to enhance network resilience by prioritising comprehensive tree-cutting initiatives in areas prone to storm-related disruptions.
Many properties in this area have private water supplies – how will these be safeguarded?	Community members and local organisations	As the project progresses and a preferred alignment for the OHL is identified, discussions will be held with landowners and surveys completed to locate private water supplies. The outcome of these surveys and subsequent assessment will be documented in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report, with mitigation measures identified where required to safeguard private water supplies.
There is no mention of the resilience of OHL networks to climate change in your proposals.	Community members and local organisations	When considering climate change in relation to the design of new OHLs several aspects are taken into consideration. In the initial stage of routeing the new OHL, we use information available to us such as terrain type, elevation and flood risk to aid in the decision of where the OHL should go.

		These factors can be linked to climate change as areas where the OHL is more exposed or at higher elevations would result in increased climatic loadings. In addition to this we also use flood maps available to us to assess the risk of flooding in the area preventing access both during and post construction. For this project the OHL will be designed as a minimum to withstand 1 in 150 year weather events based on current climatology. In addition to this, any critical structure where failure could result in a safety risk will be designed to withstand 1 in 500 year weather events. This provides resilience in a changing climate in line with British Standards. The final aspect in terms of maintaining a secure network in respect to climate change is reliant on maintaining a clear operational corridor so that other third party objects cannot interfere with the OHL during changing climatic conditions. Typically, the main concern here is windblow damage on trees impacting the OHL circuit. We have seen some significant storms in the past few years resulting in a large number of forested areas being damaged due to windblow. To ensure the resilience of this project a clear corridor will be created so that the OHL will not be subjected to any potential interactions.
How will woodland and commercial forestry be affected by our proposals and how will you manage this?	Community members and local organisations	Consideration has been taken in developing route options to avoid woodland where possible, with increased weighting to avoid designated woodlands. It will not be possible to avoid all woodland and where it becomes necessary to pass through woodlands an operational corridor will be applied of 90 m (45 m either side of the centreline). This provides protection of assets in event of windfall during storms, such as have occurred in recent years.

		This width of operational corridor will be assessed on a site by site basis, to reflect the type of trees and their maximum potential height and there may be opportunity to reduce in some instances. The operational corridor will be maintained on a four-year rotational basis through felling of regeneration. Further assessments are made in areas of broadleaf's where the operational corridor has been reduced, to remove any branches which may encroach. For any disturbance to woodland, we will seek to reach agreement with the landowner and the relevant stakeholders (such as Scottish Forestry) to agree suitable location for compensatory planting.
<u>NatureScot</u> Where it is not possible to avoid designated sites, NatureScot have requested more detailed information about the routeing and construction of the towers on or adjacent to this site before they are able to offer further comment on the level of impact.	Statutory Consultees	Once alignment options have been developed, further detail can be provided on which designated sites will potentially be impacted as part of the Alignment Stage consultation process.
<u>Historic Environment Scotland (HES)</u> HES raised queries on the methodology and terminology used in the consultation materials and highlighted potentially missing historic assets from our assessment.	Statutory Consultees	The consultation material is a summary of our more detailed route assessment. It is unlikely any historic assets have been missed from assessments, but rather were not detailed within the consultation materials. The dataset used for the route assessment was obtained from HES. Please see further detail in Appendix A.

Scottish Water All Scottish Water assets and drinking water catchments potentially affected by the activity should be identified, with particular consideration being given to access roads and pipe crossings.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Drinking water catchments have been identified and are being factored into the assessment process. Other Scottish Water assets will be identified at a later stage to feed into the design process. Please see our full response in Appendix A.
RSPB Two years of field surveys (vantage point, breeding bird and wintering bird) should be undertaken, especially in any sensitive locations. Peat depth and habitat surveys should be undertaken along the preferred route. Line markers may be required in some areas.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Noted. Please see a more detailed response in Appendix A.
National Trust for Scotland We appreciate the care that has gone into the development of multiple routes. Should SSEN Transmission look at offsetting the associated impact of disrupting peatland and moorland to underground the new line, the National Trust for Scotland would be able to consider this, as we have done together in the past.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Noted
Joint Radio Company (The Windfarm Team) Careful consideration needs to be given to the location of the towers.	Non-Statutory Consultees	We have considered any licenced transmitting/receiving devices registered with Ofcom as part of the routeing process. The Ofcom register provided locations of any transmitting/receiving devices along with the type of link that is registered.

The location of the towers must not cause an obstruction to critical national infrastructure link paths.		This dataset allows us to minimise any impact to the licenced radio networks along the route, further consultation will be carried out with JRC and other fixed link operators once alignment options and potential tower locations are identified.
<u>Scottish Forestry Grampian/ Scottish Forestry Highland</u> SSEN Transmission should consider whether the underlying purpose of the proposals can reasonably be met without resorting to woodland removal. Detailed information on any compensatory planting proposals should also be provided.	Statutory Consultees	Please refer to the Common Themes Section regarding the rationale behind the Project Need for the Technology Choice. Impacts to woodland and forestry are considered through the routeing and alignment process and are considered on balance with the wider environmental, engineering and cost factors. Detailed information on compensatory planting proposals will be provided when the application is submitted to the Scottish Government. Please see our full response in Appendix A.
<u>The Highland Council</u> The proposed OHL should aim to avoid woodland and trees of high biodiversity value. Where this is not possible, the operating corridor (OC) must be kept as narrow as possible through the restructuring of woodland.	Statutory Consultees	Consideration has been taken in developing route options to avoid woodland where possible, with increased weighting to avoid designated woodlands. It will not be possible to avoid all woodland and where it becomes necessary to pass through woodlands an operational corridor will be applied. This provides protection of assets in event of windfall during storms, such as have occurred in recent years. This width of operational corridor will be assessed on a site by site basis, to reflect the type of trees and their maximum potential height and there may be opportunity to reduce in some instances.

Where felling is considered unavoidable, these areas should be restocked with native species which enables the OC to be reduced to the minimum width, therefore reducing the amount of woodland removal. Where permanent removal of woodland occurs, compensatory planting will be required. Details of compensatory planting must be provided in support of any planning submission and developed in consultation with Scottish Forestry and other relevant stakeholders.		Detailed information on compensatory planting proposals will be provided when the application is submitted to the Scottish Government.
<u>Beauly Fishery Board</u> Beauly Fishery Board hope that the capacity of the new infrastructure would be able to take the electricity generated not just from developments planned up to 2030 but have extra capacity to take additional electricity from future projects not yet planned to minimise the potential environmental harm, disruption and time/ money spent on delivering projects such as this.	Non-Statutory Consultee	This infrastructure has been designed at the maximum capacity available within the GB transmission system and any additional reinforcements required will be subject to established electricity network planning processes based on future changes to electricity generations and demand.

3.4. Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
How confident are you in the cost element of scoring each route option during your assessment?	Community members and local organisations	At the routeing stage of a project there are still uncertainties in project costing, with costs further refined as alignments and subsequent designs are developed and further investigations completed. To build up comparative costs for each option, factors considered in costing include the construction and maintenance costs estimated based on total route length, length through woodland, existing infrastructure crossings, expected length of access tracks or road improvements required and number of angle towers (turning points in the route). Rates are applied for these elements based on experience from historic projects and engagement with framework suppliers.
A suggestion was made that properties directly affects by the project should receive a discount to their electricity bills for the lifetime of the property.	Landowners & occupiers	We anticipate the UK Government's recommendations and guidance following their recent consultation on Community Benefits for Electricity Transmission Network Infrastructure will be published in late 2023. This will outline how community benefits should be allocated. Subject to the UK Government's recommendations, we intend to formally launch our Community Benefit Fund in 2024.
How will the project contribute towards upgraded infrastructure to support business and economic growth?	Community members and local organisations	We are committed to maximising economic opportunities during the construction and operational phase of the project, supporting local jobs and businesses. Recent analysis carried out by BiGGAR Economics highlighted the significant impact these will have in delivering substantial economic benefit to Scotland and the UK, supporting thousands of high value green jobs from early careers opportunities to technical roles, helping to accommodate those transitioning from the oil and gas sectors too.

		The analysis revealed that the programme is expected to contribute over £6bn in additional value to the UK economy, including around £2.5bn of direct additional benefit in Scotland and that it could support more than 20,000 jobs right across the UK, 9,000 of which will be in Scotland. We have recently announced development of our Community Benefits Fund for projects we expect to deliver between now and 2026. The Community Benefit Fund will form a core part of our social and economic support package in the communities and regions we operate in.
Is the remuneration and compensation for landowners going to be reviewed as the amounts seem outdated.	Landowners & occupiers	Our Wayleave Payment Rates are reviewed on an annual basis. The wayleave payment is based on the size of tower footprint, as this is the amount of land used, and not the voltage of the OHL.
This project will potentially impact the value of our property. How will SSEN compensate us for this?	Community members and local organisations	In terms of compensation, this is governed by law - Electricity Act 1989 and Land Compensation Act 1973. Compensation will be agreed on a case-by-case basis according to a number of factors e.g. number of towers, size of towers and type of property affected as set out in the statutory provisions. There is no provision for compensation within these Acts for properties which do not host infrastructure on their landholding. Maintaining distance from residential properties and minimising visual impacts are a significant consideration in our routing process.
How is compulsory purchase implemented by SSEN Transmission?	Community members and local organisations	We will be required to carry out various engineering and environmental surveys on areas of land to inform the design process. Consent will be sought from affected landowners and occupiers in advance for these surveys by our land managers. Once we have finalised the design of the OHL infrastructure and associated works e.g. access tracks, we will be required to secure the appropriate land rights from the relevant parties for all infrastructure. Our land managers will endeavour to reach a voluntary agreement with each party, however, in the event that agreement cannot be achieved, we would look to utilise our statutory powers under the Electricity Act 1989 in the form of Necessary Wayleaves and Compulsory Purchase Orders.

Section 1 – Beauly area substation to south of Beauly

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 1 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
A suggestion was made that an alternative route option should have been considered to connect from the preferred Beauly Area substation site at Fanellan through Boblainy and Druim Ba forests and across the Caplich area, to avoid the more populated areas of Beauly, Kiltarlity and Kirkhill.	Community members and local organisations	Following this feedback from the consultation event, a further OHL route was assessed to the south of the route options presented at consultation. This route was ruled out on the grounds of visual impacts to the communities at Culburnie and Kiltarlity and the Dava Way, significant forestry removal impacts and effects on landscape character.
Concerns were raised about maintaining safe cycling routes between Kiltarlity and Beauly along the unclassified road via Kilmorack Dam during construction works.	Community members and local organisations	A Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment and Recreational Impact Assessment will be conducted as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. A Construction Traffic Management Plan will also be produced to accompany the Environmental Impact Assessment.
It was noted that the Section 1 area is a strategic route for military and civilian aircraft, and queried whether the towers would require to be lit-up at night time.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the potential aviation traffic in the vicinity of the route and have consulted with the MoD, Civil Aviation Authority, NATS, Highlands and Islands Airport (HIA) and other licenced aerodromes along the route to ensure that their requirements are satisfied.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
		We are currently working with the licensed aerodromes in the area to identify any specific lighting requirements, however until the tower positions are known it is not possible to conclude what these requirements will be. At this point in time no requirement for lighting has been specified, however this will be reviewed again as the alignment options develop as it is dependent on factors such as structure height, location and ground elevation which are not currently known at this stage.
Concerns were raised about maintaining safe cycling routes between Kiltarlity and Beauly along the unclassified road via Kilmorack Dam during construction works.	Community members and local organisations	A Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment and Recreational Impact Assessment will be conducted as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. A Construction Traffic Management Plan will also be produced to accompany the Environmental Impact Assessment.
The suggestion was made that if the new OHL could follow or replace existing OHLs in the local area, this would reduce visual impacts of the new OHL.	Community members and local organisations	The Preferred Route provides opportunities for the new OHL to be located alongside the existing OHLs to the east of Beauly Substation. It is proposed that the existing Beauly to Knocknagael 132kV OHL will be dismantled as part of this project, and we will continue to explore options for further network rationalisations as the project progresses through the alignment selection stage.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
<u>The Highland Council</u> Communities in Section 1 of the OHL want a consolidated approach to development in the area. The Council's key concerns at present relate to minimising the effects on surrounding landscape, visual amenity and on the affected communities. In this respect, we request that all undergrounding options are fully considered for the initial stretches of the connecting transmission lines which cross through, or in the vicinity of, the more densely populated areas both to the north and east of the proposed Beauly area substation and converter station. Should this not be possible for the 400kV OHLs, scope to rationalise or underground other transmission lines in the vicinity must be explored to help mitigate the likely widespread cumulative impacts of this proposal. Another key consideration is how construction impacts will be managed, including what mitigation will be required for the local road network, notably access over the River Beauly via the Black Bridge, with it envisaged that construction will be undertaken over several years in an area which has already been subject to extensive construction work associated with the development and expansion of Beauly substation.	Statutory Consultees	Noted. A consolidated approach will be taken to development in the area. Please refer to the Common Themes section regarding the potential for underground cables. It is proposed that the existing Beauly to Knocknagael 132kV OHL will be dismantled as part of this project, and we will continue to explore options for further network rationalisations as the project progresses through the alignment selection stage. A Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment will be conducted as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. A Construction Traffic Management Plan will also be produced to accompany the Environmental Impact Assessment Report.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised around mature tree plantings within the Lovat Estate between Black Bridge and Lovat Bridge.	Landowners & occupiers	This will be assessed in further detail when developing alignment options. A forestry specialist will be carrying out a forestry assessment of the alignment options and the mature tree plantings within the Lovat Estate will be taken into consideration as part of this assessment.
Concerns were raised around the impacts to sites of historical interest in the local area.	Community members and local organisations	Section 1 has a high density of cultural heritage designations and assets. A cultural heritage specialist has carried out site visits and an assessment of the route options and will also be undertaking the alignment options assessment to ensure impacts to sites of historical interest are minimised as much as possible.
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to badgers, pine marten, osprey, red kite, buzzard, sparrow hawks. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
<u>NatureScot</u> All routes within Sections 1 – 5 have the potential for connectivity with the goose interests associated with Inner Moray Firth SPA (within 15 - 20 km).	Statutory Consultees	Noted. Impacts to natural heritage designations including the SPA have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) processes.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultees	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
RSPB RSPB have concerns around Route 1A being preferred despite having impacts on irreplaceable semi-natural ancient woodland. Route 1A is said to have the lowest biodiversity unit value of the Section 1 options, however we understand that irreplaceable habitat would not be factored into SSEN Transmission's metric so this summary could be misleading. Avoiding impacts on irreplaceable habitat should be a key priority.	Non-Statutory Consultees	We have tried to avoid areas of irreplaceable semi-natural ancient woodland, however there are a small number of unavoidable areas. Alignments will be developed with input from environmental specialists to cross this woodland in the most appropriate way possible to ensure the least impact. Please see further detail in Appendix A.
Beauly Fishery Board The route options cross over salmon spawning habitat and prime angling. Finalising a route here would have to be in liaison with the Lower Beauly Fishing Syndicate to minimise conflict with the angling interest. It is unfortunate that different route options run through ancient woodland. We would hope that any felling would be compensated by the planting of native deciduous trees elsewhere in the catchment.	Non-Statutory Consultees	We are keen to continue consulting with the Beauly Fishery Board to ensure conflict with the Lower Beauly Fishing Syndicate is minimised and prime angling spots are retained. Please see further detail in Appendix A.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to fishing along the River Beauly, with existing fishing beats potentially restricted where the new OHL crosses the River Beauly.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware the River Beauly is used for fishing and this has been considered as part of the recreational assessment of the route options. We will continue to engage with the local fishing groups as we develop alignment options to minimise impacts on fishing in the River Beauly.
A suggestion was made that the route options assessment had assigned undue weighting to the sensitivity of the Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival site, which only operates for a few days every year, in comparison with the significance weighting of residential properties and other business enterprises.	Community members and local organisations	Route 1A was chosen as the Preferred Route primarily due to having a reduced impact on residential properties as it is further from the communities of Culburnie, Kiltarlity and Belladrum. In addition, it also has the benefit of not passing through the site of the Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival, which would potentially impact the ongoing operation of the festival.
It was noted that planning permission had been granted for holiday lodges in woodland in the Beaufort Estate, to the east of the River Beauly and Croiche Wood.	Community members and local organisations	An extensive search of planning applications has been conducted across the OHL route options. We are aware of the planning permission for the holiday lodges in the Beaufort Estate and this will be taken into consideration when developing alignment options.
<u>The Highland Council</u> It is envisaged that community wealth building would be an integral aspect to this proposal and the challenge remains for SSEN Transmission to demonstrate how socio-economic benefit would be maximised to achieve a just transition for the affected communities.	Statutory Consultees	Please refer to the Common Themes section regarding the socio-economic impacts of the proposed development.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
<u>Scottish Canals</u> Information was provided on maximum permitted vessel dimensions for the Caledonian Canal.	Non-statutory Consultees	This information will be used to ensure statutory clearance requirements are maintained when designing towers for the Caledonian Canal crossing. We will continue to engage with Scottish Canals as we develop and assess alignment options and design the crossing towers.

Section 2 – south of Beauly to south of Inverness

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 2 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about landscape and visual impacts of the Preferred Route 2A2 along the corridor between A862 and the A833 and Achnagairn, in particular on receptors in the surrounding settlements of Cabrich, Milifiach, Moniack and Knockblain.	Community members and local organisations	This has been taken into consideration as part of the routeing assessment and will be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Common Themes section.
A suggestion was made that impacts of Route 2C1 to the Great Glen Way had been given undue weighting in comparison to other constraints in the same section.	Community members and local organisations	We do not consider undue weighting has been assigned to the Great Glen Way. A landscape architect has conducted site visits and carried out a landscape and visual assessment of all the route options. If Route 2C1 was taken forward, the OHL would run parallel to the Great Glen Way, interrupting views for users of the route for over 5 km. Considering the Great Glen Way is one of Scotland's Great Trails, this contributed to the significance of the detrimental effect.
It was noted that the area of The Aird to the south and east of Newtonhill and Altnacardich, including Mam Mor, Worzil's Wood and An Leacainn, is a popular area for recreation, including walking, mountain biking and horse riding. It was also noted that there are ponds draining into the Allt na Ceardaich burn that are popular with paddle boarders.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. We are aware of the recreational value of The Aird and this will be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
A suggestion was made that there may be opportunities to improve access to existing walking tracks around Altnacardich, Blackfold and An Leacainn, and potentially adding new mountain bike links to the Great Glen Way from this area.	Community members and local organisations	We welcome suggestions of areas where existing recreational access could be improved as a result of the project. Opportunities for recreational access improvements will be explored further throughout the project development and design process, in consultation with landowners and other key stakeholders. If there are any proposals for such improvements, please feel free to highlight them by email to bbnp@sse.com.
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to Cullaird Wood to the east of the River Ness. The woodland was noted to be a popular amenity woodland space with well-established footpaths and is also the starting point of the South Loch Ness Trail.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This has been taken into consideration as part of the routeing assessment and will be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options.
Concerns were raised about impacts to the Riding for Disabled facility in the fields east of Moniack Burn.	Community members and local organisations	We are in contact with the riding school and are looking to work with them to develop alignments that avoid direct impacts to their facilities.
<u>The Highland Council</u> Have local development areas been considered in the Inverness area?	Statutory Consultee	A search of local development areas has been conducted across the route options and these have been avoided.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to Conan Bank wetland, which was granted funds as part of NatureScot's Nature Restoration Fund and has now been successfully restored by landowners and the West Loch Ness Farm Cluster.	Landowners & occupiers	We are aware of Conan Bank wetland and will continue to engage with the landowners and the West Loch Ness Farm Cluster to develop alignments that avoid direct impacts to the wetland.
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to the Reelig Estate designed woodland and landscape.	Landowners & occupiers	We are aware of Reelig House and further assessment will take place once alignment options are developed.
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to osprey, red kite, owls, buzzards and black grouse. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.		These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
<u>The Highland Council</u> Why is Route 2A2 the preferred route when Route 2A1 is better environmentally? We prefer the crossing of the Caledonian Canal to be kept closer to the existing OHL crossings, rather than take the southern Route 2C2.	Statutory Consultee	We take a multi-disciplinary approach to deciding preferred options. In addition to environmental concerns, engineering and cost considerations are also factored in to arrive at the overall preferred option. In this case, Route 2A2 is preferred because Route 2A1 was least preferred from an engineering perspective as it would have unavoidable impacts on a number of residential properties. The feedback on the crossing of the Caledonian Canal has been considered in the decision to take Route 2A2 forward as the Proposed Route.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
<u>Historic Environment Scotland</u> HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultee	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
<u>NatureScot</u> The interest of the Moniack Gorge SAC is green shield moss which requires very specific micro-climatic conditions provided by the wooded gorge. Where it is not possible to avoid the Torvean Landforms (SSSI), we would need more detailed information about the routing and construction of the towers on this site before we are able to offer further comment on the level of impact. Loch Battan (SSSI) could be vulnerable to impacts from construction.	Statutory Consultee	Noted. Route 2B would oversail the Moniak Gorge SAC here, with no anticipated need for tree thinning or removal from a wayleave. Were such removal required, we would advise use of hand tools only, to avoid disturbance to existing habitats, and possibly leaving downed woody debris where feasible to provide habitat for the SAC's qualifying feature, green shield-moss. Route 2A2 has however been selected as the Proposed Route in this section, therefore no direct impacts to the SAC are anticipated. Impacts to the noted natural heritage designations have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes. We will continue to consult with NatureScot throughout the project development process.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Beauly Fishery Board All potential routes will cross coastal burns which host sea trout. Both sea trout and salmon are present in the largest of the catchment's coastal burns, Moniack burn. Any development would have to ensure that there is no impact to salmon and sea trout.	Non-Statutory Consultee	We are aware seat trout and salmon are present in Moniack burn. Further ecology surveys will take place through to 2024 to be included within the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It was noted that planning permission is in place for five new residential properties at the site of the former Scaniport caravan site.	Community members and local organisations	An extensive search of planning applications has been conducted across the route. We are aware of the five new residential properties at the former Scaniport caravan site, and these will be taken into consideration when developing alignment options.

Section 3 – A9 and River Nairn crossing

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 3 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about impacts to Tomfat Woodlands, which is a popular recreation area for walking, cycling, horse riding and nature watching.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This information will form part of the recreational assessment at the alignment stage.
Concerns were raised about visual impacts to Culloden Conservation Area and Culloden Battlefield.	Community members and local organisations	Potential for impacts on Culloden Battlefield is one of the primary concerns for us in developing an appropriate OHL in Section 3. On site consultation took place with Historic Environment Scotland and The National Trust in early 2023, and we are keen to continue working closely with these stakeholders as the project develops.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to mature Scots pine forest in Tomfat Woodlands, including black grouse that has recently been sited here.	Community members and local organisations	These concerns have been noted and passed on to the forestry specialist for further at the alignment stage. As detailed above, native woodlands are avoided where possible, with additional weighting to the protection of veteran and ancient trees. See following response regarding black grouse.
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to red squirrel, pine marten, deer, badger and black grouse. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
The Highland Council Would prefer for the OHL to be kept within close proximity to the existing OHL. Agreed that Route 3B would be preferred.	Statutory Consultee	Noted.
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultee	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
<u>NatureScot</u> Route 3C includes a section of Littlemill Fluvioglacial Landforms (SSSI). Where it is not possible to avoid the SSSI, we would need more detailed information about the routing and construction of the towers on this site before we are able to offer further comment on the level of impact.	Statutory Consultee	The alignment stage will avoid passing directly through any SSSI or SAC sites in this section and indirect impacts from connecting habitats will also be considered. The alignment selection stage will also take into consideration the use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on protection of species. Please refer to Appendix A for a more detailed response.
<u>Scottish Forestry</u> Will a new wayleave be created with new forestry loss within Section 3 if the Preferred Route is chosen?	Statutory Consultee	OHLs will be kept together through forestry where possible to reduce the need for a new wayleave, however this will be dependent on other constraints in the area and may not always be possible.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It was noted that there is an operational quarry (Mid Lairgs Quarry) within Route 3C which has planning permission for sand and gravel extraction.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. The quarry should not be affected with the decision to take Route 3B forward to alignment stage.

Section 4 – south of Culloden to Ferness

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 4 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Dulsie Bridge on the River Findhorn was noted to be a popular recreational area for walking.	Community members and local organisations	Dulsie Bridge is over 2.5 km south of the most southern route option therefore it is not anticipated to be affected by the Proposed Development. We are aware the River Findhorn in general has many walking routes in close proximity. These have been taken into consideration at the route selection stage and will be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options.
The broadleaved woodland areas between the River Findhorn and the B9007 were noted to be important local amenity woodlands.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This has been considered as part of the routeing process and will form part of our assessment when developing alignment options.
It was noted that the area around Loch Belivat and Ardclach Bell Tower is a popular recreational and tourist area.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This will form part of our recreational assessment when developing alignment options.
Concerns were raised about potential cumulative landscape and visual impacts associated with the new OHL running in parallel to the existing 275kV OHL within Section 4.	Community members and local organisations	From a landscape and visual perspective, it is often preferential to parallel a new OHL with an existing OHL to keep the potential effects in the same area, as long as it is designed within specific parameters. A team of landscape architects are working closely with us to understand and assess potential landscape and visual impacts across the Proposed Development. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It was noted that there are three key amphibian breeding pools within Section 4 including at the ford near Achravat, Levrattich near Ardclach and Achavelgin.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This will be taken into consideration when developing alignment options.
The Nairn Viaduct, south of Culloden Moor, was noted to be an important historical feature.	Community members and local organisations	The Nairn Viaduct has been considered in the cultural heritage assessment as part of the multi-disciplinary route options appraisal. It is an important historical feature, which is one of the reasons Routes 4A1 and 4A2 have not been taken forward as the Proposed Route.
It was noted that the Preferred Route 4B will run through an area of native woodland at Glengeoullie, planted in 2012.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the woodland at Glengeoullie, which we will look to avoid when developing alignment options.
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to osprey, capercaillie and red crossbill. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
Concerns were raised about potential impacts of the northern route options (Routes 4A1 and 4A2) on the Darnaway Forest Special Protection Area (SPA), designated for capercaillie populations.	Community members and local organisations	We have considered Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA in the routeing process and will continue to consider it when developing alignment options.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
		We are engaging with the Capercaillie Project Officer as advised by NatureScot. We have surveyed all potentially suitable woodland blocks along the route including those where capercaillie data was obtained from RSPB. This included consultation with NatureScot as was required of us under the Schedule 1 survey licence for capercaillie surveys.
The Highland Council Would prefer for the OHL to be kept within proximity of the existing OHL.	Statutory Consultees	Noted. This feedback will be considered when developing alignment options.
NatureScot Routes 4A1 and 4A2 include Dalroy and Clava Landforms (SSSI) spanning most of the route width, which may be difficult to avoid. Routes 4A1 and 4A2 are adjacent to Cawdor Wood SSSI and SAC. Tree removal adjacent to the SAC would need to assess the likelihood of any indirect effects on woodland interests within the SAC. Muckle Burn Clunas (SSSI) is located within Route 4C and avoided by the preferred option.	Statutory Consultees	The alignment stage will aim to avoid passing directly through any SSSI or SAC sites in this section and indirect impacts from connecting habitats will also be considered. The alignment selection stage will also take into consideration the use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on protection of species. Please refer to Appendix A for a more detailed response.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Darnaway and Lethen Forest (SPA) is designated for its breeding capercaillie and there are adjacent forest blocks that provide habitat and support to the SPA population.		
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultees	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage. Please refer to Appendix A for further detail.
National Trust for Scotland We fear that the addition of the 400kV OHL in proximity to the existing 275kV OHLs would create a jarring affect to the landscape. The current Preferred Route 4B would see an increase of the existing powerlines that would be visible from the main battlefield landscape.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Noted. Please see a more detailed response in Appendix A.
RSPB The route options pass close to woodland where Capercaillie have historically been recorded. There is a risk it will fragment current continuous forest cover within dispersal distance of the designated site, which may have a negative effect on the species and their ability to travel between suitable areas of habitat.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Ornithology surveys are being conducted in the areas that the route options pass through, including Capercaillie focused surveys. An ornithologist is working closely with us and will be feeding into alignment development.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It is important that up to date Capercaillie records are requested from RSPB Scotland, and appropriate survey work undertaken in this area. Where possible woodland habitat removal should be avoided.		

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to the proposed Cairn Duhie Wind Farm development.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the Cairn Duhie Wind Farm development, and it will be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options.
It was noted that an existing planning consent is in place for a sand and gravel quarry development at Remore, within Route 4A1.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. We do not anticipate this being a constraint going forward with the Proposed Route 4B.

Section 5 – Ferness to south of Forres

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 5 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential impacts of Route 5A to the Findhorn Valley and Wooded Estates Special Landscape Area.	Community members and local organisations	Direct impacts to the Findhorn Valley and Wooded Estates Special Landscape Area are not anticipated with the decision to take Route 5B forward to the alignment stage. This was one of the drivers for choosing Route 5B as the Proposed Route.
Moray Council Do SSEN Transmission try to avoid elevations?	Statutory Consultees	We try to avoid elevations and sky-lining as per the Holford Rules and our Routeing Guidance 'Procedures for Routeing OHLs and Underground Cables of 132kV and above'. This is why Route 5B is so wide around Cairn Eney. This allows flexibility to develop alignment options at the next stage of the process.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about impacts of Route 5A on Glenernie House.	Community members and local organisations	This has been taken into consideration and Route 5A will not be taken forward to the alignment stage.
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to hen harrier, capercaillie, black grouse, crested tits, pine marten, red squirrel, wildcat and badger. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
<u>NatureScot</u> Capercaillie movement between areas of suitable and supporting habitat is possible. The river crossings of the Findhorn and one of its major tributaries will be required upstream of the Lower Findhorn Woods SSSI and SAC. The SSSI supports two rare river lichens that would be vulnerable to pollution. The preferred route is within 1 km of Moidach More SSSI and SAC. Hydrological connectivity is less likely, but care will need to be taken to ensure that construction does not impact the rate of drainage from the SSSI/SAC.	Statutory Consultee	Advice on potential Capercaillie movements are noted and this has been captured in the Capercaillie survey coverage, which began in March 2023. The potential impacts to Lower Findhorn Woods SSSI/SAC and Moidach More SSSI/SAC during construction are noted. Works taking place during construction will follow an appropriate Construction Environmental Management Plan and an Ecological Clerk of Works will be required to monitor works onsite. Further detail provided in Appendix A.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultee	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
RSPB RSPB believe that the alternative, Route 5A, should be reconsidered unless the preferred, Route 5B, can be aligned to avoid impacting on the large amount of irreplaceable bog habitat found within this stretch. The eastern end of Route 5A/5B, south of Hill of Glaschyle, is of medium importance for breeding farmland waders.	Non-Statutory Consultee	Alignment options will be developed to avoid irreplaceable bog habitat as best as possible. Route 5A is unlikely to be reconsidered due to the potential for visual impacts on residential properties and cultural heritage settings impacts at the pinch point near Edinkillie House and Church, the Dava Way, and the Divie Viaduct. The presence of breeding farmland waders is noted and has been passed onto the consultant ornithologists.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to grouse moor management in the southern portions of Route 5B.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. We will continue to engage with landowners and estate managers as we develop alignment options within the Proposed Route 5B.

Section 6 – south of Forres to Kellas

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 6 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised that the northern route options (Routes 6A1 and 6A2) would surround the village of Dallas by OHLs, as there is already a 275kV OHL to the south of the village.	Community members and local organisations	The proximity of Route 6A1 and 6A2 to Dallas was a significant constraint of the route options. With Route 6C as the Proposed Route, effects on Dallas are anticipated to be negligible.
Concerns were raised about landscape impacts of Routes 6A1 and 6A2 on the Pluscarden Valley Special Landscape Area.	Community members and local organisations	With Route 6C as the Proposed Route, effects on Pluscarden Valley Special Landscape Areas are anticipated to be negligible.
It was noted that there are informal footpaths and walks in the area immediately to the north of Dallas within Routes 6A1 and 6A2.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. With Route 6C as the Proposed Route, effects on walking routes around Dallas are anticipated to be negligible.
<u>Moray Council</u> Route 6A1 is not preferable is due to the proximity to Dallas. Romach Loch in the western end of Routes 6A1 and 6A2 is popular for walking, it would be a shame to have pylons in this area.	Statutory Consultees	Please see comment above for response on proximity to Dallas. We aware of the recreational use of Romach Loch. With Route 6C as the Proposed Route, effects on Romach Loch are anticipated to be negligible. Please see Appendix A for further detail.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
NatureScot All routes within Sections 6-8 are within the 15-20 km connectivity distance for foraging greylag geese of Loch Spynie SPA and Ramsar. Forest blocks within the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA lie within the Section 6 route options and may support Capercaillie populations. Routes 6A1 and 6A2 are within potential connectivity distance for breeding osprey that could be associated with the Findhorn Bay section of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar. Routes 6A2, 6B and 6C are all adjacent to Kellas Oakwood (SSSI) although indirect effects are unlikely.	Statutory Consultees	Impacts to the noted natural heritage designated sites have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes. Much of the surrounding landscape is suitable for foraging geese, and our current choice of bird survey vantage points covers the movements of geese from these sites into functionally linked land. Please refer to Section 5 regarding our response on Capercaillie. Please see Appendix A for further detail.
RSPB The preferred route in Section 6 (Route 6C) is preferable in terms of bird species interests. The alignment would need to avoid a large amount of irreplaceable bog habitat.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Alignment options will be developed to avoid irreplaceable bog habitat as best as possible. Also see the following response.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
There is historic use of this route by breeding Merlin. The woodland within the alternative Route 6A has historically contained lekking Capercaillie.		
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to capercaillie, merlin and crested tits. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.

Section 7 – Kellas to Teindland

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 7 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The Highland Gliding Club is in close proximity to the Preferred Route. It is likely the Preferred Route would affect safe operation and pose an air safety hazard. There are some possibilities for mitigating this and the gliding club would be happy to discuss further with SSEN Transmission. A site visit is recommended by the gliding club so SSEN Transmission can gain an appreciation of the effect of power lines near airfields.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the presence of the Highland Gliding Club and will continue to engage with them as we further develop alignment options.
Concerns were raised about the back-up Preferred Route 7A in terms of proximity to properties and other existing and proposed developments, including the A96 dualling project and the Acorn Bioenergy anaerobic digestion plan at Longmorn.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. The Proposed Route is 7B which avoids this area.
Concerns were raised about landscape impacts of route options 7A1 and 7A2 on the Pluscarden Valley Special Landscape Area.	Community members and local organisations	With Route 7B as the Proposed Route, impacts on Pluscarden Valley Special Landscape Area are anticipated to be negligible.
Moray Council SSEN Transmission should be aware that south of Elgin has open undulating plain. This area is involved within the Route 7A options.	Statutory Consultee	Noted. The Proposed Route is 7B which avoids this area.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to pine marten, hen harrier and merlin. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
<u>Nature Scot</u> East of the A941, all routes fall within the 10 km core foraging area for breeding osprey that could be associated with the River Spey section of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar site. Route 7A2/7B are adjacent to Kellas Oakwood (SSSI). With the road separating the SSSI from the route options there is less likelihood of indirect effects. Route 7B includes a small section of Buinach and Glenlatterach (SSSI) and Coleburn Pasture (SSSI). Geese in Route 7A1/7A2 around Upper Bogside may have a possible connection to local SPAs.	Statutory Consultee	The alignment stage will avoid passing directly through any SSSI or SAC sites in this section and indirect impacts from connecting habitats will also be considered. The alignment selection stage will also take into consideration the use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on protection of species. Please refer to Appendix A for a more detailed response.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultee	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
Scottish Forestry The area south of Brown Muir has a significant new proposed woodland area, which is currently in Environmental Impact Assessment stage.	Statutory Consultee	Noted. This will be taken into consideration when developing alignment options.
RSPB The alignment must avoid the small areas of peatland and ancient woodland within this area of the planned route. The open moorland around the western edge of Route 7B has been used by nesting hen harrier and merlin. The quarry to the north of Route 7A can hold large numbers of wintering waders and wildfowl.	Non-Statutory Consultee	Alignment options will be developed to avoid irreplaceable peatland habitat as best as possible.

Section 8 – Teindland to Keith

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 8 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about the cumulative impact of a third OHL in close proximity to the existing OHLs and the River Spey crossing.	Community members and local organisations	This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. The feasibility of undergrounding of one of the existing OHLs in this area is being considered as a potential option.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about impacts to Trochelhill Wood, north of Orbliston, which contains a wide variety of wildlife and is a popular recreational walking area.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options.
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to badger, pine marten, red squirrel, deer, bats, ospreys, buzzards, goshawk, capercaillie treecreepers, jays, goldcrest and bullfinches. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
Moray Council Have underground cables been considered around the Lower River Spey? How will the third line impact the landscape and visual impacts? This should be included in any landscape assessments going forward. Have SSEN Transmission considered breaking away from traditional tower design, and considered something more palatable in terms of pylons crossing the Lower River Spey?	Statutory Consultees	The option of undergrounding one of the existing OHLs to the west of the River Spey may be considered as part of the alignment options assessment. It would be technically very challenging to underground beneath the River Spey itself, due to the steep slopes on the eastern side of the river and environmental constraints including the River Spey SAC and SSSI and Scottish Water drinking water abstractions. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on tower design.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
NatureScot The River Spey SSSI and SAC boundary is 300 m wide at potential crossing points for all routes. Much of the land beyond the boundary are still part of the functioning floodplain and also include buried river gravels. The gravels hold ground water and are part of a resource abstracted by Scottish Water at their Dipple Wellfield. Excavation for tower foundations, any access tracks and temporary safety equipment adjacent to the SAC would need to take account of the potential to influence groundwater movements that could have knock-on effects for the supply of water for supporting riparian vegetation. With appropriate design and the right construction methods, adverse effects on the SAC are likely avoidable. Lower River Spey – Spey Bay SAC is crossed by both Route 8B1 and 8B2. Similar issues to those above for the River Spey SAC in respect to the impacts on gravels and ground water. All routes fall within the core foraging area for breeding osprey that could be associated with the River Spey section of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar Site.	Statutory Consultees	We are aware of and acknowledge the sensitivity of this area in relation to hydrogeology, sub-surface flows and the protection of drinking water supplies and designated habitats. This information will be used to inform the alignment selection stage, whilst also taking into consideration the use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments. Regarding Osprey, please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultees	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
Scottish Forestry Highland Conservancy has worked closely with the Spey Catchment initiative. There is a strong drive to maintain and retain riparian woodlands. Within the areas of wet woodland, SSEN Transmission need to ensure they are showing how this will be retained and maintained.	Statutory Consultees	Noted. The potential impact on riparian woodland is understood and will be considered in further detail when developing and assessing the alignment options.
RSPB The woodlands in Section 8 are used by Capercaillie, although the routes suggested are thought to avoid known potentially active lek sites.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Noted.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised over Ordiequish Woods and a third OHL further damaging the woods and impacting on forestry operations.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options.
Concerns were raised about potential impacts of the OHL to existing licensed water abstractions for distillery operations.	Community members and local organisations	We will seek to avoid potential impacts to water abstractions when developing alignment options. Further detail on this will be provided at the alignment consultation stage.

Section 9 – Keith to south of Turriff

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 9 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It was queried why the Preferred Route had changed from the northern option to the southern option, when there are more villages in proximity to Route 9C2 than Routes 9A1 and 9A2 and the construction costs of Route 9C2 are higher.	Community members and local organisations	The Preferred Route in Section 9 was illustrated as Route 9C2 at consultation. Despite being more complex from a construction perspective, Route 9C2 was chosen as preferred due to the likely impact the 'A' and 'B' routes would have on the landscape in the Deveron Valley. In addition, the 'A' and 'B' routes present two pinch points at Bracobrae and Knock where groups of residential properties are too dense to pass, and compulsory purchase of properties would be required. Compulsory purchase is unlikely to be explored by us where there are other viable route options available, as such in this case with Route 9C2.
Concerns were raised about potential cumulative impacts of the new OHL in addition to the existing 400kV OHL in the area around Redhill.	Community members and local organisations	Cumulative impacts with the existing OHL will be considered where necessary as part of the landscape and visual assessment. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options.
Concerns were raised about proximity of the preferred route to the village of Cairnie and the village primary school, and potential health impacts of the OHL.	Community members and local organisations	The proximity of Cairnie and the Village Primary School will be taken into consideration when developing alignment options and within the alignment appraisal process.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about impacts to local wildlife, including at Whitehill SSSI, Bin Hall Local Nature Conservation Site, Bin Forest, the Cairnie Burn, and Longmoor Wood. Specific species mentioned in Section 9 included badger, pine marten, red squirrel, otter, wildcat, bats, water vole and amphibians. Concerns were raised about impacts to migratory birds and breeding birds in the local area. Specific species mentioned in Section 9 include osprey, buzzard, merlin, sparrow hawk, red kite, honey buzzard, golden eagle, hen harrier, kestrel, peregrine, goshawk, hobbies, kingfisher, woodpecker, mute swan, Bewick swan, woodcock, oystercatcher, curlew, lapwing, heron, barn owl, tawny owl, little owl and migratory geese. <u>RSPB</u> The preferred route in Section 9 (Route 9C2) passes through a Wildcat Priority Area. The route passes close to the Bin Forest, which holds a diverse range of specially protected birds, including many raptor species.	Community members and local organisations Non-Statutory Consultees	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table and Appendix A for more information.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about impacts to the Deveron Valley Special Landscape Area (SLA), as the Preferred Route crosses a longer length of the SLA than the other route options.	Community members and local organisations	The 9 'B' route options cross the river in a particularly attractive, remote and secluded location, with Route 9B2 particularly challenging because topography would likely require the use of tall crossing towers across the River Deveron, or a wayleave up through a particularly tall steep wooded bank with closely spaced tension towers. Both would compromise the special qualities of the Deveron Valley SLA, Route 9B2 more than Route 9B1. The 9 'C' options cross the River Deveron where the topography is relatively gentle, and a straight alignment of suspension towers should be achievable, and is a key reason for taking Route 9C to alignment stage.
Concerns were raised about proximity to Cobairdy House, a Grade 2 Listed building.	Community members and local organisations	Potential impacts to Cobairdy House will be considered in further detail by a cultural heritage specialist at the alignment selection stage.
Concerns were raised about impacts to ancient historical stones at Greens of Feithhill.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the Hare Stone, stone circle, Scheduled Monument north of Feith Hill. This will be considered and assessed in further detail when developing alignment options.
<u>NatureScot</u> Feedback was provided on designated sites (SSSIs and SACs) within the route options or in close proximity and also where there is a potential for indirect impact due to hydrological connectivity with the surrounding areas. The wildcat priority area was also raised, with specific mention of Clashdour Forest containing wildcats.	Statutory Consultees	The alignment stage will avoid passing directly through any SSSI or SAC sites in this section and indirect impacts from connecting habitats will also be considered. The alignment selection stage will also take into consideration the use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on protection of species. Please refer to Appendix A for a more detailed response.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultees	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The entire area between Keith and Peterhead has a growing tourist industry which will inevitably be adversely affected by the project.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. Please refer to the Common Themes and Project wide response tables.
Concerns were raised about proximity to businesses classed as Noise Sensitive Developments.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. Please refer to the Project wide response tables for details on how we will mitigate noise impacts of the project. Noise Sensitive Developments will be taken into further consideration as we identify and assess alignment options.

Section 10 – south of Turriff to New Deer

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 10 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about the proximity of the Preferred Route to the town of Turriff and associated visual impacts.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. Potential for visual impacts will be considered in further detail when developing and assessing alignment options.
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to Towie Barclay Castle and Mill of Towie which are both of historical significance.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. Potential for impacts will be considered in further detail when developing and assessing alignment options.
It was queried why Route 10A had been selected as the Preferred Route when it was less favoured from a visual impact perspective.	Community members and local organisations	Whilst Route 10A was least preferred from a visual perspective, it offers the opportunity to approach New Deer 2 substation from the north, which is the only viable option. Routes 10B and 10C are also fairly densely populated with properties and there are a number of pinch points that would be difficult to pass an OHL through without compulsory purchase.
It was queried why the Hatton Castle Garden and Designed Landscape had been excluded from the search area for potential route options. It was noted that part of this designated area contains a working quarry (Greystone Quarry) and an adjacent commercial area and agricultural farmland.	Community members and local organisations	Generally we would not look to route an OHL through a Garden and Designed Landscape unless absolutely unavoidable, which is why we excluded the GDL from the route search area. The quarry and commercial areas are likely hidden in the landscape and away from important aspects of the GDL, such as the castle itself. This would not be possible with an OHL in this area, and there would be a much higher possibility for objection from Historic Environment Scotland and other statutory stakeholders.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It was noted that Waggle Hill woodland is a popular recreational area for local walking and horse riding.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This information will form part of the recreational assessment at the alignment stage.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Historic Environment Scotland HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultees	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
It was noted that there are two large wildlife ponds at Millmoss, to the south of Turriff.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. It is not anticipated that these will be directly impacted at this stage but they will be considered as part of the alignment development process.
Concerns were raised about the proximity of the Preferred Route 10A to Delgaty Woods.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. It is not anticipated that Delgaty Wood will be directly impacted at this stage but it will be considered as part of the alignment development process.
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to osprey, grey partridge, owl, migratory geese, pine martin, red squirrel, badger, bats, deer and hybrid wildcat. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.

Section 11 – New Deer to Peterhead

This section summarises the feedback received regarding specific features or constraints located within Section 11 of the OHL route options.

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about the proximity of the Preferred Route to the village of Stuartfield and Hill of Dens.	Community members and local organisations	This has been recognised in our decision to widen the preferred route option in this area, to allow for alignments to be developed further south.
Concerns were raised about the proximity of the Preferred Route to Maud and the potential for this to restrict further development of the village to the south.	Community members and local organisations	This has been recognised in our decision to widen the preferred route option in this area, to allow for alignments to be developed further south.
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to Crichie House and Estate, designed landscape and woodlands.	Community members and local organisations	This has been recognised in our decision to widen the preferred route option in this area, to allow for alignments to be developed further south.
Concerns were raised about impacts to radio broadband in areas with no access to fibre broadband.	Community members and local organisations	We have considered any licenced transmitting/receiving devices registered with Ofcom as part of the routeing process. The Ofcom register provided locations of any transmitting/receiving devices along with the type of link that is registered. This dataset allows us to minimise any impact to the licenced radio networks along the route, further consultation will be carried out with licence holders as the alignment options are developed.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It was queried why Route 11A was selected as the Preferred Route given that that this option was least preferred from a landscape perspective.	Community members and local organisations	Route 11A was selected as the Preferred Route due to the opportunity to avoid peatland and the Local Nature Conservation Sites in the 'C' options. In addition, the 'C' options would need to cross the 275kV OHL that is currently being upgraded to a 400kV circuit. This would introduce significant technical challenges for maintenance. Whilst Route 11B would be preferred from a landscape perspective, this was only if it could be paralleled with the existing OHL. Unfortunately a true parallel cannot be achieved across Route 11B due to the number of residential properties in close proximity, and therefore if this option was chosen many properties would be boxed in by two OHLs. Despite this, following consultation, Route 11A has been widened to include sections of Route 11B where the landscape benefits can be achieved of paralleling the two OHLs.
A number of respondents noted that Route 11B would be more appropriate than Route 11A, as it would follow the existing New Deer to Peterhead OHL route rather than spreading visual impacts further.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. Please see comment above.
Concerns were raised about impacts of the Preferred Route to the Culsh Monument and cemetery, north of New Deer, which is an important viewpoint for both locals and tourists.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. Culsh Monument will be considered in further detail when developing the alignment options, and assessed from both a cultural heritage and recreational perspective.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential visual impacts to the Aikey Brae stone circle.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. Parkhouse Hill, stone circle (Aikey Brae) will be considered in further detail when developing the alignment options, and assessed from both a cultural heritage and recreational perspective.
It was noted that there is an old drove road and walkway between Maud, Bulwark and Stuartfield crossing Wind Hill and Castle Hill. This was noted to be an important link walk between these areas with views to the sea at Peterhead.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This information will form part of the recreational assessment at the alignment stage.
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to users of the Formartine & Buchan Way to the south of Maud.	Community members and local organisations	Noted. This has been taken into consideration as part of the routeing assessment and will be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options.
Ministry of Defence (MOD) There are possible impacts to Ministry of Defence assets.	Statutory Consultees	Noted. MOD will continue to be consulted as the project progresses.
National Gas Transmission There is potential to affect National Gas Transmission pipelines in Section 11.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Noted. National Gas Transmission will continue to be consulted as the project progresses.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised regarding impact to protected species and wildlife, with specific mention given to bats, badger, wild cat, deer, voles, hare, wintering geese, owls, swans, heron, tree sparrow, lapwing and starling. It was requested that these be looked into in more detail.	Community members and local organisations	These responses have been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.
<u>NatureScot</u> All routes have a significant portion in Section 11 that is within 20 km of Loch Strathbeg SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site. This is within connectivity distance for foraging geese that could be linked to the SPA. All routes within Section 11 are within 20 km connectivity distance for pink-footed geese as an interest of Ythan Estuary, Forvie Sands and Meikle Loch SPA. Routes 11C2 and 11C4 lie just to the north of Moss of Cruden (SSSI). Providing the SSSI can be avoided, impacts are unlikely.	Statutory Consultees Non-statutory Consultees	The alignment stage will avoid passing directly through any SSSI or SAC sites in this section and indirect impacts from connecting habitats will also be considered. The alignment selection stage will also take into consideration the use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments. Based on studies to date the areas which fall within and immediately surrounding the route are not understood to represent core foraging areas for geese associated with either Loch of Strathbeg or Ythan Estuary and Meikle Loch SPA/Ramsar. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on protection of species.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
<u>RSPB</u> The preferred goose foraging habitats should be avoided where possible, with deflectors recommended where it is necessary. The eastern end of Routes 11C2 and 11C4 are least preferred from an ornithology perspective. Moss of Kinmundy has recently undergone peatland restoration and has since attracted summering Common Cranes. It is possible that breeding could take place at this site once the habitat develops. Birds using this site are also known to commute to a nearby site, which is close to, but out with the route options presented. The presence of an old nest suggests there was also a failed breeding attempt there in 2022.		
<u>Historic Environment Scotland</u> HES have noted a number of historic designations and assets that should be considered in further detail at alignment stage. The details of which are provided in Appendix A.	Statutory Consultees	The noted designated sites are already included in the route appraisal and will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Ythan District Salmon Fishery Board Prior to construction, consultation with the board must take place about construction method and site protection so as to ensure no silt or building materials run off occurs from site to the adjoining water courses which form part of The Littlewater Burn which is an important tributary for spawning salmonids in the Ythan catchment.	Non-Statutory Consultees	We will continue to consult with Ythan District Salmon Fishery Board as the project progresses into the alignment and Environmental Impact Assessment stages.
River Ugie District Salmon Fishery Board Would like to know what steps will be taken to ensure the safety of salmon and sea trout resident in the River Ugie during construction and operation of the project.	Non-Statutory Consultees	Potential impacts during construction and operation will be assessed in detail as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment stage. A Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) will be prepared and implemented by the Principal Contractor once consent has been granted for the OHL to be built. The CEMP will detail how the Principal Contractor will manage construction in accordance with commitments and mitigation detailed in the EIA report, statutory consents and authorisations, and industry best practice and guidance. Implementation of the CEMP will be managed on-site by a suitably qualified and experience Environmental Clerk of Works (ECoW), with support from other environmental professionals as required. Once operational, in general an OHL requires very little maintenance, although regular inspections are undertaken of the line and towers to identify any deterioration of components so they may be replaced before potential failure.
Concerns were raised that Hill of Dens is a winter-feeding ground for flocks of pink footed geese and is not appropriate for an OHL.	Community members and local organisations	This response has been passed on to the consultant ornithologists and additional surveys are being undertaken in this area. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concerns were raised about potential impacts to farming operations both during construction and operation of the OHL.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware the land across Section 11 is commonly used for farming operations, and the Land Capability for Agriculture for the majority of the area is considered as prime agricultural land. We will consider potential for impacts to agriculture in further detail as we develop alignment options.

4. Summary of Key Decisions

This section sets out the key decisions that we have made following analysis and review of consultation feedback. The information presented confirms the route options being taken forward to the next stage of OHL development, outlines where changes have been made to the route options and identifies the reasons. The aim of this section is to provide clarity on the options being taken forward and those no longer being considered.

The stakeholder and public consultation has allowed us to gather feedback on the Preferred Route and also local knowledge to help inform subsequent stages of the routeing process. After the consultation period closed, we analysed the feedback received as part of a review of each route option in Sections 1 to 11. This review was undertaken to check that all relevant consultation feedback and other data and information about the constraints within each route option, including further field surveys, was fully considered. Listening to the local communities' and stakeholders concerns about the project and getting an insight into the many local areas across the study area has enabled us to further understand the potential effects that the consulted routes may have on certain areas. This feedback has been very important to the decision-making process.

Following engagement with communities and stakeholders, we have, where possible, amended the Preferred Route presented during the consultation to reflect the issues and concerns raised during the consultation period; the amended route is referred to as the Proposed Route. The following sections present detail on where changes have been made to extend or reduce the Preferred Route, with full changes illustrated in 'Preferred Route with Amendments' maps, with extracts included in the following sections. Copies of the maps are available to download from the project webpage.

There are areas of the Preferred Route which have also been removed from future consideration. These areas have become redundant due to the choice of Proposed Route on either side. They were originally included to provide cross-over points between route sections.

The Preferred Route has been expanded following consultation, increasing the flexibility we have to provide suitable options for alignments which reflect and incorporate the feedback received. Common themes in feedback driving these changes included a strong preference to run the proposed OHL alongside existing OHLs, where possible and a need for additional flexibility to move further from some sensitive receptors. The adjustments proposed give us greater flexibility to accommodate such requests in our alignments. Where these expansions to the Route are more than 100m wide, they have been allocated an 'Extended Area Reference' number in the 'Preferred Route with Amendments' maps, with details of the feedback informing these adjustments summarised by section below.

Section 1 – Beauly area substation to south of Beauly

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **1A**

Feedback confirmed a preference from the community for Route 1A, with fewer residential properties impacted by this option. Adjustment has been made to Route 1A (Figure 4.1, Extended Area Reference 1) to provide the opportunity to develop alignments which avoid more woodland, whilst also crossing the Beaufort Castle Garden and Designed Landscape at the least impactful location (subject to other constraints) in this area. A narrow route expansion has also been applied to the north of Route 1A to provide opportunity to parallel as close as possible with the existing OHL at the eastern River Beauly crossing.

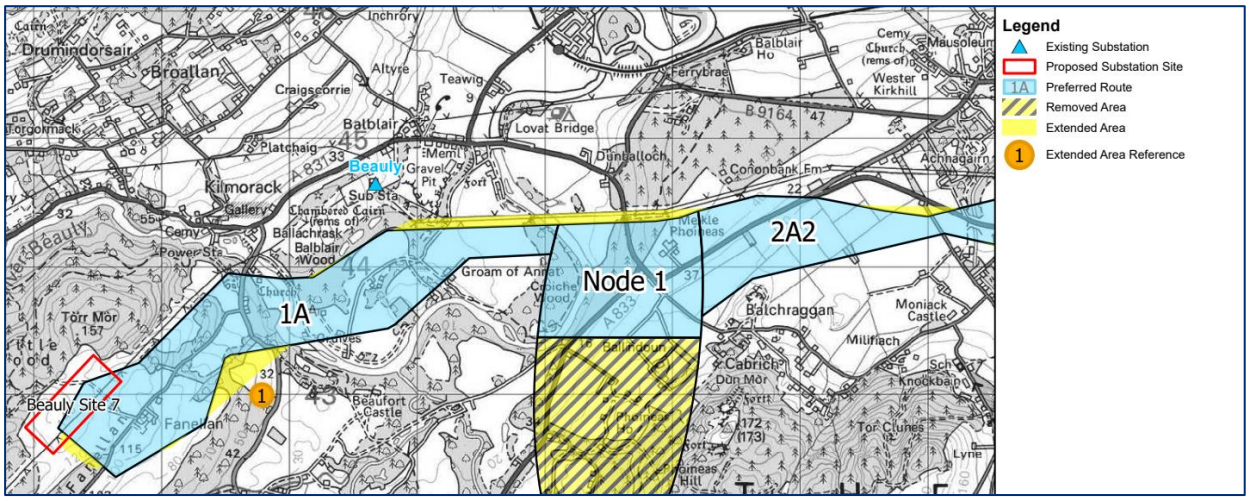


Figure 4.1 – Section 1, extended area reference 1

Section 2 – South of Beauly to south of Inverness

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **2A2**

Feedback reflected the recreational importance of the Aird. Adjustment has been made to Route 2A2 (Figure 4.2, Extended Area Reference 2) to provide opportunity to cross the Aird at a slightly lower elevation, providing opportunity to minimise visual impact and to develop alignment options which run alongside the existing OHL keeping infrastructure together, which was raised as a preference through consultation feedback. It also opens up an alternative option for a point for the proposed OHL to cross the Great Glen. This crossing is at a natural dip in the landscape, so provides an option with potentially reduced landscape and visual effects, if otherwise acceptable.

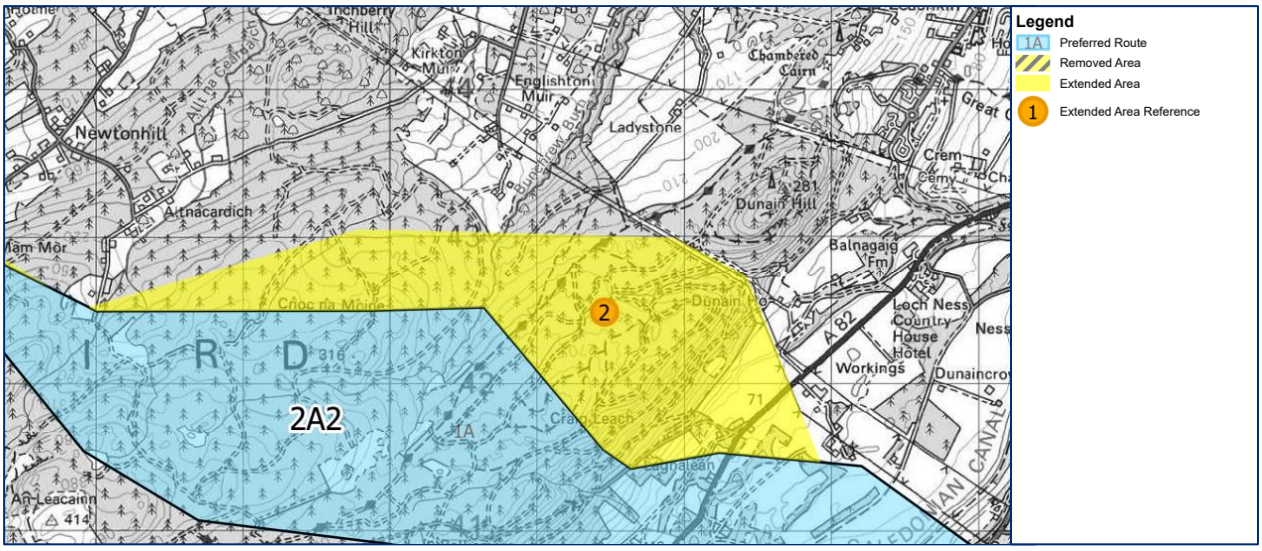


Figure 4.2 – Section 2, extended area reference 2

Section 3 – A9 and River Nairn crossing

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **3B**

A narrow expansion of the route has been applied to the north of Route 3B to provide opportunity to parallel as close as possible with the existing OHL through Daviot Wood, reflecting the preference in feedback.

Section 4 – South of Culloden to Ferness

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **4B**

Route 4B has been expanded to the north by a narrow section at the western end, between Saddle Hill (south east of Culloden battlefield) up to Mains of Clunas. This expansion provides opportunity to parallel as close as possible with the existing OHL, reflecting feedback from statutory consultees and the community. The eastern end of Route 4B (from Mains of Clunas to Dulsie Wood) has also been expanded to allow additional flexibility in developing alignment options at the next stage. Feedback reflected the recreational value and environmental sensitivity of the River Findhorn crossing and surrounding area. The route has been expanded at this point to provide opportunity to parallel as close as possible with the existing OHL.

Section 5 – Ferness to south of Forres

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **5B**

Route 5B has been expanded to the north to provide opportunity for an alignment option to parallel as close as possible with the existing OHL which runs along the northern edge of the route.

Section 6 – South of Forres to Kellas

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **6C**

A small route expansion has been added at the western end of Route 6C, where it meets Route 5B. This provides improved flexibility at the alignment stage, with more options available to avoid areas of Class 1 peatland and the consented Clash Gour Wind Farm substation location.

Section 7 – Kellas to Teindland

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **7B**

Route 7B has been expanded to the south, from Glen Latterach to south of Lochbuie (Figure 4.3, Extended Area Reference 3), to provide opportunity to develop alignments that minimise woodland loss by including a region outwith existing woodland. However, it is noted that there is peatland in this area which would also be a consideration at the alignment assessment stage and the merits of each will be appraised. This aligns with consultation feedback regarding protection of woodlands and peatland.

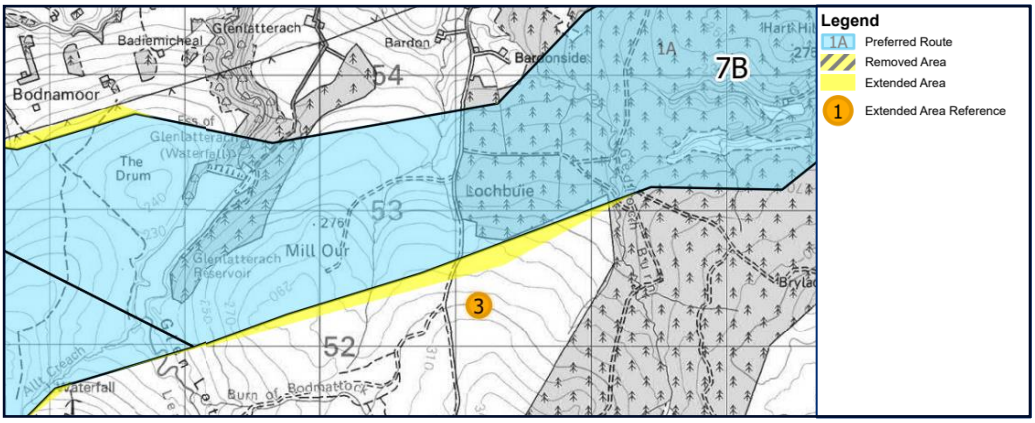


Figure 4.3 – Section 7, extended area reference 3

The route has also been expanded to the north at the eastern end, near Teindland (Figure 4.4, Extended Area Reference 4) and at the western end near Bodnamoor. These adjustments provide opportunity to parallel as close as possible with the existing OHL, reflecting preferences in the feedback.

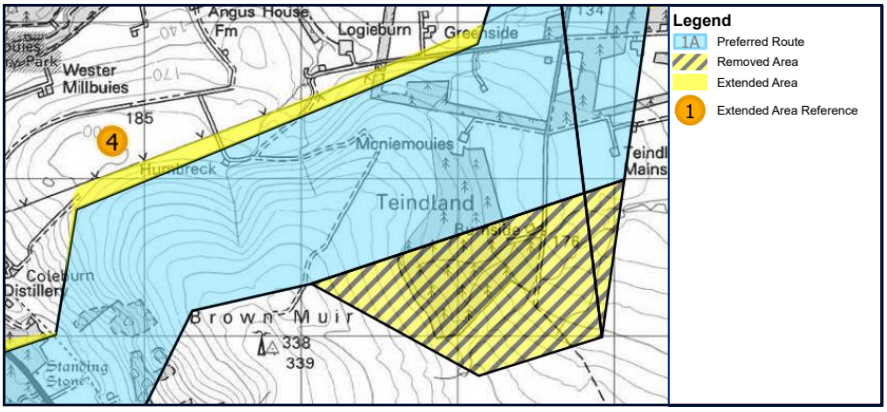


Figure 4.4 – Section 7, extended area reference 4

Section 8 –Teindland to Keith

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **8A1**

Route 8A1 has been extended at the western end, near Altonside, to provide the opportunity to develop more direct, shorter alignments (Figure 4.5, Extended Area Reference 5), potentially minimising impacts.

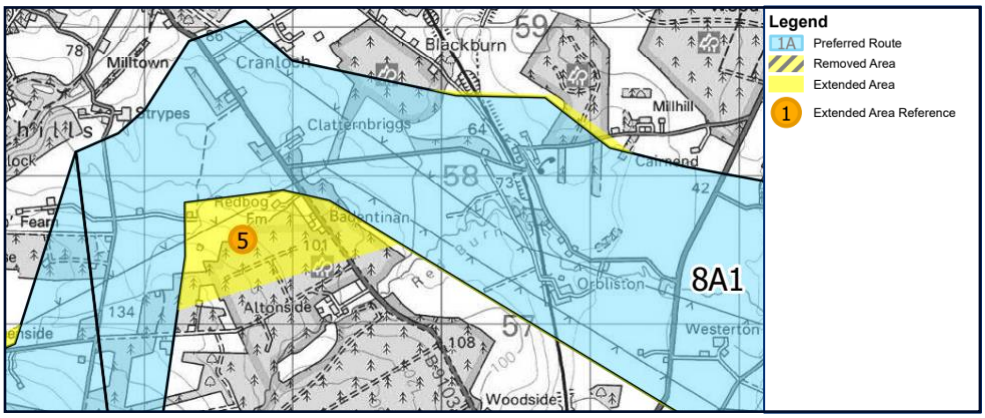


Figure 4.5 – Section 8, extended area reference 5

The proposed OHL needs to connect into the proposed Blackhillock 2 Substation, which is a separate project but is directly linked to this project and is progressing in tandem. Following public and stakeholder consultation on the location of the proposed substation site, the location has been moved from a site to the east of Keith (Site 10), to an alternative site to the southeast of Keith (Site 4). We therefore reviewed the route options and identified the potential to route the OHL to the south of Keith as well as to the north. Route 8A1 was therefore extended within Section 8 on the approach to Keith (Figure 4.6, Extended Area Reference 6) and extended at Node 2 around Keith (Figure 4.7, Extended Area Reference 7), so that alignments options could be developed to both the north and south of Keith for the upcoming alignment selection stage.

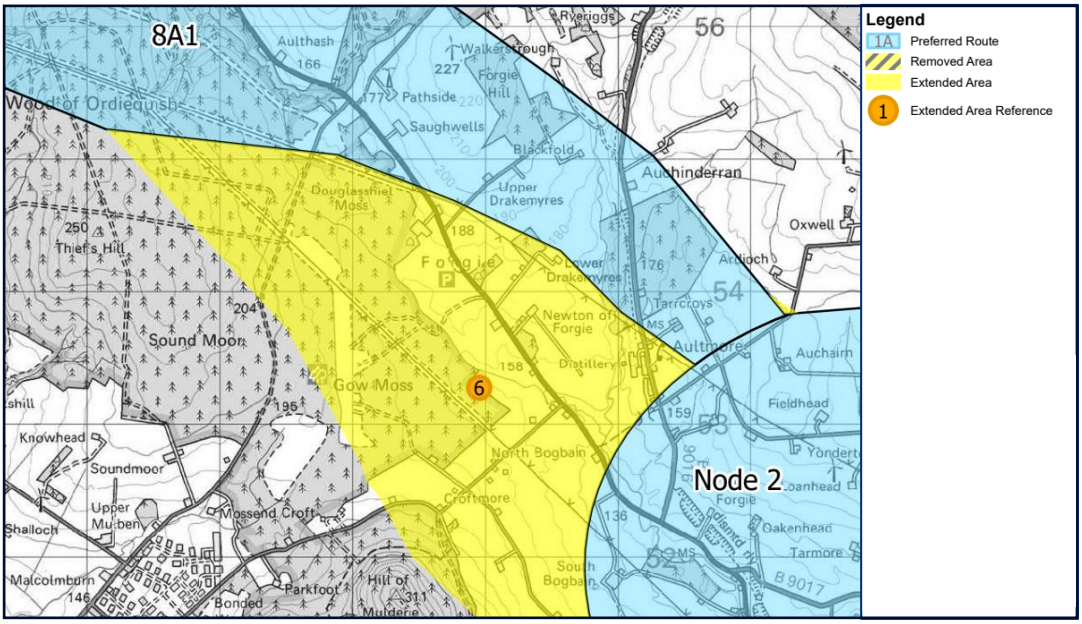


Figure 4.6 – Section 8, extended area reference 6

Section 9 – Keith to south of Turriff

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **9C2**

As noted in Section 8 above, following the change in location to the proposed Blackhillock 2 substation site, the route has been extended to provide opportunity for alignments options to be developed to the north and south of Keith for the upcoming alignment selection stage (Figure 4.7, Extended Area Reference 7).

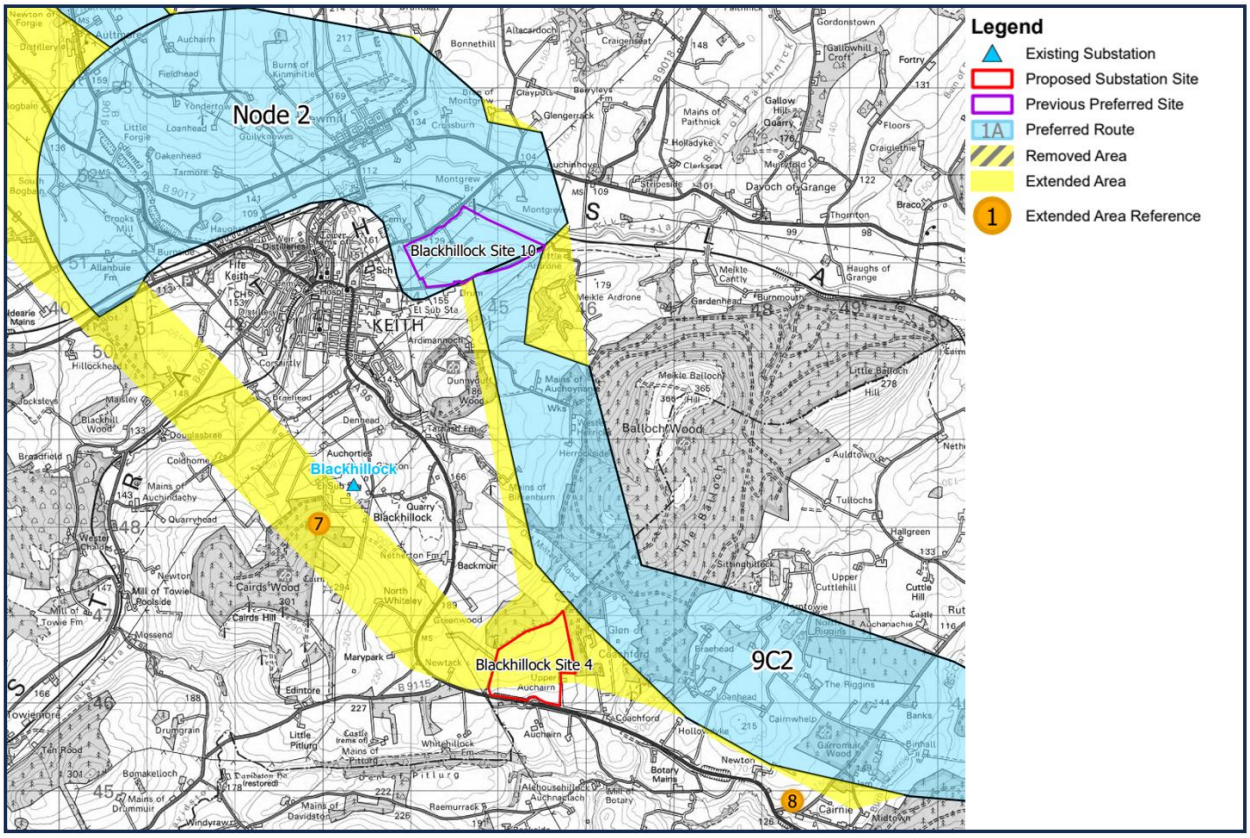


Figure 4.7 – Section 9, extended area reference 7 and 8

The route was also extended near Cairnie, to the south of Garromuir Wood (Figure 4.7, Extended Area Reference 8) and several short, narrow extensions have been added at other points along the route. These extensions provide more flexibility to develop alignment options through Route 9C2, where residential properties are scattered.

Section 10 – South of Turriff to New Deer

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **10A**

The proposed OHL needs to connect into the proposed New Deer 2 Substation, which is a separate project but is directly linked to this project and is progressing in tandem. Following a review of the Proposed Site for the substation and consideration of flexibility to develop alignment options into it, it was considered that a small extended area would be beneficial, extending the Route to the north near to Castlehill (Figure 4.8, Extended Area Reference 9).

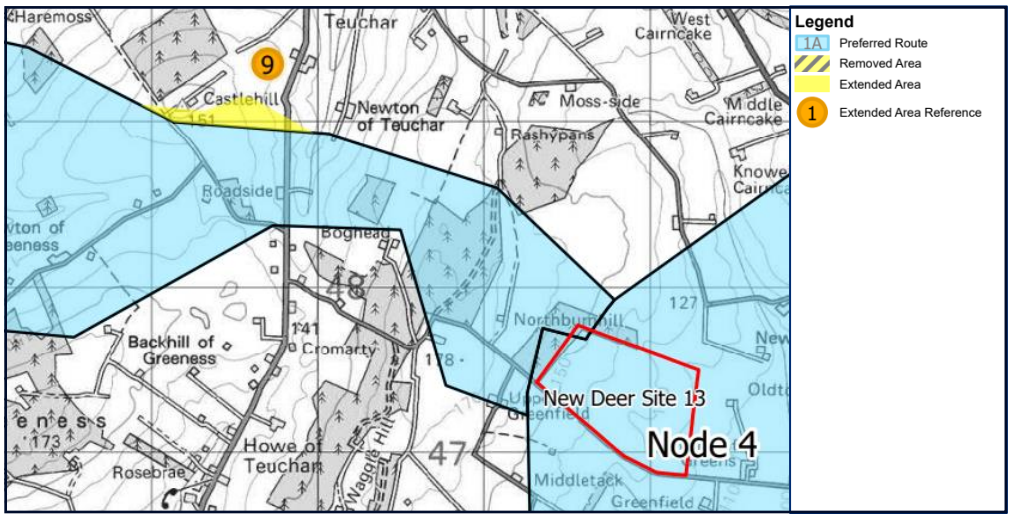


Figure 4.8 – Section 10, extended area reference 9

Section 11 – New Deer to Peterhead

Our Proposed Route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **11A**

Public consultation feedback on Section 11 raised concerns about the proximity of the OHL to the settlements of Maud (regarding the potential to restrict development of the village to the south) and Stuartfield (including Crichie House and Estate), and also to the Hill of Dens in relation to the presence of geese. A number of respondents also proposed that Route 11B would be more appropriate to keep the new infrastructure together with the existing OHL. Route 11B in its entirety was not a viable option due to the proximity of properties in clusters along the existing OHL. However, the Route has been extended to the south where feasible to do so, to enable alignment options to be developed further to the south and alongside the existing OHL where feasible (Figure 4.9 - Section 11, Extended Area Reference 10).

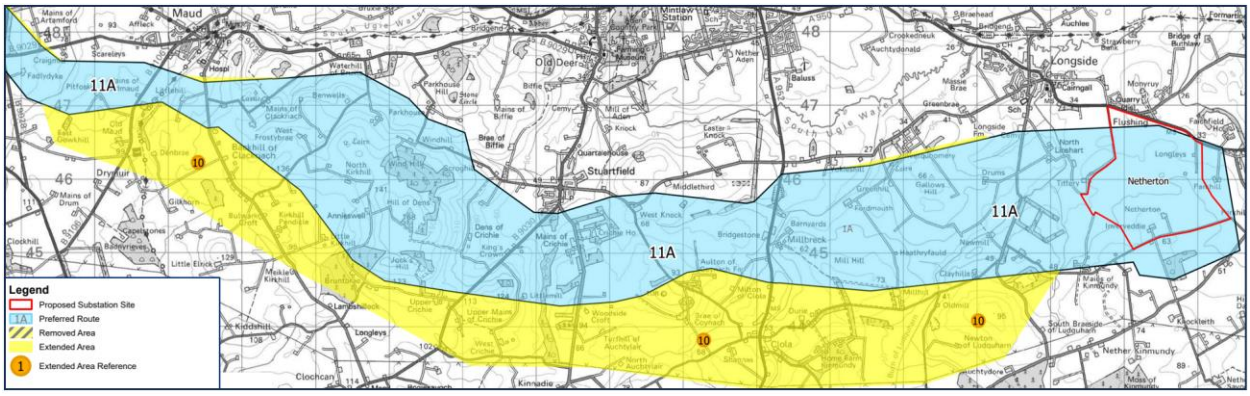


Figure 4.9 – Section 11, extended area reference 10

Proposed Route

Following these changes, the Proposed Route being taken forward to the next stage of OHL development is shown in Figure 4.10 and can be accessed in further detail via the project webpage.

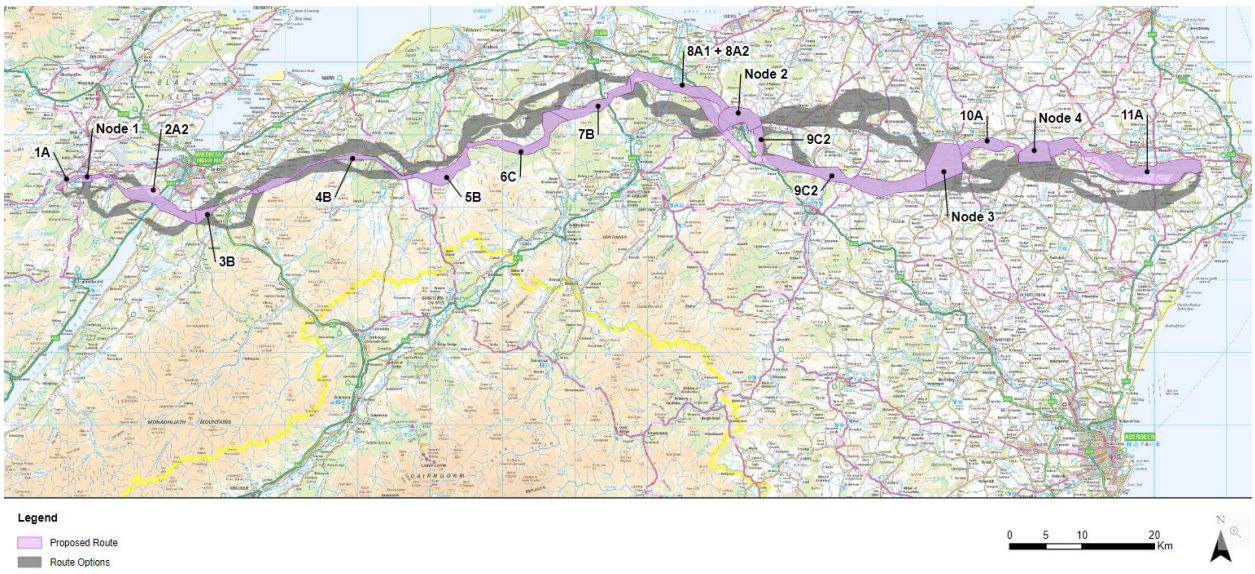
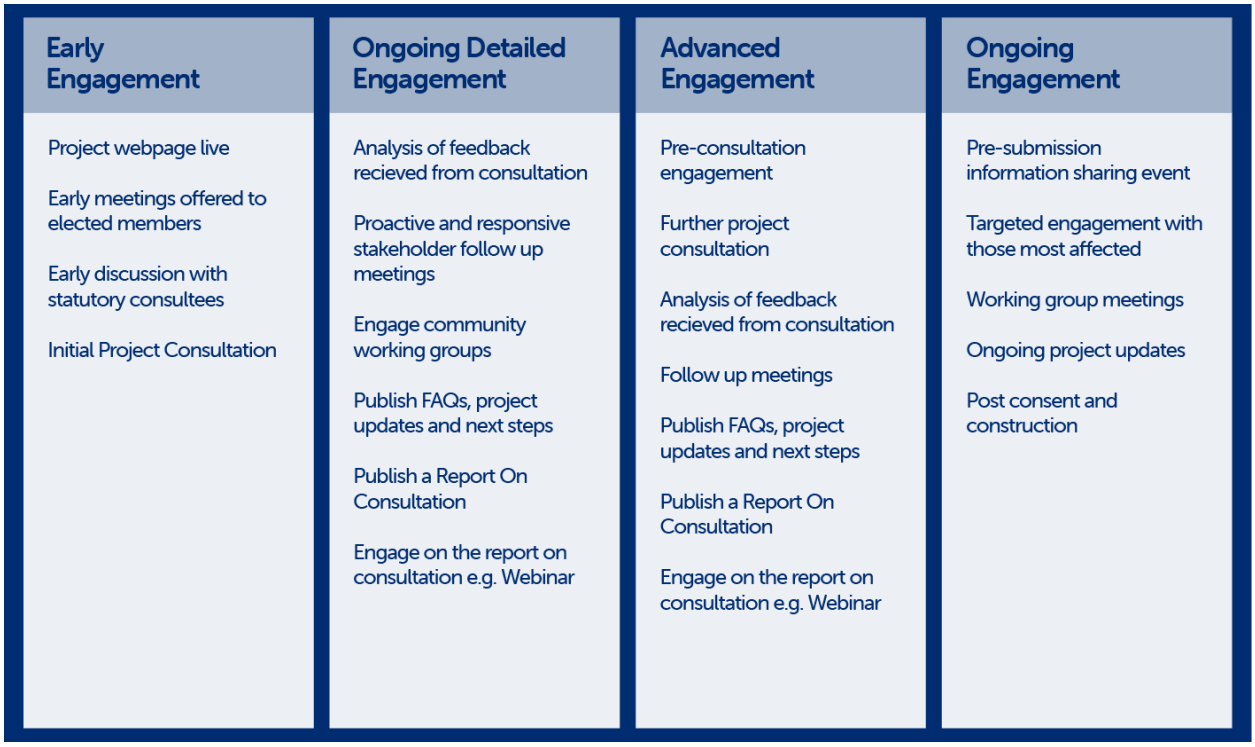


Figure 4.10 – Proposed Route to be taken to Alignment.

5. Next Steps

5.1. Ongoing Engagement

The period of consultation described in this report is part of an ongoing engagement process that spans to full development cycle for the project, where feedback is sought at different stages and engagement with stakeholders is continuous as we refine our proposals.



Following publication of this Report, we, alongside specialist consultants and contractors, will further develop the design of the OHL.

In Spring 2024, we will hold our next public consultation. At this consultation stakeholders will be provided with proposed alignment options for the OHL accompanied by the environmental, technical and cost appraisals.

Early in 2024, a request for an EIA Scoping Opinion will be made to The Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECU) and an EIA Scoping Report will be prepared and submitted to support the request. The request for a Scoping Opinion is made to identify the scope of impacts to be addressed and the method of assessment to be applied in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) which is prepared and submitted with the Section 37 application for consent.

5.2. Feedback

Further consultation events for this project will be held in early 2024. In the meantime, if you have any questions or comments in relation to this document, please get in touch with us:

Community Liaison Manager

bbnp@sse.com

Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks

200 Dunkeld Road,

Perth

PH1 3GH

Further information about the project is available on the project website:

www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/beauly-blackhillock-new-deer-peterhead-400kv/

6. Glossary

Term	Definition
Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) Substation	An AIS substation is constructed with switchgear which relies on open air components, which can require large clearance areas for operation and safety, which takes up a larger area of land than Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS).
Alignment	A centre line of an overhead line OHL, along with location of key angle structures.
Amenity	The natural environment, cultural heritage, landscape and visual quality. Also includes the impact of SHE Transmission's works on communities, such as the effects of noise and disturbance from construction activities.
Ancient Woodland	Defined in National Planning Framework (NPF) 4 as "*land that has maintained continuous woodland habitat since at least 1750*".
Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)	AWI is a provisional guide to the location of Ancient Woodland. It contains three main categories of woodland, all of which are likely to be of value for their biodiversity and cultural value. These include Ancient Woodland, Long-established woodlands of plantation origin (LEPO), and other woodlands.
Area of Search (Study Area)	A broad geographical area within which possible sites might be capable of identification within approximately 5km of the required connectivity point; usually determined by geographical features such as coastlines or hill/mountain ranges, or designation boundaries, such as National Park boundaries.
Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)	Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an approach to development that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was pre-development. It focuses on the change in the biodiversity value of a site, comparing the pre and post construction biodiversity values to ensure a positive impact overall.
Conductor	A metallic wire strung from support structure to support structure, to carry electric current.
Consultation	The dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based on a genuine exchange of views and, normally, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action.
Corridor	A linear area which allows a continuous connection between the defined connection points. The corridor may vary in width along its length; in unconstrained areas it may be many kilometres wide.
Double circuit	A double circuit transmission line comprises of two independent circuits each made up of three sets of conductors (cables).

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	A formal process set down in The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 used to systematically identify, predict and assess the likely significant environmental impacts of a proposed project or development.
Engagement	The establishment of effective relationships with individuals or groups.
Electricity System Operator (ESO)	National Grid is the Electricity System Operator (ESO) for Great Britain. The ESO balances electricity supply and demand to ensure the electricity supply.
Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDLs)	The Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes lists those gardens or designed landscapes which are considered by a panel of experts to be of national importance.
Gas Insulated Switchgear (GIS) Substation	A GIS substation is constructed with switchgear with gaseous reliant components which allows operation and safety clearances to be reduced compared to an AIS substation.
Habitat	Term most accurately meaning the place in which a species lives, but also used to describe plant communities or agglomerations of plant communities.
Holford Rules (as modified)	Principles developed by the late Lord Holford in 1959 which continue to be employed as the basis for routeing high voltage overhead lines and include additional notes on the siting of substations.
Kilovolt (kV)	One thousand volts.
Landscape Character Type (LCT)	A distinct, recognisable and consistent pattern of elements in a landscape that differentiate the area from another.
Listed Building	Building included on the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest and afforded statutory protection under the 'Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997' and other planning legislation. Classified categories A – C(s).
Micrositing	The process of positioning individual structures to avoid localised environmental or technical constraints.
Mitigation	Term used to indicate avoidance, remediation or alleviation of adverse impacts.
National Scenic Area (NSA)	A national level designation applied to those landscapes considered to be of exceptional scenic value.

Offshore Integrated Link	Offshore cable connection between the onshore network and offshore network being developed as part of the Coordinated Offshore Network. This is being developed as a result of the Holistic Network Design (HND) publication in summer of 2022 produced by National Grid Electricity System Operator (NGESO) to facilitate greater co- ordination and efficiency for offshore windfarms. In the autumn of 2022 Ofgem published their Asset Classification findings which in turn meant SSENT were tasked with delivering large parts of the Coordinated Offshore Network.
Overhead line (OHL)	An electric line installed above ground, usually supported by lattice steel towers or wooden poles.
Planning Application	Used in this context to describe an application for consent under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.
Plantation Woodland	Woodland of any age that obviously originated from intentional planting.
Preferred Option	The option which SSEN Transmission believes offers the best balance of technical and environmental impact considerations identified through initial assessment. This is then subject to consultation with stakeholders, where local and previously unknown considerations may confirm or alter the initial preference. Once confirmed, this becomes the Proposed Option to take forward to the next stage of project development.
RAG Rating	A Red, Amber, Green rating provided to allow for a comparison between different options being appraised.
Red Line Boundary (RLB)	This area should include all land necessary to carry out the Proposed Development.
Riparian Woodland	Natural home for plants and animals occurring in a thin strip of land bordering a stream or river.
Route	A linear area of approximately 1 km width (although this may be narrower/wider in specific locations in response to identified pinch points / constraints), which provides a continuous connection between defined connection points.
Routeing	The work undertaken which leads to the selection of a proposed alignment, capable of being taken forward into the consenting process under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989.
Scheduled Monument	A monument which has been scheduled by the Scottish Ministers as being of national importance under the terms of the 'Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979'.
Section 37 Application	An application for consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to develop an overhead electricity line.
Semi-natural Woodland	Woodland that does not obviously originate from planting. The distribution of species will generally reflect the variations in the site and the soil. Planted trees must account for less than 30% of the canopy composition

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Designated area of national importance for natural heritage. The aim of the SSSI network is to maintain an adequate representation of all natural and semi-natural habitats and native species across Britain.
Span	The section of overhead line between two structures.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	An area designated under the EC Habitats Directive to ensure that rare, endangered or vulnerable habitats or species of community interest are either maintained at or restored to a favourable conservation status.
Special Landscape Area (SLA)	Landscapes designated by The Highland Council which are considered to be of regional/local importance for their scenic qualities.
Special Protection Area (SPA)	An area designated under the Wild Birds Directive (Directive74/409/EEC) to protect important bird habitats. Implemented under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
Stakeholders	Organisations and individuals who can affect or are affected by SHE Transmission works.
Study Area	The area within which the corridor, route and alignment study takes place.
Substation	A node on the network to allow safe control of the electricity network. This could include convergence of multiple circuits, transformation of voltage or other functions to maintain and operate the electricity network.
Substation Site Area	Site area identified as necessary to deliver all the substation infrastructure requirements e.g. platform, access tracks, temporary construction area, drainage including SUDS, landscaping.
Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS)	Drainage solutions that provide an alternative to the direct channelling of surface water through networks of pipes and sewers to nearby watercourses.
Terminal Structure	A structure (tower or pole) required where the line terminates either at a substation or at the beginning and end of an underground cable section.
The National Grid	The electricity transmission network in the Great Britain.
UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP)	The UK BAP was published in 1994 after the Convention on Biological Diversity. It summarised the most threatened species and habitats in the UK and gave detailed plans for their recovery.
Volts	The international unit of electric potential and electromotive force.
Wayleave	A voluntary agreement entered into between a landowner, upon whose land an overhead line is to be constructed, and SHE Transmission
Wild Land Area (WLA)	Those areas comprising the greatest and most extensive areas of wild characteristics within Scotland.
Works	Constructing new transmission infrastructure such as substations, overhead lines, underground cables; major refurbishment of these; the dismantling and removal of any parts of the system; and associated works, which may include formation of access tracks, bridge and road improvements, tree cutting, drainage etc.

7. Appendices

Appendix A – Statutory and Non-Statutory Consultee Feedback

Project Wide Feedback

Summary of feedback	Our Response
NatureScot	
Protected areas Where alignment is unable to avoid direct or indirect effects on protected areas we are likely to object if these effects will be adverse and cannot be mitigated satisfactorily. Where it is not possible to avoid designated sites, NatureScot have requested more detailed information about the routeing and construction of the towers on or adjacent to this site before they are able to offer further comment on the level of impact.	Noted
Habitats Regulations Appraisal NatureScot are happy to continue engagement with SSEN Transmission on the gathering and production of information to inform the HRA**.**	Habitat Regulations Appraisal reports have been provided to NatureScot at each development stage and we will continue to work with NatureScot in the provision of subsequent reports.

Peatland and carbon rich soils Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 include larger extents of land identified on NatureScot's Carbon and Peatland 2016 mapping as nationally important peatland. In addition to surveys helping to identify sensitive areas to avoid there may also be opportunities for peatland restoration as part of the project. A valuable source of information about peatland restoration is the Peatland ACTION project webpage. Forestry and Land Scotland have a bog restoration project at Gow Moss (Wood of Ordiequish near Fochabers in Moray) which is located in route options 8A2 and 8B1.	Peatland is a major constraint which we are seeking to avoid as much as possible, however information on opportunities to support peatland restoration schemes is welcomed as it is unlikely that all peatland will be avoidable.
Ecological and ornithological interests not associated with protected areas Strathbogie Wildcat Protection Area is discussed in Section 9 below.	
Alignment and tower location choices could help reduce the impact on habitats by avoiding wooded areas and the edges of woodland particularly where these include scrub and gorse banks before transitioning to agricultural land. NatureScot have standing advice and guidance on minimising impacts on nature and securing the benefits that nature can provide available online here. NPF4 sets out new requirements for development to deliver positive effects, primarily under Policy 3. NatureScot have advice and further links to guidance available on the Planning and development: Enhancing biodiversity page of the NatureScot website.	We are committed to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on all our projects; as well as compensatory planting for any trees felled during the construction phase, where possible with native species. Robust policies are also in place to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats like peatland and ancient woodland. Noted
Landscape and visual interests	

All route options identified are likely to avoid impacts on National Scenic Areas and Wild Land Areas. Affected Special Landscape Areas will be advised on by the local authorities

Historic Environment Scotland (HES) HES are generally content with the methodology of the assessment in the Preferred Route Consultation. However, they note that A-listed buildings are defined as 'Cultural Assets' rather than 'Designations'. A-listed buildings are among the designations which fall within our interests for the purposes of environmental impact assessment. We also note that setting impacts have been identified as 'indirect'. We do not consider setting impacts to be indirect. We are not content that all the relevant historic environment assets have yet been assessed. We therefore recommend that any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken for the proposals should include an assessment of impacts on all heritage assets (including but not limited to, scheduled monuments and their setting, category A-listed buildings and their settings, and gardens and designed landscapes (GDLs) and battlefields in their respective inventories) and their settings in the vicinity of the proposed overhead line. This assessment should use, initially, a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) to identify assets which have the potential to be impacted. It is important to remember that even if an asset does not have direct visibility of the development, its setting could be affected if the development is visible in views towards the asset. If assets are scoped out following this exercise, the evidence for that should be presented in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report.	In future documentation, settings impacts will be referred to as direct. Category A Listed Buildings are referred to as 'Cultural Assets' as per internal reporting procedure. This approach will also be followed for the Alignment Selection reporting, but for the purposes of the Environmental Impact Assessment, Category A Listed Buildings will be referred to as designations. The consultation material is a summary of our more detailed route assessment. It is unlikely any historic assets have been missed from assessments, but rather weren't detailed in the consultation material. The dataset used for the route assessment was obtained from HES. The setting of assets has been considered at the routeing stage but it is limited in its approach as the position of the OHL is as yet unknown, however there has been further setting consideration assets located at 'pinch-points' within routes, where there is no potential alternative OHL alignments within the routes; as this then becomes a key consideration for selection of route options. The forthcoming Alignment Selection Stage is the first point where actual potential alignment options are identified, and therefore setting effects can be considered in more detail.

Any Environmental Impact Assessment for the historic environment should be undertaken by a suitably experienced professional. We are likely to be content with the 5B, 6C, 7B, 8A1, and 10A sections of the route. We do not currently have sufficient information to comment on whether the other preferred routes would be acceptable.	An Environmental Impact Assessment will be undertaken following the Alignment Stage consultation and our heritage consultants will undertake the assessment of setting impacts on a case by case basis following Historic Environment Scotland's 'Managing Change Guidance' on Setting; supported by site visits, visualisations and ZTV's as appropriate.
<u>The Highland Council</u> The proposed OHL should aim to avoid woodland and trees of high biodiversity value. Where this is not possible, the operating corridor (OC) must be kept as narrow as possible through the restructuring of woodland. The Council are aware that the OC can vary from as much as 80 metres (40m either side of the OHL) through commercial woodland, to as little as 30 metres (15m either side of the OHL) in native woodland. The need to rationalise felling back to a windfirm edge (in commercial woodland) may involve a significant amount of additional felling. Where felling is considered unavoidable, these areas should be restocked with native species which enables the OC to be reduced to the minimum width, therefore reducing the amount of woodland removal. Where permanent removal of woodland occurs, compensatory planting will be required. Details of compensatory planting must be provided in support of any planning submission and developed in consultation with Scottish Forestry and other relevant stakeholders. This must identify a suitable area of land which has been assessed by Scottish Forestry under the Forestry EIA screening process.	Consideration has been taken in developing route options to avoid woodland where possible, with increased weighting to avoid designated woodlands. It will not be possible to avoid all woodland and where it becomes necessary to pass through woodlands an operational corridor will be applied. This provides protection of assets in event of windfall during storms, such as have occurred in recent years. This width of operational corridor will be assessed on a site by site basis, to reflect the type of trees and their maximum potential height and there may be opportunity to reduce in some instances. The operational corridor will be maintained on a four-year rotational basis through felling of regeneration. Further assessments are made in areas of broadleafs where the operational corridor has been reduced, to remove any branches which may encroach. For any disturbance to woodland, we will seek to reach agreement with the landowner and the relevant stakeholders (such as Scottish Forestry) to agree suitable location for compensatory planting. Detailed information on compensatory planting proposals will be provided when the application is submitted to the Scottish Government.

Compensatory planting proposals must then be developed in consultation with Scottish Forestry and any other relevant stakeholders to demonstrate that it is a viable scheme.

Compensatory planting must be of at least the equivalent area to that which is being removed and, in some cases, an enhanced area of compensatory planting will be required. It should also be noted that compensatory planting should be of a similar woodland type (commercial/native) to the one being removed.
Any off-site compensatory planting will need to be secured through a legal agreement between the Council, the applicant and landowner(s).

Where woodland removal or restructuring affects an area under an approved Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP), then this will need to be amended to account for any approved changes. It is important that any related operations are integrated, such as woodland restructuring, biodiversity enhancement, compensatory planting, Habitat Management Plans and LTFPs.

<u>Transport Scotland</u> Transport Scotland have no further observations to make above the comments that were provided for the previous Corridor Consultation in 2022.	Noted
<u>NATS Safeguarding</u> • The proposed development does not conflict with our safeguarding criteria. Accordingly, NATS (En Route) Public Limited Company ("NERL") has no safeguarding objection to the proposal.	Noted

Scottish Water **Drinking Water Protected Areas** The proposed activity falls within several drinking water catchments (listed below) where a Scottish Water abstraction is located. There is a risk to water quality from this work and mitigation measures will be required to ensure risks are minimised as much as possible and particular care is taken in our smaller and more sensitive catchments. Further information was provided by Scottish Water regarding mitigation and future involvement: The River Ugie supplies Forehill Water Treatment Works (WTW). Burn Of Davidstone and Shenwell Spring supply Herrciks Water Treatment Works (WTW) and this is a particularly sensitive area so great care will need to be taken. Glenlatterach supplies Glenlatterach Water Treatment Works (WTW) and it is also a sensitive site where care will need to be taken. Glenlatterach supplies Glenlatterach Water Treatment Works (WTW) and it is also a sensitive 105heree great care will need to be taken. The Spey Boreholes, Dipple and the Ordiequish Collecting Chambers supply the Spey Scheme (Badentinan) Water Treatment Works (WTW) and ground water will need to be protected. The River Deveron (Muiresk Intake) supplies Turriff Water Treatment Works (WTW). Loch Ness supplies Invermoriston Water Treatment Works (WTW) and Loch Ashie supplies Inverness Loch Ashie Water Treatment Works (WTW). **Scottish Water Assets** There are multiple Scottish Water assets in the areas highlighted. All Scottish Water assets potentially affected by the activity should be identified, with particular consideration being given to access roads and pipe crossings. Scottish Water have produced a list of precautions for a range of activities. The list of precautions for assets details protection measures to be taken if there are assets in the area. Please note that site specific risks and mitigation measures will require to be assessed and implemented.	Drinking Water Protected Areas have been identified and are being factored into the assessment process. Other Scottish Water assets will be identified at a later stage to feed into the detailed design process. Site specific risks and mitigation measures will be provided as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. We will continue to consult with Scottish Water at the alignment selection stage.

RSPB

Due to the location, large scale and timeline of the project, there is significant scope for detrimental impacts to habitats and wildlife. Robust survey and assessment should be undertaken to inform the final design and avoid or minimise impacts as per the mitigation hierarchy. Two years of field surveys should be undertaken, especially in any sensitive locations.

Several designated sites and priority bird species are known to be present along or close to the routes. RSPB Scotland, the Highland Raptor Study Group, and the Northeast Scotland Raptor Study Group should be contacted as soon as possible for relevant bird records.

NatureScot guidance should be followed as it is well known that overhead wires associated with power lines present risks of collision, electrocution, and displacement to birds. Construction and maintenance also present disturbance risks and these should be discussed in the assessment.

Peat depth and habitat surveys should also be undertaken along the preferred route to inform the final alignment deviation choices.

Undergrounding should not be ruled out. Line markers may also be required in some areas. Various existing pylon routes run parallel to this new proposed overhead line in some areas. It is not clear whether all of these are to remain alongside the proposed development or be removed. The cumulative and in-combination impacts of existing overhead lines, including any to be decommissioned should also be included in any assessment.

The proposal needs to offer 'significant biodiversity enhancements' that can be 'secured within a reasonable timescale and with reasonable certainty' as required by policy 3iv) of NPF4.

Ornithology surveys are already taking place including vantage point, breeding bird and wintering bird surveys. The duration (one year) and location of these were agreed in consultation with NatureScot. RSPB Scotland, the Highland Raptor Study Group, and the Northeast Scotland Raptor Study Group have all been contacted for relevant bird records.

Peat depth surveys will take place in late 2023 and early 2024 to help inform alignment development. Habitat surveys have already begun and helped to inform the routeing assessment. Habitat surveys will continue in further detail for the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Robust survey and assessment will be undertaken to inform the final design and applicable mitigation measures will be proposed which may include line markers in specific locations. This will form the Environmental Impact Assessment to be submitted as part of the planning application.

We are committed to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain on all our projects; as well as compensatory planting for any trees felled during the construction phase, where possible with native species. Robust policies are also in place to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats like peatland and ancient woodland.

National Trust for Scotland Should SSEN Transmission look at offsetting the associated impact of disrupting peatland and moorland to underground the new line, the National Trust for Scotland would be able to consider this, as we have done together in the past. As the public consultation launches in mid-April, we ask that this information be made available and possibly host one of your in-person consultations at Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre, we would be glad to facilitate this.	Noted. The offer of hosting one of our in-person consultations at the Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre is greatly appreciated. We plan to include this as an additional event in our next round of consultations.
Joint Radio Company (The Windfarm Team) The alternative routes in the documentation provided at this stage showed the corridor crosses a large number of critical national infrastructure link paths. Although we do not anticipate any issue with the OHL itself, careful consideration needs to be given to the location of the towers. The location of the towers must not cause an obstruction to these critical national infrastructure link paths.	We have considered any licenced transmitting/receiving devices registered with Ofcom as part of the routeing process. The Ofcom register provided locations of any transmitting/receiving devices along with the type of link that is registered. This dataset allows us to minimise any impact to the licenced radio networks along the route, further consultation will be carried out with JRC once alignment options and potential tower locations are identified.
Scottish Forestry The first consideration for all woodland removal decisions should be whether the underlying purpose of the proposals can reasonably be met without resorting to woodland removal. Woodland removal should be allowed only where it would achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits. Further detail on the criteria for determining acceptability of woodland removal were provided in the response.	Please refer to the Common Themes Section regarding the rationale behind the Project Need for the Technology Choice. The ongoing route selection process considers forestry at every stage with a view to minimising woodland removal where possible. Woodland and Forestry impacts will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options and Scottish Forestry Grampian and Scottish Forestry Highland will have another opportunity to provide consultation feedback ahead of the Environmental Impact Assessment stage.

By felling and/or fragmentation the preferred routes will adversely impact: • Ancient Woodland as recorded in the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI). • Native woodland recorded on the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS). • Annex 1 Woodland Habitats including Caledonian Pinewoods and Old Sessile Oak woods. • Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS). 'Preferred Route Rag Ratings' demonstrates that the RAG impact rating for forestry is high for all bar two route sections, the remaining two are medium RAG rating. The rating reflects the impact on commercial woodland and the sensitive woodlands listed above for which there is a strong presumption against removal. Scottish Forestry advises to include a specific chapter on Forestry in future consultation documents and provide detailed information on the types and areas of forestry to be felled and restocked as a result of the proposed development. Detailed information on any compensatory planting proposals should also be provided. All felling, restocking and compensatory planting proposals must be compliant with the UK Forestry Standard. Any additional felling which is not part of the planning application will require permission from Scottish Forestry. For areas covered by an approved Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP), the request for additional felling, as well as subsequent restocking, areas need to be presented in the form of LTFP amendment.	A specific chapter on Forestry will be included within the Environmental Impact Assessment report, however we will be able to provide further detail on potential impacts to forestry at the alignment stage. Details on compensatory planting proposals will be provided. Where required, we will work with landowners and relevant parties, to seek amendments to LTFP for both felling and compensatory planting proposals.

The applicant should note that any compensatory planting required as a result of the proposed development, may also need to be considered. A woodland creation proposal should be complete before any compensatory planting is carried out.	
Beauly Fishery Board Hope that the capacity of the new infrastructure would be able to take the electricity generated not just from developments planned up to 2030 but have extra capacity to take additional electricity from future projects not yet planned to minimise the potential environmental harm, disruption and time/ money spent on delivering projects such as this.	This infrastructure has been designed at the maximum capacity available within the GB transmission system and any additional reinforcements required will be subject to established electricity network planning processes based on future changes to electricity generations and demand.
British Telecom (BT) Due to the length and large area of the proposed OHL route, BT requested the co-ordinates for the proposed structures and their planned heights, using the preferred routes to enable them to assess any impact to their existing and planned radio network.	There is no further information we can provide at this stage. We will be able to provide the precise proposed structure locations following the selection of the Preferred Alignment.
National Gas Transmission Works in the vicinity of the pipelines are to be approved and monitored by National Gas Transmission as necessary. Any costs incurred by National Gas Transmission as a result of this project are to be accepted by SSEN Transmission. Ground potential rise studies must be carried out to ensure that the touch and step potentials that the pipelines are exposed to are within the safe limits as defined in BS EN 50121-1. Pre and post energisation surveys will need to be carried out by a National Gas Transmission approved contractor and additional mitigations may be required to ensure that the pipeline's CP levels are not negatively affected by the OHL installations.	Noted

Section 1 – Beauly area substation to south of Beauly

Summary of feedback	Our Response
The Highland Council The Highland Council highlighted that communities in Section 1 want a consolidated approach to development in the area	A consolidated approach will be taken to development in the area going forward.
The Council's key concerns at present relate to minimising the effects on surrounding landscape, visual amenity and on the affected communities. In this respect, we request that all undergrounding options are fully considered for the initial stretches of the connecting transmission lines which cross through, or in the vicinity of, the more densely populated areas both to the north and east of the proposed Beauly area substation and converter station. Should this not be possible for the 400kV OHLs, scope to rationalise or underground other transmission lines in the vicinity must be explored to help mitigate the likely widespread cumulative impacts of this proposal.	Please refer to the Common Themes section regarding the potential for underground cables. It is proposed that the existing Beauly to Knocknagael 132kV OHL is dismantled as part of this project, and we will continue to explore options for further network rationalisations as the project progresses through the alignment selection stage.
It is noted that the developer proposes that the 400kV overhead line would use pylons significantly larger than many found in these parts of Highland currently. It is further noted that in substantial parts the preferred route follows alongside an existing, smaller overhead line or is set away from but still in the vicinity of the existing lines. It will be helpful to have clarity, as proposals move forward, as to whether the proposed overhead line would be entirely additional to those existing or whether any of the existing infrastructure would be removed. The pre-application information does mention removal of a 132kV connection between Beauly and Knocknagael. Full consideration of any available options to remove existing line infrastructure is required.	A team of landscape architects are working closely with us to understand and assess potential landscape and visual impacts across the proposed development and cumulative effects with other infrastructure. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options.

Each 'option route' for the overhead line passes through a number of different landscape character types. Understanding the consequences of these factors for the effects of the proposed development will be important, particularly at the transitions between landscape character types and also cumulative effects with other infrastructure. Another key consideration is how construction impacts will be managed, including what mitigation will be required for the local road network, notably access over the River Beauly via the Black Bridge, with it envisaged that construction will be undertaken over several years in an area which has already been subject to extensive construction work associated with the development and expansion of Beauly substation.	A Traffic and Transport Impact Assessment will be conducted as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. A Construction Traffic Management Plan will also be produced to accompany the Environmental Impact Assessment Report.
<u>Naturescot</u> Parts of the Inner Moray Firth SPA are located as far east as Whiteness Head therefore all routes within sections 1 – 5 have the potential for connectivity with the goose interests associated with this SPA (within 15 - 20 km).	Impacts to natural heritage designations including the SPA have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes.
<u>Historic Environment Scotland</u> Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment: • Beaufort Castle, GDL (GDL00052) • Beaufort Castle, Category A Listed Building (LB8068) • Kiltarlity Old Parish Church Burial Ground, Category B Listed Building (LB8081) Corff House, Scheduled Monument (SM3195)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

RSPB The Consultation Document identifies Route 1A as the Preferred Route, despite this having impacts on ancient woodland habitat, which is acknowledged as being an irreplaceable habitat. Although Route 1A is said to have the lowest Biodiversity Unit value of the Section 1 route options, we understand that irreplaceable habitat would not be factored into SSEN Transmission's metric so this summary could be somewhat misleading. Given the nature crisis, and the ambition for SSEN Transmission to achieve 'biodiversity net gain' avoiding impacts on irreplaceable habitat should be a key priority.	Across the route options, we have tried to avoid areas of irreplaceable semi-natural ancient woodland, however across the 180 km length, there are a small number of unavoidable areas, which include Crioche Wood in Route 1A. Alignments will be developed with input from environmental specialists to cross this woodland in the most appropriate way possible to ensure the least impact. We will also seek advice from the local authority, NatureScot, and other stakeholders to ensure impact to Crioche Wood is minimal.
Beauly Fishery Board The two crossings over the mainstem River Beauly are in areas of salmon spawning habitat and prime angling so finalising a route here would have to be in liaison with the Lower Beauly Fishing Syndicate to minimise conflict with the angling interest. It is unfortunate that this route goes through ancient woodland and although not a perfect mitigation we would hope that any felling would be compensated by planting of native deciduous trees elsewhere in the catchment in priority areas to buffer the effects of climate change. The grounds of Beaufort Castle are out of scope (come under 'Garden and Designed Landscape') but should perhaps be reconsidered to minimise biodiversity impacts. All potential routes will cross coastal burns which host sea trout.	We are keen to continue consulting with the Beauly Fishery Board to ensure conflict with the Lower Beauly Fishing Syndicate is minimised and prime angling spots are retained. Further surveys and assessment will be carried out to understand the potential for impacts on the aquatic and riparian habitats, and any mitigation required. Every effort will be taken to mitigate and reduce the impact on designated woodlands. This will be a key consideration in identifying suitable alignments within the Proposed Route. If crossing of ancient woodlands is required, we will seek to minimise felling as much as reasonably practicable, with a more intensive maintenance programme specified to maintain a safe corridor whilst minimising impact on the remaining trees. Any trees removed to provide a safe operational corridor, will have compensatory planting as close as possible to the local area as can be agreed with the landowner and relevant statutory bodies, or off site if needed, at designated schemes within the same local authority area.

It would be advised that the footprint and river/burn crossings of the development are minimised with good track design, culvert design, and sediment management measures in place. • Any development would have to ensure that there is no impact to salmon and sea trout, and we would suggest that robust monitoring is in place to assess this. i.e., baseline, development, and post- development monitoring in the form of electro-fishing and invertebrate sampling	
<u>Scottish Canals</u> Information was provided on maximum permitted vessel dimensions for the Caledonian Canal.	This information will be used to ensure statutory clearance requirements are maintained when designing towers for the Caledonian Canal crossing. We will continue to engage with Scottish Canals as we develop and assess alignment options and design the crossing towers.

Section 2 – south of Beauly to south of Inverness

Summary of feedback	Our Response
<u>The Highland Council</u> Why is Route 2A2 the Preferred Route when Route 2A1 is better environmentally? The Highland Council has a preference for the crossing of the Caledonian Canal to be kept closer to existing OHL crossings, rather than take the southern Route 2C2. The Highland Council asked if any local development areas have been considered in the Inverness area.	We take a multi-disciplinary approach to deciding the Preferred Route. In addition to environmental concerns, engineering and cost considerations are also factored in to arrive at the overall Preferred Route. In this case, Route 2A2 is preferred because Route 2A1 was least preferred from an engineering perspective as it would have unavoidable impacts on a number of residential properties. The feedback on the crossing of the Caledonian Canal has been considered in the decision to take Route 2A2 through to the alignment stage. A search of local development areas has been conducted across the route options and these have been avoided.
<u>Historic Environment Scotland</u> Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment: • Dochfour Inventory Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL00137) • Dochfour House, Category A Listed Building (LB8028) • Aldourie Castle Inventory Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL00011) • Aldourie Castle, Category A Listed Building, (LB535)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

- Dochgarroch House, Category B Listed Building (LB8067)
- Dun Mor, fort, Scheduled Monument (SM2423)
- Phioneas Hill, enclosure, Scheduled Monument (SM4729)
- Castle Spynie, brich, Scheduled Monument (SM4653)
- Torbreck, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM3098)

Garn Clas, chambered cairn (SM2392)

NatureScot Route 2B crosses Moniack Gorge SSSI and SAC. The interest of the SAC is green shield moss and this requires very specific micro-climatic conditions provided by the wooded gorge. It is not clear if this has taken into account the possible need for wayleave and the removal or trimming of trees to maintain it. Loch Ashie SSSI and SPA. Birds flying to and from the SPA on migration away from breeding areas to Loch Ashie to moult may cross the route. Route 2C2 remains close enough to the SPA for potential disturbance. Routes 2C1 and 2C2 include parts of Loch Battan SSSI that could be vulnerable to impacts from construction. Where it is not possible to avoid the Torvean Landforms (SSSI), we would need more detailed information about the routing and construction of the towers on this site before we are able to offer further comment on the level of impact.	Noted. Route 2B would oversail the Moniak Gorge SAC here, with no anticipated need for tree thinning or removal from a wayleave. Were such removal required, we would advise use of hand tools only, to avoid disturbance to existing habitats, and possibly leaving downed woody debris where feasible to provide habitat for the SAC's qualifying feature, green shield-moss. Route 2A2 has however been selected as the Proposed Route in this section, therefore no direct impacts to the SAC are anticipated. Impacts to the noted natural heritage designations have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes. We will continue to consult with NatureScot throughout the project development process.

Beauly Fishery Board Routes 2A1 and 2A2 would cross through a wetland that has received Nature Restoration funding. From a biodiversity perspective, any works in this area would have to be carefully carried out and fully restored. This is a valuable wetland site, providing a source of invertebrates that benefit the wider ecology of the area. All potential routes will cross coastal burns which host sea trout. It would be advised that the footprint and river/ burn crossings of the development are minimised with good track design, culvert design, and sediment management measures in place. • Any development would have to ensure that there is no impact to salmon and sea trout, and we would suggest that robust monitoring is in place to assess this. i.e., baseline, development, and post- development monitoring in the form of electro-fishing and invertebrate sampling.	We are aware sea trout and salmon are present in Moniack Burn, and of the Conan Bank wetland in Section 2 that has received Nature Restoration funding. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Further ecology surveys will take place through to 2024, to be included within the Environmental Impact Assessment.
RSPB The Consultation Document identified Route 2A2 as the Preferred Route. Our comments in relation to irreplaceable woodland applies, as per the comments towards Section 1**.**	Noted.

Section 3 – A9 and River Nairn crossing

Summary of feedback	Our Response
<u>The Highland Council</u> The Highland Council would prefer for the proposed OHL to be kept with the existing OHL. We understand and agree that Route 3B would be preferred as siting the OHL close to the existing OHL is preferable.	Noted. This will be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options.
<u>Historic Environment Scotland</u> Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the preferred route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the preferred alignment: • Leys Castle, GDL (GDL00264) • Leys Castle, Category A Listed Building (LB8053) • Daviot Cottage, Mains of Daviot Farm, ring cairn and stone circle Scheduled Monument (SM3085) • Daviot Castle, Scheduled Monument (SM5486) • Inventory Battle of Culloden (BTL6) Clava Cairns, Scheduled Monument (SM90074).	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage. The proximity of Culloden has been a key factor in decisions made during the route selection stage and will continue to be so in the alignment selection stage.
<u>NatureScot</u> All routes within sections 3 are within the 15 - 20 km connectivity distance for foraging geese of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA. Route 3C includes a section of Littlemill Fluvioglacial landforms (SSSI). Where it is not possible to avoid the SSSI, we would need more detailed information about the routing and construction of the towers on this site before we are able to offer further comment on the level of impact.	Impacts to the noted natural heritage designations have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes. With the choice to take Route 3B forward as the Proposed Route, it is not anticipated that this Littlemill Fluvioglacial Landforms SSSI would be impacted and require further assessment.

Scottish Forestry Will a new wayleave be created with new forestry loss within Section 3 if the preferred route is chosen?	Lines will be kept together through forestry where possible to reduce the need for a new wayleave, however this will be dependent on other constraints in the area and may not always be possible.
National Trust for Scotland While we appreciate the care that has gone into the development of multiple routes, the current Preferred Route 3B route would see an increase of the existing powerlines that would be visible from the main battlefield landscape. Elsewhere, us has put great attention to put new powerlines underground as has been done in other areas of significance, such as at Cuillin. At present Route 3B has minor consolations in terms of its ability to skirt behind a portion of the hill to the south of the battlefield and the plantation of trees that currently would act to mask the new 400kV line would be felled in the coming years and thus not provide a lasting screen for the masts. • We fear that the addition of the 400kV OHL in proximity to the existing 275kV OHL, given the new lines' differing spacing and increased height would create a jarring affect to the landscape.	Please refer to Common Themes for information on undergrounding. Lines will be kept together through forestry where possible to reduce the need for a new wayleave, however this will be dependent on other constraints in the area and may not always be possible. From a landscape and visual perspective, it is often preferential to parallel a new OHL with an existing OHL to keep the potential effects in the same area as long as it is designed within specific parameters. A team of landscape architects are working closely with us to understand and assess potential landscape and visual impacts across the proposed development. This will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options.
RSPB Our comments (outlined in Section 1 and Section 2) in relation to irreplaceable woodland also applies to Section 3. If the line can pass over the top, instead of felling trees in this area, then we agree with the preference of routeing it alongside an existing line. The issue of irreplaceable habitats (in the form of blanket bogs) applies to habitats in this section.	It is not known at this stage where trees would need to be felled and this would be taken into further consideration when developing alignment options. OHLs cannot usually oversail woodland for operational safety reasons, and the preference would be to fell an operational corridor for the OHL to pass through. The exception to this may be where an OHL passes through Category 1a or 2a ancient woodland. Route 3B passes over an area of Category 1a ancient woodland south of Mains of Daltulich. The intention is for this area of woodland to be oversailed, due to its location within a gorge at a lower elevation than the OHL would be.

Section 4 – south of Culloden to Ferness

Summary of feedback	Our Response
The Highland Council The Highland Council would prefer for the proposed OHL to be kept with the existing OHL.	Noted.
NatureScot Routes 4A1 and 4A2 include Dalroy and Clava Landforms (SSSI) spanning most of the route width. Avoiding an impact on the SSSI may be difficult. Where it is not possible to avoid the SSSI, we would need more detailed information about the routing and construction of the towers on this site before we are able to offer further comment on the level of impact. Routes 4A1 and 4A2 are adjacent to Cawdor Wood SSSI and SAC. Tree removal adjacent to the SAC would need to assess the likelihood of any indirect effects on woodland interests within the SAC. Muckle Burn Clunas (SSSI) is located within Route 4C and avoided by the preferred option. Darnaway and Lethen Forest (SPA) is designated for its breeding capercaillie and there are adjacent forest blocks that provide habitat and support to the SPA population. Capercaillie function as a meta population and use suitable habitat to disperse into from their breeding areas. We strongly recommend contacting the Capercaillie Project Officer, to request details of capercaillie records and activity within and adjacent to the SPA. SSEN Transmission should consider potential movement of birds between this SPA and the Strathspey SPAs to the south.	Dalroy and Clava Landforms SSSI, Cawdor Wood SSSI/SAC and Muckle Burn Clunas SSSI are not anticipated to be directly impacted with the decision to take Route 4B forward as the Proposed Route. Despite this, they will still be taken into consideration when developing alignment options in terms of indirect impacts. Regarding Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA, we have engaged with the Capercaillie Project Officer as advised. We have surveyed all woodland blocks with potential suitability for Capercaillie along the route including those where capercaillie data was obtained from RSPB. This included consultation with NatureScot as was required of us under the Schedule 1 survey licence for capercaillie surveys. NatureScot's advice regarding connectivity to other SPAs in the much wider area is noted and will be investigated further as part of the EcIA.

Historic Environment Scotland Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment: • Cawdor Castle, GDL (GDL00099) • Logie Bridge, Category A Listed Building (LB564) • Culloden Moor Viaduct, Category A Listed Building (LB1709) • Ardclach Bell Tower, Category A Listed Building (LB551) • Inventory Battle of Culloden (BTL6) Levratattich, cairn, Scheduled Monument (SM11738)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
National Trust for Scotland The feedback for Section 4 is the same as Section 3 from the National Trust for Scotland.	
RSPB Routes pass close or through woodland where Capercaillie have historically been recorded. There is a risk it will fragment current continuous forest cover within dispersal distance of the designated site, which may have a negative effect on the species and their ability to travel between suitable areas of habitat. It is important that up to date Capercaillie records are requested from RSPB Scotland, and appropriate survey work undertaken in this area. Where possible woodland habitat removal should be avoided. The issue of irreplaceable habitats (in the form of bogs) applies to habitats in this section. We agree with the preferred option, following the route of the existing line and this route also appears to balance between forest Capercaillie and sensitive bog habitats.	Ornithology surveys are being conducted in the areas that the route options pass through, including Capercaillie focused surveys. An ornithologist is working closely with us and will be feeding into alignment development. Capercaillie records have been requested and received from RSPB Scotland.

Section 5 – Ferness to south of Forres

Summary of feedback	Our Response
Moray Council Urge for Special Landscape Areas to be avoided where possible despite being a local designation. Do SSEN Transmission try to avoid elevations?	Special Landscape Areas have been a consideration during the routeing stage and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. We try to avoid elevations and sky-lining as per Holford Rules. This is why Route 5B is so wide around Cairn Eney. This allows flexibility to develop alignment options at the next stage of the process.
NatureScot Although this section (Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA) crosses more open ground, capercaillie movement between areas of suitable and supporting habitat is possible. Lower Findhorn Woods (SSSI/ SAC) is currently avoided by all the route options. However, the river crossings of the Findhorn and one of its major tributaries will be required upstream of the SSSI and SAC. The SSSI supports two rare river lichens that would be vulnerable to pollution. Both Routes 5A and 5B avoid Moidach More (SSSI/SAC). The Preferred Route however is within 1 km of Moidach More. Hydrological connectivity is less likely, but care will need to be taken to ensure that construction does not impact the rate of drainage from the SSSI/SAC.	Advice on potential Capercaillie movements is noted and this has been captured in the Capercaillie survey coverage, which began in March 2023. The potential impacts to Lower Findhorn Woods SSSI / SAC and Moidach More SSSI / SAC during construction are noted. Works taking place during construction will follow an appropriate Construction Environmental Management Plan and an Ecological Clerk of Works will be required to monitor works onsite. This will include use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments.
Historic Environment Scotland Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment: Edinkillie House, Category A Listed Building (LB2188)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

RSPB We believe that the alternative route (5A) should be reconsidered unless the preferred route (5B) can be aligned to avoid impacting on the large amount of irreplaceable bog habitat found within this stretch. The eastern end of this section (both routes), south of Hill of Glaschyle, is of medium importance for breeding farmland waders.	Alignment options will be developed to avoid irreplaceable bog habitat wherever possible. Route 5A is unlikely to be reconsidered due the potential for visual impacts on residential properties and cultural heritage settings impacts at the pinch point near Edinkillie House and Church, the Dava Way, and the Divie Viaduct. The presence of breeding farmland waders is noted and has been passed onto the consultant ornithologists.

Section 6 – south of Forres to Kellas

Summary of feedback	Our Response
Moray Council Route 6C is the preferred option. The back up option (Route 6A1) is not preferable due to the proximity to Dallas.	Moray Council's response is noted. The proximity of Route 6A1 to Dallas was a significant constraint of the route option. With Route 6C as the Proposed Route, effects on Dallas are anticipated to be negligible.
With Route 6C, there is a multitude of elevations, with a ridge of land that follows the route. SSEN Transmission should be mindful of the changing elevations when designing the alignment – the lower the better.	Engineers and landscape architects will work closely to develop suitable alignment options that will take changing elevations into account and avoid skylining the OHL as per Holford Rules.
Romach Loch in the western end of Routes 6A1 and 6A2 is popular for walking, it would be a shame to have pylons in this area.	We are aware of the recreational use of Romach Loch. With Route 6C as the Proposed Route, effects on Romach Loch are anticipated to be negligible.
It would be disappointing if proliferation of wind farms pushed this OHL into populated areas and the ECU should be made aware of this if wind farm developers are not cooperating with SSEN Transmission.	We are in contact with the relevant wind farm developers.
NatureScot All routes within Sections 6 are within the 15-20 km connectivity distance for foraging greylag geese of Loch Spynie SPA and Ramsar. Forest blocks within the Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA lie within the Section 6 options and may support Capercaillie populations. Routes 6A1 and 6A2 are just within potential connectivity distance for breeding osprey that could be associated with the Findhorn Bay section of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar.	Impacts to the noted natural heritage designated sites have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes. Much of the surrounding landscape is suitable for foraging geese, and our current choice of bird survey vantage points, as agreed with NatureScot, have been informed by the detail in Mitchell (2012) which covers the movements of geese from these sites into functionally linked land.

Routes 6A2, 6B and 6C are all adjacent to Kellas Oakwood (SSSI). The SSSI is designated for its oak woodland interests. With the road separating the SSSI from the route options it is unlikely that there would be any indirect effects.	Regarding Darnaway and Lethen Forest SPA, we are engaging with the Capercaillie Project Officer as advised. We have surveyed all woodland blocks with potential suitability for Capercaillie along the route including those where capercaillie data was obtained from RSPB. This included consultation with NatureScot as was required of us under the Schedule 1 survey licence for capercaillie surveys.
RSPB The Preferred Route in Section 6 (Route 6C) is preferable in terms of bird species interests, but alignment would need to avoid a large amount of irreplaceable bog habitat. There is historic use of this route by breeding Merlin. The woodland within the alternative route (6A) has historically contained lekking Capercaillie.	Alignment options will be developed to avoid irreplaceable bog habitat where possible.

Section 7 – Kellas to Teindland

Summary of feedback	Our Response
Moray Council SSEN Transmission should be aware that south of Elgin has open undulating plain. This area is involved within the Route 7A options.	Noted. The Proposed Route is 7B which avoids this area.
Nature Scot East of the A941, all routes fall within the 10km core foraging area for breeding osprey that could be associated with the River Spey section of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar site. Route 7A2 /7B are adjacent to Kellas Oakwood (SSSI). With the road separating the SSSI from the route options there is less likelihood of indirect effects. Route 7B includes a small section of Buinach and Glenlatterach (SSSI). The impact of any new wayleave on woodland interests would need to be considered as this would be a longer-term effect on the SSSI interests. Route 7B includes Coleburn Pasture (SSSI). Geese in Route 7A1/ 7A2 around Upper Bogside may have a possible connection to local SPAs.	Impacts to the noted natural heritage designated sites have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes. We would consider wayleave requirements at alignment stage. As Buinach and Glentlatterach SSSI is in a steep gorge, it may be possible to oversail it, thereby reducing the need for maintaining vegetation clearance for a wayleave. Alignment options will be developed to avoid irreplaceable peatland habitat wherever possible.
Historic Environment Scotland Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment:	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

- Blackhills House, GDL (GDL00409)
- Birnie Kirk, Category A Listed Building (LB2294)

Kellas House, Category A Listed Building (LB2345)

Scottish Forestry The area south of Brown Muir has a significant new proposed woodland area, which is currently in Environmental Impact Assessment stage.	Noted. This will be taken into consideration when developing alignment options.
RSPB The alignment must avoid the small areas of peatland and ancient woodland within this area of the Preferred Route. The open moorland around the western edge of Route 7B has been used by nesting Hen Harrier and Merlin. The quarry to the north of Route 7A can hold large numbers of wintering waders and wildfowl.	Alignment options will be developed to avoid irreplaceable peatland habitat wherever possible. Additional information noted.

Section 8 – Teindland to Keith

Summary of feedback	Our Response
Moray Council Have underground cables (as an alternative to OHLs) been considered around the Lower River Spey? How will the third line impact the landscape and visual impacts? This should be included in any landscape assessments going forward. Have SSEN Transmission considered breaking away from traditional tower design, and considered something more palatable in terms of pylons crossing the Lower River Spey?	The option of undergrounding one of the existing OHLs to the west of the River Spey may be considered as part of the alignment options assessment. It would be technically very challenging to underground beneath the River Spey itself, due to the steep slopes on the eastern side of the river and environmental constraints including the River Spey SAC and SSSI and Scottish Water drinking water abstractions. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on tower design.
NatureScot The River Spey SSSI and SAC boundary is 300 m wide at potential crossing points for all routes. Much of the land beyond the boundary are still part of the functioning floodplain and also include buried river gravels. The gravels hold ground water and are part of a resource abstracted by Scottish Water at their Dipple Wellfield. Excavation for tower foundations, any access tracks and temporary safety equipment adjacent to the SAC would need to take account of the potential to influence groundwater movements that could have knock-on effects for the supply of water for supporting riparian vegetation. With appropriate design and the right construction methods, adverse effects on the SAC are likely avoidable.	We are aware of and acknowledge the sensitivity of this area in relation to hydrogeology, sub-surface flows and the protection of drinking water supplies and designated habitats. This information will be used to inform the alignment selection stage, whilst also taking into consideration the use of appropriate mitigation measures for constructing in sensitive environments. Regarding Osprey, please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information.

Lower River Spey – Spey Bay SAC is crossed by both Route 8B1 and 8B2. Similar issues to those above for the River Spey SAC in respect to the impacts on gravels and ground water. All routes fall within the core foraging area for breeding osprey that could be associated with the River Spey section of the Moray and Nairn Coast SPA and Ramsar Site.	
<u>Historic Environment Scotland</u> Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the preferred alignment: • Gordon Castle GDL, (GDL00198) Boat of Brig Tollhouse, Category A Listed Building (LB2324)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.
<u>Scottish Forestry</u> Highland Conservancy has worked closely with the Spey Catchment initiative. There is a strong drive to maintain and retain riparian woodlands. Within the areas of wet woodland, SSEN Transmission need to ensure they are showing how this will be retained and maintained.	Noted. The potential impact on riparian woodland is understood and will be considered in further detail when developing and assessing the alignment options.
<u>RSPB</u> The woodlands in Section 8 are used by Capercaillie, although the routes suggested are thought to avoid known potentially active lek sites.	Noted.

Section 9 – Keith to south of Turriff

Summary of feedback	Our Response
NatureScot Both Routes 9C1/ 9C2 include Mill Wood (SSSI). Any negative effects of wayleave requirements would need to be assessed. Routes 9A1 and 9A2 include Shiel Wood Pastures (SSSI). Routes 9C1 and 9C2 are immediately north of Mortlach Moss (SSSI/SAC). The routes are located downhill from the wetlands, meaning hydrological connectivity may be less likely. Care would need to be taken to ensure that construction does not impact the rate of drainage from the SSSI/SAC. Route 9C1 includes Whitehill (SSSI). Moss of Crombie (SSSI) is slightly impinged by Route 9A2. It is important to avoid direct impacts and to ensure that construction adjacent to the bog doesn't influence drainage to and from the bog. Routes 9A1, 9A2, 9B1 and 9B2 route through the raised bog at Reidside Moss (SSSI/SAC). The area would be very vulnerable to hydrological impacts both on and within the surrounding area. The potential for indirect effects on local drainage will need to be assessed to ensure that this does not impact the hydrological regime of the bog at Reidside Moss.	Regarding wildcats, please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information on protection of species. The specific advice provided on wildcat protection will be taken on board during the construction stage. We would consider the effects of wayleave requirements at Environmental Impact Assessment stage (when more detailed wayleave requirements would be available) should this option be carried forward. We would consider routing and construction of towers at alignment stage should the option be carried forward and provide the requested detail should the option be carried through to Environmental Impact Assessment stage. Noted, however with the Reidside Moss SAC on higher ground we would suggest that the likelihood of a hydrological connection that could result in LSE is theoretical rather than credible. We would not anticipate any direct habitat loss but will consider groundwater connections in the alignment and preferred alignment/ Environmental Impact Assessment stages of the project should either of these two options be taken forward. We would consider the risk of hydrological impacts at alignment stage should this route option be taken forward; and would provide appropriate mitigation advice for construction at Environmental Impact Assessment stage where relevant.

There are very few pure wildcats left within the Wildcat Priority Area. The Wildcat Priority Area includes Clashdour Forest. This forest does have wildcats within. Routes 9C1 and 9C2 (preferred) traverse the northern part of the Strathbogie Wildcat Protection Area (WPA). We have standing advice available for wildcats and Scottish Forestry's guidance for Forest Operations and Wildcats in Scotland should be used to inform methods for any tree felling operations associated with the project within the WPA which should include surveying in advance for wildcats and their dens and putting in positive mitigation (leaving brash piles etc).	
<u>Historic Environment Scotland</u> Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment: • Crombie Castle, Category A Listed Building (LB19602) • Kinnairdy Castle with Outbuildings, Category A Listed Building (LB19606) • Forglen GDL, (GDL00398) • West Outbuilding at Corse Croft, Category A Listed Building (LB43681) • Auchanachie Castle, Category A Listed Building (LB3016) • Castle Bridge Over River Deveron, Category A Listed Building (LB9081) • Raich Farm, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM42) • Arn Hill, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM4) • Cairnton, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM11) • Hare Stone, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM338) • North Pitglassie, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM38)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

• Mains of Hatton, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM30) Corrydown, stone circle, Scheduled Monument (SM16)	
RSPB The preferred route in Section 9 (Route 9C2) passes through a Wildcat Priority Area and close to the Bin Forest, which holds a diverse range of specially protected birds, including many raptor species. Siting and construction would need to be carried out sympathetically following surveys. On balance we suggest that the southern 9C routes are preferable.	This response has been passed on to the consultant ecologists and ornithologists and will be considered in further detail when developing alignment options. Please refer to the Project Wide response table for more information. The specific advice provided by NatureScot on wildcat protection will be taken on board during the construction stage.

Section 10 – south of Turriff to New Deer

Summary of feedback	Our Response
Historic Environment Scotland Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment: • Hatton Castle GDL, (GDL00399) • Hatton Castle, Category A Listed Building (LB16431) • Idoch Castle Dovecot, Category B Listed Building (LB16430) Towie Barclay Castle, Category A Listed Building (LB16405)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

Section 11 – New Deer to Peterhead

Summary of feedback	Our Response
Ministry of Defence (MOD) One of the possible routes in Section 11 runs due west from Boddam. The route runs in very close proximity to the MOD radar site at Buchan (AB42 0NZ). As it primarily looks out seaward, the radar has been installed on high terrain (approximately 99 m above mean sea level). If the proposed OHLs are over the top of the radar, then it is likely that the MOD will object to the plans, particularly if it in close to site.	Noted. MOD will continue to be consulted as the project progresses.
NatureScot All routes have a significant portion in Section 11 that is within 20 km of Loch Strathbeg SSSI, SPA and Ramsar site. This is within connectivity distance for foraging geese that could be linked to the SPA. All routes within section 11 are within 20 km connectivity distance for pink-footed geese as an interest of Ythan Estuary, Forvie Sands and Meikle Loch SPA. Routes 11C2 and 11C4 lie just to the north of Moss of Cruden (SSSI). The area is designated for its geological interest of sedimentary deposits. Providing the SSSI can be avoided, impacts are unlikely.	Impacts to the noted natural heritage designated sites have informed the routeing process and will subsequently inform the alignment, Environmental Impact Assessment and HRA processes. Based on studies to date the areas which fall within and immediately surrounding the route are not understood to represent core foraging areas for geese associated with either Loch of Strathbeg or Ythan Estuary and Meikle Loch SPA/Ramsar.
Historic Environment Scotland Detail was provided on the following designations/assets in proximity to the Preferred Route. These should be assessed in greater detail before deciding the Preferred Alignment: • Hill of Culsh Monument, Category B Listed Building, (LB16156) • North Windhill Farm, Category B Listed Building, (LB16103) • Clackriach Castle, Scheduled Monument (SM5534) Parkhouse Hill stone circle, Scheduled Monument, (SM2)	The noted designated sites will be considered in further detail at the alignment stage.

National Gas Transmission The Preferred Route of the OHL appears to interact with NGT's assets in three different separate locations (St Fergus to Cairnorrie/ Stuartfield/ Kinknockie). The affected pipelines have easements of 24.4 m centred on the pipe, and any new pylons must be installed outside the pipeline easement. Any crossings over the pipeline must be as close to perpendicular as reasonably practicable to reduce the chance of low frequency induction.	Noted. National Gas Transmission will continue to be consulted as the project progresses.
RSPB The route is within 20 km of SPAs designated for wintering geese. Therefore, preferred goose foraging habitats should be avoided where possible, with deflectors recommended where it is necessary to encroach on favoured habitat. There are records of a few sensitive species in the area, but the east end of Routes 11C2 and 11C4 are least preferred from an ornithology perspective. Moss of Kinmundy has recently undergone peatland restoration and has since attracted summering Common Cranes, which are at risk of fatality from power line collision. It is possible that breeding could take place at this site once the habitat develops. Birds using this site are also known to commute to a nearby site which is close to but out with the route options presented. The presence of an old nest suggests there was also a failed breeding attempt there in 2022. Details of this site have been provided to SSEN Transmission.	Noted. The Preferred Route avoids the east end of Routes 11C2 and 11C4. Feedback regarding Common Crane has been noted and will be considered in further detail as the project progresses.
Ythan District Salmon Fishery Board Prior to construction, consultation with the board must take place about construction method and site protection so as to ensure no silt or building materials run off occurs from site to the adjoining water courses which form part of The Littlewater Burn which is an important tributary for spawning salmonids in the than catchment.	We will continue to consult with Ythan District Salmon Fishery Board as the project progresses into the alignment and Environmental Impact Assessment stages.

Appendix B – Public Consultation Event postcard invite