



# Summary Report on Consultation

## Spittal to Beauly

November 2023

# Foreword

As well as keeping the lights on for the communities our network region serves, it is also our role to connect and transport large quantities of renewable electricity to where it's needed.

The north of Scotland's abundance of renewable resources means we have a vital part to play in helping deliver energy independence, securing future electricity supplies with homegrown low carbon energy, reducing our dependence on imported power from often volatile global markets.

As well as delivering a more secure and affordable energy system for homes and businesses across the country, our electricity network will play a leading role in harnessing Scotland's clean energy potential and delivering Scotland's and the UK's climate change targets.

To help achieve our energy independence and net zero ambitions, we are taking forward over £20bn of investment in new electricity transmission infrastructure this decade. These investments, which consist of new overhead lines, substations and HVDC subsea links and converter stations, form part of a major upgrade of the electricity transmission system across Great

Britain that is required to meet interim 2030 Government targets. This includes a new 400 kilovolt (kV) overhead line connecting Spittal to Beaulay via new substations located near Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beaulay.

Earlier this year, we embarked on the first phase of public consultation across our Pathway to 2030 programme of investments and I would like to personally thank every individual and organisation who took the time to respond and engage with us. We have carefully considered all responses which has helped inform our decisions on potential overhead line routes and substation locations.

We acknowledge that the impacts of new infrastructure on some communities are unavoidable and are committed to minimise and mitigate local and environmental impacts wherever possible, looking to avoid population centres, historical landmarks and Scotland's most precious environmental designations and landscapes.

As we build the infrastructure needed to transport our clean, homegrown energy, we are set to deliver one of the biggest investment programmes the north of Scotland has ever seen. We will ensure the benefits of this major investment programme are shared with our host communities by supporting local businesses, employment and delivering a lasting legacy for current and future generations.

We now look forward to continued engagement with our stakeholders on our Pathway to 2030 programme of investments as we start to refine our plans ahead of our next round of public consultation in early 2024.

**Rob McDonald**  
MD, SSEN Transmission



# Introduction

In early 2023, we carried out early consultation on the proposed Spittal to Beaulieu 400kV overhead line and associated substations, presenting proposals which were based on initial detailed site and route selection appraisals and included extensive environmental and technical analysis.

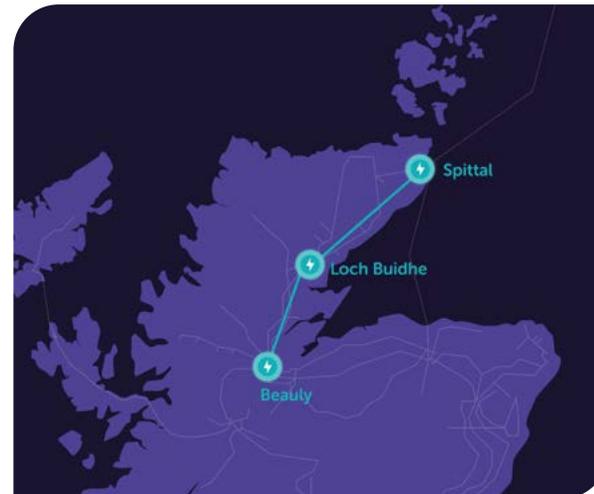
We hosted public consultation events as well as meetings with a wide range of stakeholders and welcomed feedback via a range of methods including online feedback forms, emails and letters. We have now collated this feedback, our responses and the decisions that we have made into specific Reports on Consultation which are available on each project specific webpage:

- [Spittal Area 400kV Substation](#)
- [Loch Buidhe Area Substation](#)
- [Beaulieu Area 400kV Substation](#)
- [Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beaulieu 400kV Overhead Line](#)

This Report on Consultation Summary provides a summary of the individual Reports on Consultation relating to the proposed overhead line and associated substations near Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beaulieu. It highlights the feedback we received in response to our consultations, and how this has influenced our actions and

decision-making.

Across all of our Pathway to 2030 project consultations, we received feedback covering a number of common themes: project need, technology choice, environmental impacts, socio-economic impacts and on the consultation process. 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 at the end of this Summary Report on Consultation. In addition, we have also developed a set of responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) that can be viewed [here](#).



## Summary of Public Consultation Engagement



**10** Consultation events



**603** Registered attendees



**1103** Pieces of written feedback

These public engagement events were supplemented by a number of online and in person meetings with a variety of stakeholders including statutory and non-statutory consultees, members of the public, Community Councils and elected members.

### Useful links

- [Pathway to 2030](#) – Projects delivering a Network for Net Zero
- [Why are the Pathway to 2030 Projects needed?](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on our Pathway to 2030 Projects

# Summary of Project Specific Feedback and Our Decisions

# Spittal Area Substation

## What we proposed at consultation

The location of a new 400kV Substation and HVDC Converter station to the north of the existing Spittal substation, at Site Option 12.

## Feedback received



Concerns with the proximity of Site Option 12 to residential properties were raised by the local community.

The presence of peatland and a number of small watercourses on Site Option 12 were raised as concerns by SEPA, who asked that we carefully consider surface water flooding as the project develops.

Historic Environment Scotland advised that the Preferred Site Option 12 is unlikely to raise issues of national interest, but did mention that Site Option 11 would have significant impact on cultural heritage, due to the setting of St Magnus' Church, burial ground and hospital.

## Response to feedback



We acknowledge the feedback provided in relation to Site Option 12, including the presence of peat, the hydrology of site and proximity to residential properties. This will be considered in further detail as we develop the plans for the site and appropriate mitigations, such as landscape bunding to mitigate visual impacts of the site, will be incorporated to minimise impacts.

## Explanation of decision

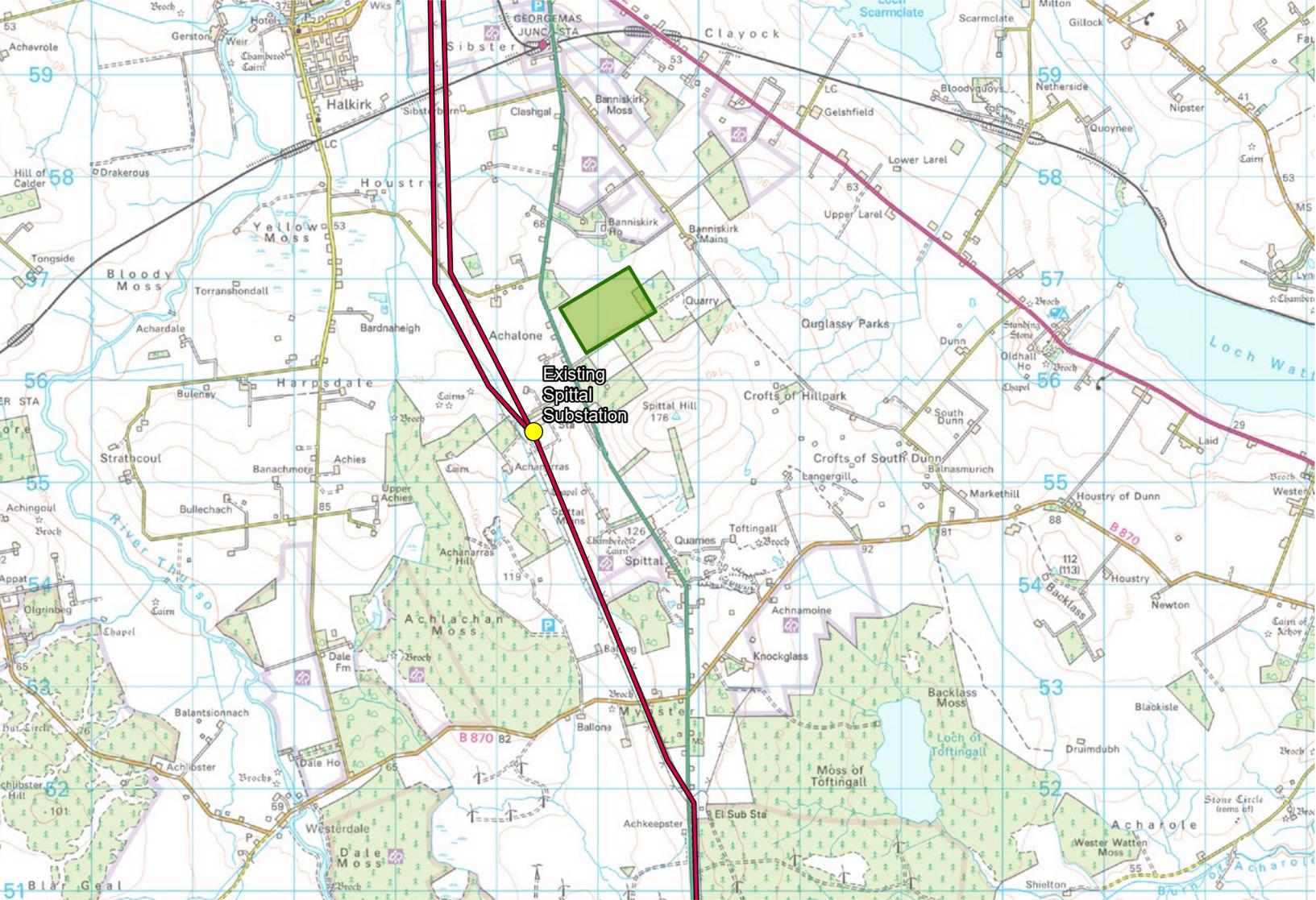


Following a review of the feedback received during the consultation, as well as a review of our site selection assessments, our decision is to progress with Site Option 12 as our Proposed Site Option for the new 400kV substation.

The volume of feedback we received was low and the site specific issues raised did not have a material impact on the overall assessment of the site. As such, the results from the site assessment presented at consultation still present Site Option 12 as the best option on balance across all factors including environmental and technical considerations.

We acknowledge that SEPA had some concerns in relation to Site Option 12 and we will continue to engage with them to address their concerns. We are confident that we can ensure satisfactory mitigations are implemented.

# Proposed Spittal Area Substation

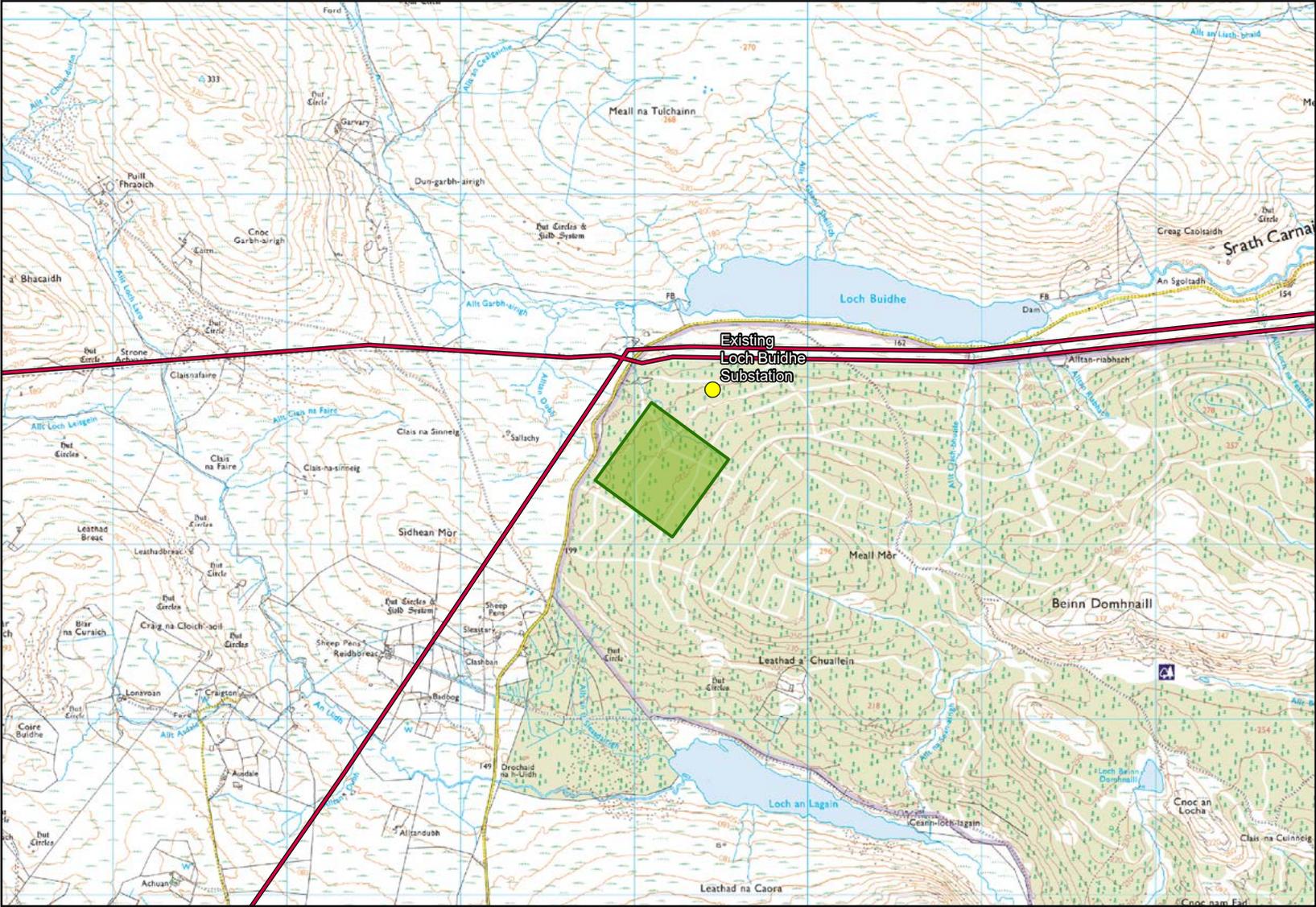


- Spittal Proposed Substation Site
- Existing Infrastructure:
  - Existing Spittal Substation
  - Existing OHL

# Loch Buidhe Area Substation

What we proposed at consultation	Feedback received 	Response to feedback 	Explanation of decision 
<p>The location of a new 400kV substation beside the existing Loch Buidhe Substation, known as Site Option 3.</p>	<p>Communities and landowners suggested that locating the substation near the A836 could cause less disruption for local residents.</p> <p>SEPA agreed that the preferred option for the location of the substation is Site Option 3 but did note that peatland does lie immediately adjacent to the site.</p> <p>Historic Environment Scotland indicated that Site Option 3 is unlikely to raise issues of national interest.</p>	<p>Sites were considered close to the A386 however, this option was likely to compromise scheduled monuments and habitats with high potential for ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems.</p> <p>We will undertake peat surveys of at the proposed site and will consult with SEPA on an appropriate method for peat probing. Minimising impact on peatland will be a central consideration during the detailed design of the substation.</p>	<p>Following a review of the feedback received during the consultation, as well as a review of our site selection assessments, our decision is to progress with Site Option 3 as our Proposed Site Option for the new 400kV substation.</p> <p>Selection of this Site Option 3 aligns with stakeholder feedback received during the consultation as well as our site selection assessments.</p> <p>In developing the proposals for the site, further work will be undertaken to consider how best to avoid and minimise impacts to identified concerns such as traffic management and impacts on local residents.</p>

# Proposed Substation Near Loch Buidhe

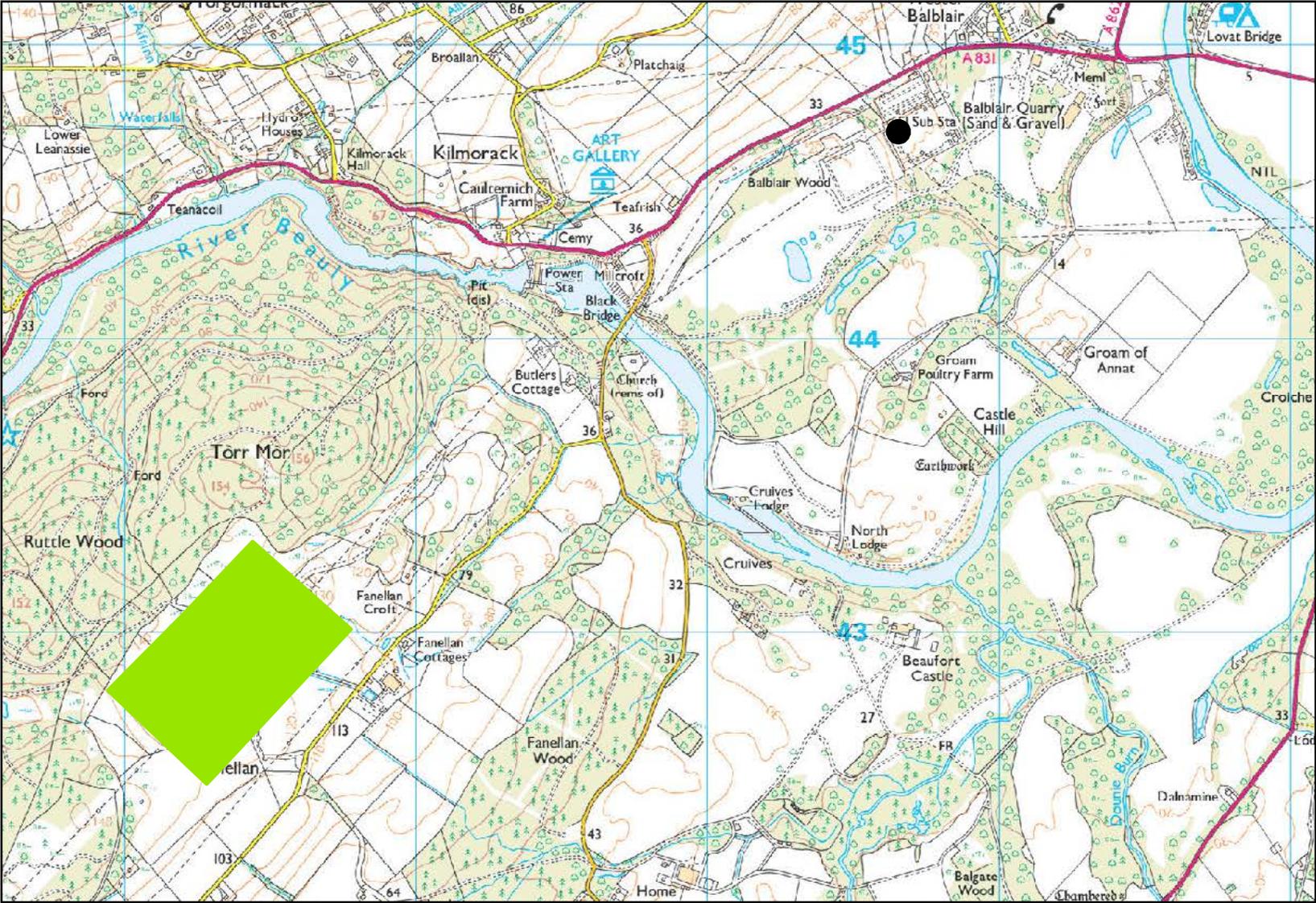


- Loch Buidhe Proposed Substation Site
- Existing Infrastructure:
- Existing Loch Buidhe Substation
- Existing OHL

# Beauly Area Substation

What we proposed at consultation	Feedback received 	Response to feedback 	Explanation of decision 
<p>We proposed to co-locate a new 400kV substation and HVDC converter station on a site near Fanellan, southwest of Beauly (known as Site Option 7).</p>	<p>Both The Highland Council and local community members were concerned about the visual and community impact that Site Option 7 may have and asked for suitable mitigation, such as using building materials that blend into the environment and vegetation screening to be considered. They also requested for additional sites (including the nearby quarry) to be assessed for suitability.</p> <p>Statutory consultees SEPA, NatureScot and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) were broadly supportive of our proposed site. SEPA highlighted that Site Option 4 had a potential fluvial flood risk.</p> <p>The Highland Council requested that Site Options 11 and 11A be avoided due to the significant impact this would have on current and future housing developments in the area.</p> <p>Beauly Fishery Board stated that the least preferable Site Options were 4 and 11A due to proximity to angling activities and restored wetlands.</p> <p>The community raised concerns for wildlife, access and recreation in relation to the nearby Ruttle Wood during both construction and operation.</p>	<p>In response to the feedback received, 6 additional Site Options were identified and assessed. These sites did not score more favourably than Site Option 7, mainly due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their distance from the existing Beauly to Denny Overhead Line (requiring additional overhead lines compared with Site Option 7).</li> <li>• Close proximity to residential properties and risk of adding to the current noise levels at the existing Beauly substation.</li> <li>• Engineering challenges due to either remoteness of the site or as a result of positioning on land impacted by quarry works</li> <li>• Proximity to cultural heritage</li> </ul> <p>As part of the ongoing development of this project we will undertake detailed environmental assessments and design which will propose mitigation for identified concerns such as nuisance, wildlife, habitats and visual impact.</p>	<p>Following consultation, we believe Site Option 7 is the best site, on balance, when we consider stakeholder feedback and minimising the cumulative visual impact of our proposals in the Beauly area. We will therefore progress with Site Option 7 as our proposed site for the co-location of the 400kV substation and HVDC converter station.</p> <p>Our decision to not change our preferred Site Option to one of the original shortlisted Options (4, 11 and 11A), or to one of the additional 6 sites considered, was supported by feedback received from statutory consultees and the Beauly Fishery Board. We did not receive material feedback specifically in relation to Site Option 9.</p>

# Proposed Beauly Area Substation

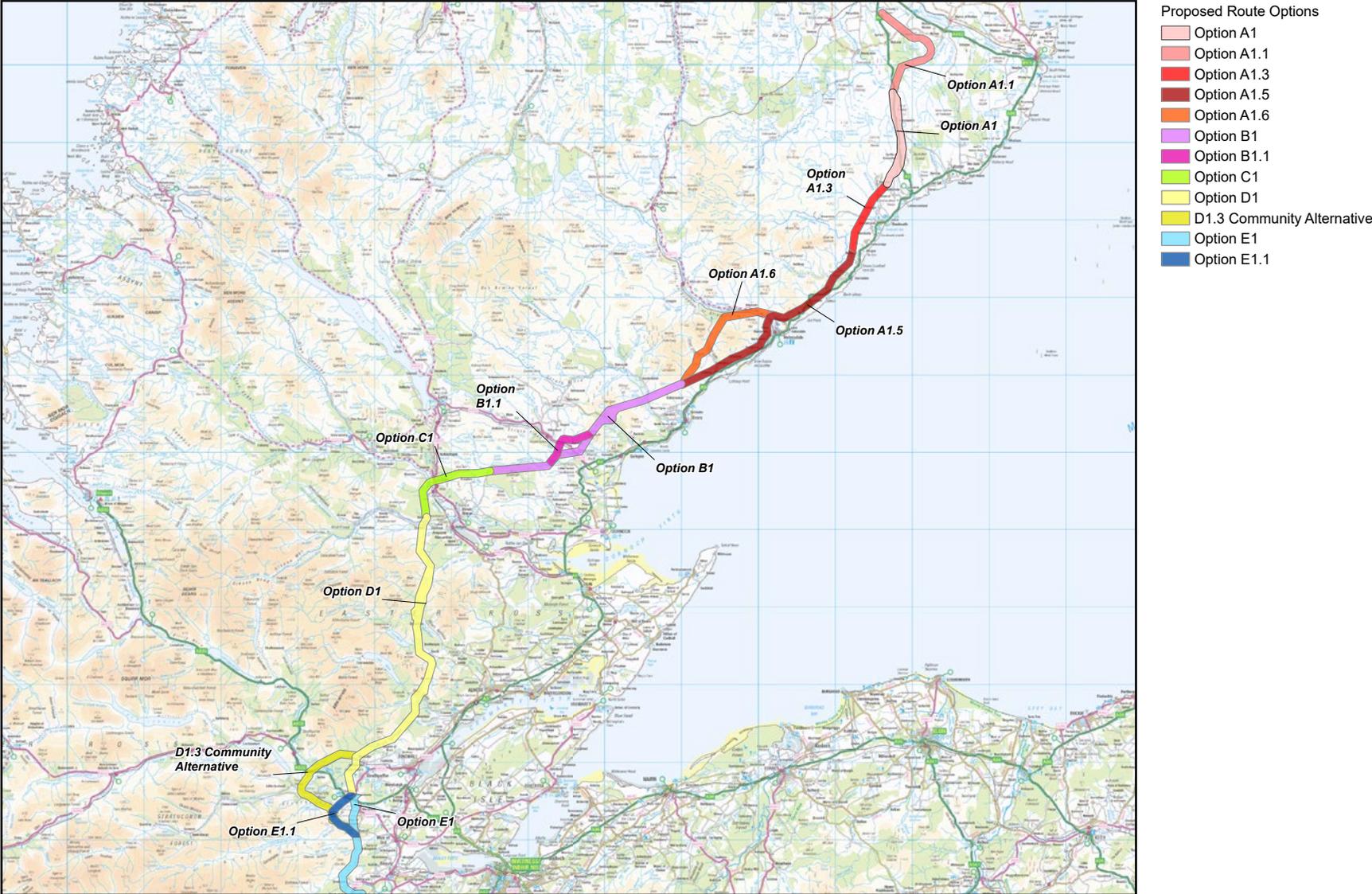


- Legend**
- Beauly Substation
  - Preferred Site

# Spittal - Loch Buidhe - Beaully Overhead Line

What we proposed at consultation	Feedback received 	Response to feedback 	Explanation of decision 
<p>A new 400kV overhead line, approximately 170km in length connecting Beaully to Spittal via Loch Buidhe. Due to the length of the line, the project has been divided into the following section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A - Spittal to Brora</li> <li>• B - Brora to Golspie</li> <li>• C - West of Dornoch</li> <li>• D - Dornoch to Dingwall</li> <li>• E - Dingwall to Beaully</li> </ul>	<p>Local community feedback from the consultation focused on concerns regarding wildlife, proximity to residential properties, peatland (including the proposed Flow Country World Heritage Site), cultural heritage, visual amenity, tourism and local business.</p> <p>Historic Environment Scotland advised that careful alignment will be required within Sections A and B to avoid issues of national interest.</p> <p>Specific concerns were also raised between Ardgay and Strathpeffer (Section D) and an alternative route was developed in consultation with the local community that moves the proposed overhead line to the west of Strathpeffer.</p> <p>Within Section B, between Brora and Loch Buidhe, The Highland Council noted concerns due to the potential impacts on the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth Special Landscape Area and commented that the merits of the community alternative route proposed in Section D should also be given due consideration.</p>	<p>Feedback received during the consultation has been reviewed and a number of changes to routes have been made as a result.</p> <p>Feedback from Historic Environment Scotland on their preferred route regarding Section B has been considered and careful design alignment will be developed to mitigate potential visual and landscape impacts.</p>	<p>In response to feedback from the local community across a number of Sections of the proposed overhead line route, we are taking forward alternative route options in Sections A, B, D and E alongside the initial potential routes that were consulted on. This includes a route within Section D which was developed in consultation with the local community to the west of Strathpeffer.</p> <p>Whilst we have not made amendments to Section C between Loch Buidhe and Ardgay, in recognition of concerns about the potential impact of this route on the village of Culrain and Carbisdale Castle, we will seek to minimise and mitigate impacts as we develop our route alignment.</p> <p>Proposed routes take into account the key issues raised during the consultation and will incorporate mitigation measures in order to avoid or minimise impact on the ecological, cultural heritage, landscape and visual impacts highlighted in the feedback.</p> <p>The Route Options that have been selected to proceed to the next round of consultation are further detailed within the full Spittal - <a href="#">Loch Buidhe - Beaully 400kV Overhead Line Report on Consultation</a>.</p>

# Proposed Overhead Line from Spittal to Beaulieu



# Next Steps

Engagement with communities and other stakeholders is essential in planning the delivery of this critical national infrastructure. We will now work with stakeholders to refine the plans for these projects ahead of our next round of consultation in early 2024. This engagement will be undertaken through in person and virtual meetings as well as an online webinar.

The webinar is open for all to join and will be held on **Wednesday 13 December between 2pm-3.15pm**, where SSEN Transmission colleagues will describe some of the primary changes to Pathway to 2030 projects that are being proposed following consultation. This webinar will be recorded and made available on our website.

We will be consulting further with local communities and stakeholders early in the new year, where we will seek feedback on specific alignments within the route corridor and all associated proposed substations. Further to this, there will be another opportunity for communities and stakeholders to engage with us on the projects as we host our final round of public events before the end of 2024.



# Common Themes

## 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 that these projects will transport will play a key role in meeting UK and Scottish Government renewable energy and climate change targets. It 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](#).



# Common Themes

## Technology Choice

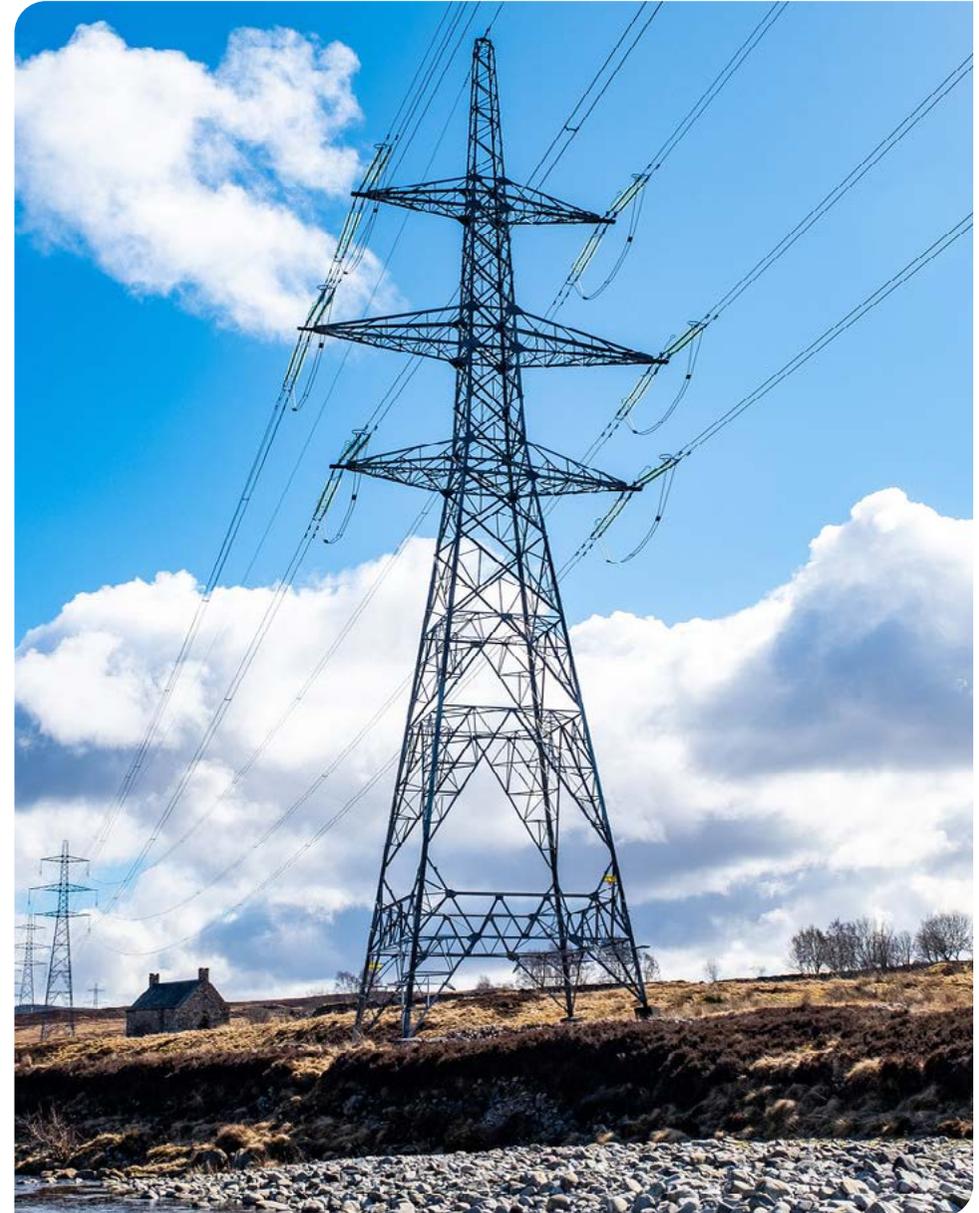
Several respondents have questioned the technology choice, particularly why the infrastructure cannot all be installed subsea or underground, instead of overhead line steel lattice towers.

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 that 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 that we are allowed to recover for these projects.



# Common Themes

## Environmental impacts

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

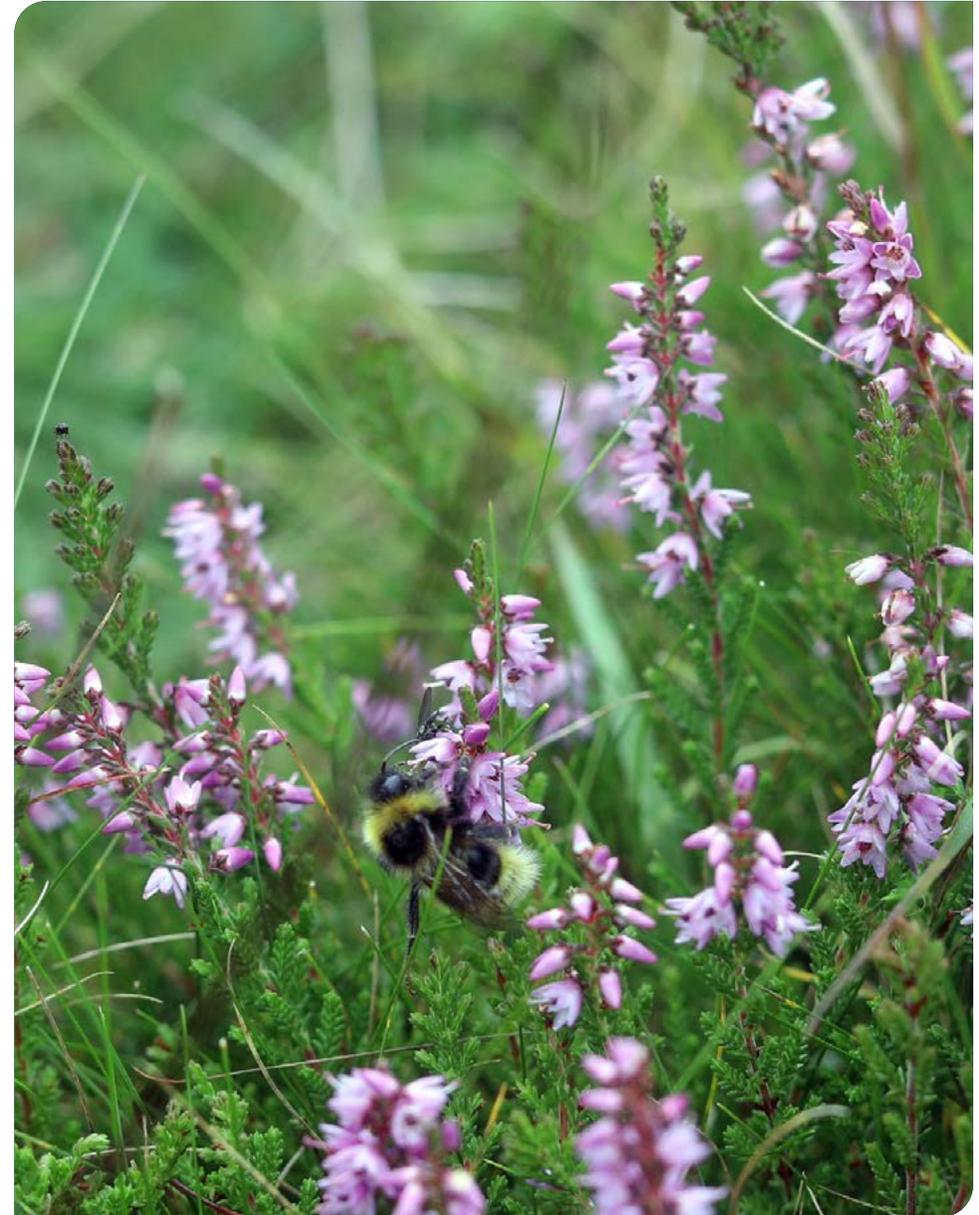
As one of the greatest risks to our natural environment and biodiversity is climate change, these projects are part of the solution if we are to tackle the climate emergency and deliver net zero emissions in Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

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

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 that 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.

You can find out more about how we are delivering a positive environmental legacy by [clicking here](#).



# Common Themes

## 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 are committed to do all that we can to minimise and mitigate the visual impact on local communities as part of the ongoing development of the 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 that host communities will play in delivering the infrastructure required to meet 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.



# Common Themes

## 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 recognise that there is always room for improvement and as we look forward to the next round of public consultations, we are committed to applying 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.

