Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Overhead Line

Report on Consultation

November 2023

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of this document

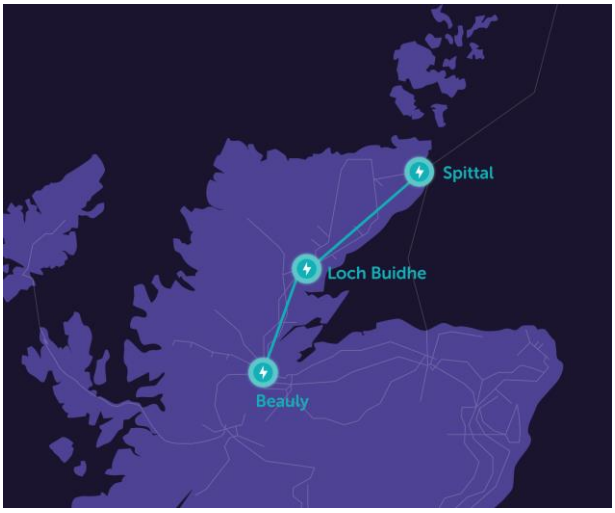
The purpose of this Report on Consultation (RoC) is to document the consultation responses received as part of our Overhead Line (OHL) route option consultation process, and where appropriate, show how the option taken forward to the next stage has been informed by this process.

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. The document confirms which route options are being progressed to the next stage of development – Alignment Development and provides information on the next steps we are implementing, leading to the next public consultation events.

1.2 Project Overview

Based on the requirements outlined in the ESO's Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design[1], we have developed proposals to reinforce the onshore corridor between Spittal and Beauly, via Loch Buidhe. To facilitate this connection, and others as part of the wider strategy, new additional 400kV substations and associated infrastructure is also required in these three locations.

We are proposing a new Spittal – Loch Buidhe - Beauly 400kV Overhead Line Connection[2], spanning a significant length of the north of Scotland, which will involve the construction of a new 400kV overhead line, between the new proposed substations at Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beauly.



New SSEN Transmission projects between Spittal and Beauly

The new Spittal – Loch Buidhe - Beauly 400kV Overhead Line Connection project requires:

• Construction of approximately 85 km of a new 400kV double circuit steel lattice OHL between the proposed new Spittal and Loch Buidhe 400kV substations.

• Construction of approximately 82km of a new 400kV double circuit steel lattice OHL between the proposed new Loch Buidhe and Beauly 400kV substations.

• Construction of temporary and permanent access tracks along the length of the OHL route.

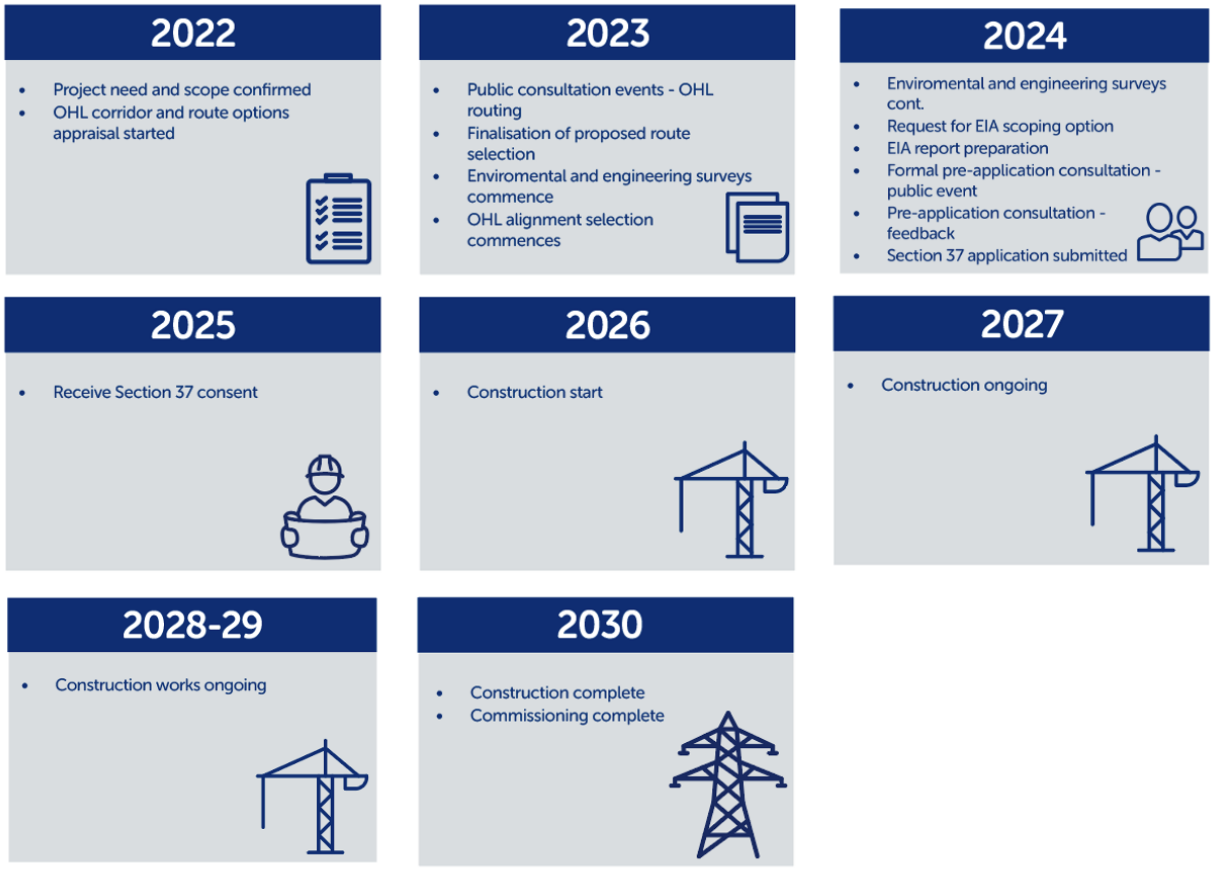
• Rationalisation of existing high voltage and low voltage infrastructure at points of crossing along the new OHL routes, and around new and existing substation sites.

[1] https://www.nationalgrideso.com/future-energy/pathway-2030-holistic-network-design/holistic-network-design-offshore-wind
[2] https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/spittal--loch-buidhe--beauly-400kv-connection/

Please refer to the following webpages for summary and project specific Reports on Consultations for the proposed new Beauly Area, Loch Buidhe, and Spittal 400kV substations:

- Beauly Area 400kV Substation
- Loch Buidhe 400kV Substation
- Spittal 400kV Substation

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

We understand the importance of involving communities and key stakeholders throughout each stage of our development process. Our project optioneering process needs to balance technical, cost and environmental considerations in order to select an option that is economically viable, technically feasible, and which minimises impacts on the environment and local communities. To best inform this complex balance of competing considerations, we consider stakeholder feedback to be of critical importance.

Based on the requirements outlined in the ESO's Pathway to 2030 Holistic Network Design, we developed proposals to reinforce the onshore electricity transmission network between Spittal and Beauly, via Loch Buidhe, through constructing a new 400kV Overhead Line. To facilitate this OHL connection, and others as part of the wider strategy, new additional 400kV substations and associated infrastructure is also required in these three locations.

Owing to the intrinsic connection between the proposals for delivery of new infrastructure at and between Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beauly, we chose to consult on all elements of the proposed development at the same time; we considered this to be the most appropriate way in which to provide a holistic view of the proposals to the communities that would be likely to host the infrastructure, and to enable comprehensive discussion and feedback on all connected elements.

During this consultation, we presented options regarding our route options for the proposed Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV overhead line connection. The consultation included information regarding technology options, environmental and technical considerations, the project development process and route options including an indication of our preferred option, which attempts to provide the best balance of environmental and technical considerations from our internal assessments.

The output of our internal Route Selection appraisal[3] prior to the February 2023 Public Consultation identified route options:

Section A – Spittal to Brora

Section B – Brora to Golspie

Section C – West of Dornoch

Section D – Dornoch to Dingwall

Section E – Dingwall to Beauly

[3] consultation-booklet-spittal---loch-buidhe---beauly-400kv.pdf (ssen-transmission.co.uk)

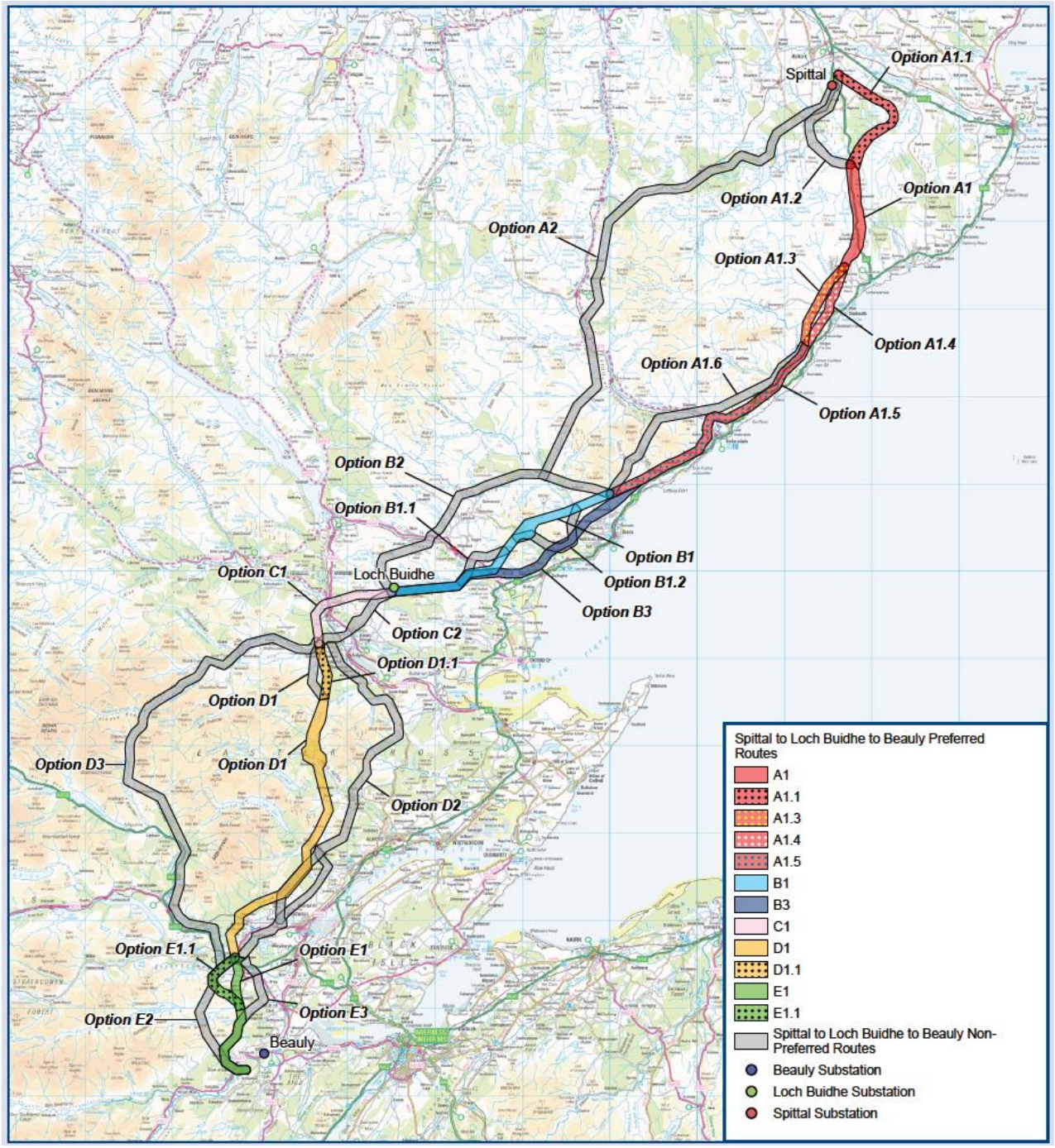


Figure 1 – Route Options Presented at Consultation

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; and
- landowners and occupiers

2.2 Consultation feedback period

The public consultation period was open from 20 February until 14 April 2023. This was originally due to conclude on 31 March, however it was extended in response to stakeholder requests.

Where possible, affected landowners were contacted ahead of the consultation period opening to the public to discuss land related considerations or concerns.

Statutory Consultees were invited to provide feedback on our Consultation Document from the start of the feedback period and during the summer months; the feedback period for statutory consultees culminated in a formal Pre-Application meeting chaired by The Highland Council on 13 September 2023, after which time formal written feedback was received from the statutory bodies.

2.3 The advertising process

The consultation events were advertised extensively using the following methods:

- The consultation events were advertised in the following local and regional newspapers:
    - Press and Journal on 9 and 15 February
    - Caithness Courier on 8 and 15 February
    - Northern Times, Ross-Shire Journal and Inverness Courier on 10, 17 and 24 February
- Our social media channels and dedicated project webpage.
- Community Councillors and Local Elected Members were emailed in advance with information they could share within their local area.
- A postcard sent to 28,309 homes and 1,133 businesses within communities potentially impacted by our proposals. Please see Appendix A Postcard invite.
- An email was sent to those signed up for project updates from the project website.

2.4 Stakeholder participation

A series of public consultation events were held between 20 February and 6 March 2023, where local stakeholders could meet with the project team to discuss the proposals in more detail. At these events exhibition boards presenting key information found in the project consultation booklet were provided, as well as copies of the booklet. A 3D modelling tool was used to present outline design information along with the optioneering software that had aided the development of route options assessed.

Date	Event	Recorded attendance
20 February	Halkirk, Ross Institute	18
21 February	Spittal, Village Hall (Coffee Morning)	9
21 February	Helmsdale, Bunilidh Social Club	35
22 February	Dunbeath, Dunbeath Hall	36
23rFebruary	Golspie, Fountain Road Hall	34
27 February	Bonar Bridge, Community Hall	39
28 February	Ardross, Ardross Community Hall	35
1 March	Dingwall, Legion Hall	160
2 March	Beauly, Kilmorack Hall	214
6 March	Virtual Event	23

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. A Consultation Summary Report[4] was published in July 2023 which contains a further breakdown of stakeholder participation.

[4] https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/projects/spittal---loch-buidhe---beauly-400kv-connection-downloads/consultation-report---spittal---loch-buidhe---beauly---july-23.pdf

Virtual events

A virtual exhibition room[5] was accessible via the project webpage, and a virtual event was held on 6 March 2023.

The virtual exhibition room contained the same information presented at the in-person events and a question-and-answer chat function was implemented during the hours of the event.

The event was attended by 23 people with 78 questions being asked. Most questions received were in relation to the overhead line.

Stakeholder meetings

In the weeks before, during and after the consultation events, various meetings were held with other key stakeholders such as landowners, 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
15 February	Pre-consultation presentation meeting with Highland Council Ward Councillors (Microsoft Teams meeting)	Highland Councillors invited from wards potentially impacted by our proposals
7 & 10 March	Virtual Consultation event with Statutory Consultees (Microsoft Team meeting)	The Highland Council (THC); NatureScot (NS); Historic Environment Scotland(HES); apologies from Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
21 March	Meeting with cultural heritage groups to discuss potential impacts on cultural heritage, as a result of the proposed development	ARCH, NOSAS and other cultural heritage groups located across Caithness and Sutherland
2 May	In-person meeting in Inverness regarding our proposals around the Strathpeffer, Contin and Marybank areas	Strathpeffer Community Council; Contin Community Council; Marybank, Scatwell and Strathconon Community Council; Strathpeffer/Contin Better Cable Route group

[5] https://www.3dwtech.co.uk/dashboard/ssen/spittal-to-beauly/exhibition-en/https://www.3dwtech.co.uk/dashboard/ssen/spittal-to-beauly/exhibition-en/

18 May	Public meeting in Strathpeffer (Spa Pavilion)	Open meeting for members of the public, at the request of Strathpeffer Community Council, alongside Contin Community Council; Marybank, Scatwell and Strathconon Community Council and Strathpeffer/Contin Better Cable Route Group. Ian Blackford MP and Maree Todd MSP were also in attendance
28 May	Public meeting in Brora (Brora Primary School)	Open meeting for members of the public, at the request of Brora Community Council; Golspie Community Council; Helmsdale Community Council and Rogart Community Council
29 May	Virtual meeting with Timespan to discuss archaeology and cultural heritage impacts around the Helmsdale area, as a result of our proposals	Representation from Timespan; Helmsdale Development Trust; Garbh Allt Community Initiative; and Rogart Heritage Trust
12 June	Ardross area visit	Met with a representative from Ardross Community Council and community members regarding the route option around Strathrusdale
12 June	Public meeting in Ardgay (Ardgay Public Hall)	Open meeting for members of the public at the request of Ardgay and District Community Council and Creich Community Council
13 September	Formal Pre-Application meeting with The Highland Council and Statutory Consultees to discuss the proposed development	The Highland Council (THC); NatureScot (NS); Historic Environment Scotland(HES); apologies from Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)

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:

We contacted key statutory agencies, including The Highland Council (THC), NatureScot (NS), Historic Environment Scotland (HES) and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and requested them to provide feedback on the proposals. Four responses were received, one from each of the statutory agencies listed, with a summary of each provided in the project wide and section specific feedback part of this report.

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. All their comments have been taken on board 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 Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 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 infrastructure

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 adopts 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 14 April.
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	The consultation events in February and March 2023 presented the route options that have been identified for the overhead line, 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.
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. As the project alignment is 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 Martin Godwin.
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'd 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.
Why can the line 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. For further information refer to Common Themes.

Other projects have been undergrounded in the local area and in other countries. Why can't this one?	Community members and local organisations	We have a statutory obligation under the Electricity Act 1989 to develop and maintain an efficient, coordinated and economical system of electricity transmission, and to facilitate competition in the supply and generation of that electricity. In addition to this we also have to consider the preservation of amenity when designing any new infrastructure in relation to the transmission network. We are therefore required to carefully consider the use of both OHLs and underground cables when looking at developing any new transmission circuits accounting for the benefits and disadvantages of each option. For further information refer to Common Themes and FAQ.
How big are the towers going to be?	Community members and local organisations	The height of the towers used for the new 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 less than this. The span lengths between towers would vary depending on topography and altitude but would be approximately 350 m apart. As the project progresses, further work will be done to identify specific requirements in terms of tower heights and spans but due to no alignment being identified at this point only an estimate can be provided.
Have alternative tower designs such as 'T' pylons been considered?	Community members and local organisations	Please refer to our FAQs for further information on T Pylons.
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. The cost scoring in our Route Selection Guidance reflects this uncertainty. 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.
How have you identified and assessed the RAG categories for each option and how is the scoring weighted against Engineering and Environmental consideration?	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. Further description of our process can be found within the FAQs.
How will SSEN 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.
Concerns were raised regarding potential health risks of a 400kV overhead line passing in close proximity to houses.	Community members and local organisations	The UK Government sets guidelines for exposure to electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) in the UK on advice from Public Health England (PHE). In March 2004 the UK adopted the 1998 guidelines published by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). These guidelines are designed to set conservative exposure levels for the general public to electric and magnetic fields, and they are endorsed by the UK's Health Protection Agency, the World Health Organisation and the UK Government. We abide by these rules.
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 noise impacts on nearby sensitive receptors.

		For further information please refer to our FAQ.
Concerns about proximity of the new overhead line to properties, and the potential for the overhead lines 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 Landowners and Occupiers	We use up-to-date OS Address base data to identify existing property locations. In addition, we also monitor planning applications to ensure we are aware of consented and proposed developments. By identifying current and proposed dwelling we aim to maintain as much separation as possible with the proposed OHL. Property locations and planning applications will continue to be monitored and reviewed as we develop alignment options.
Why could we not upgrade the existing infrastructure instead of constructing a new OHL.	Community members and local organisations	Whether an existing circuit can be uprated to 400kV is dependent on a number of factors, primarily the size of the existing towers and therefore the safety clearances required for the voltage they need to operate at. For 400kV operation, the clearances are larger than for 275kV/132kV. In addition, the towers must be strong enough to manage the additional weights and loads of the heavier and larger 400kV conductors. Only specific towers can take these increased loads and clearances required for 400kV operation and still require strengthening both to the steelwork and the foundations. Many older tower designs are not capable of taking the increased loads and/or are not tall and large to achieve the minimum required safety clearances. When upgrading existing infrastructure, we look to maximise the potential capacity of the line as much as possible without having to rebuild the line. Therefore, we construct additional infrastructure when there is no spare capacity available on existing network.

Detrimental effect on radio signals, mobile telephone signals, satellite communications.	Community members and local organisations	We are considering the proximity to communication masts and paths and will further engage with telecom companies as we develop proposals further.

Environmental Considerations

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
What is SSEN 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. For further information please refer to Common Themes and FAQ. 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 assessment 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 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. 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 BNG can be viewed on our website https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/globalassets/documents/a-network-for-net-zero/supporting-evidence/our-approach-to-implementing-biodiversity-net-gain-.pdf We are currently reviewing the changes between Natural England's Biodiversity Metric 3.1 and 4.0 (published in spring 2023) to update our toolkit and its supporting guidance appropriately. The project is still undergoing design to allow calculations to be finalised, 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.
Concerns were raised about damage to peatland and forestry habitats and the risk of loss of biodiversity, including newly created woodland plantation schemes	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. During the assessment of the route options, we used peat classification maps. Peat depth surveys will take place in 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 response above for detail on biodiversity.
If the new overhead line could follow or replace existing overhead lines in the local area, this would reduce visual impacts of the new overhead line.	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. However, quite often the ability for new OHL's to be constructed in parallel existing OHL's is compromised by hard constraints presented by adjacent existing infrastructure; for example, housing or commercial developments that have been constructed after the existing OHL was put in place, or similarly, areas afforded environmental protection after the existing infrastructure has been built. 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.
Many properties in this area have private water supplies - will these be safeguarded.	Landowners and occupiers	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.
Why have you not carried out a Strategic Environmental Assessment of this project	Community members and local organisations	The consultation relates to a specific proposed development, rather than a 'plan' or 'programme' for the purposes of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 (the legislation that sets out when Strategic Environmental Assessments should be carried out). The development is, however, going to be treated as 'EIA development', meaning that a detailed Environmental Impact Assessment will be undertaken to inform the proposed development. A report of that assessment (an 'EIA Report') will be submitted alongside the application to Scottish Ministers for Section 37 consent.
NatureScot Where it is not possible to avoid designated sites, NatureScot has 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 Consultee	Once alignment options have been developed, further detail can be provided on which designated sites will potentially be impacted as part of the alignment consultation process.
Historic Environment Scotland (HES) HES indicated that further detailed design information would be required to assess the potential impacts on cultural heritage assets and the historic environment and highlighted some historic assets along each route option that were not specifically raised in our consultation material and must be taken into account in our assessment of options.	Statutory Consultee	The consultation material is a summary of our more detailed route assessment. Where historic assets have not been specifically referenced in our consultation material these have been mapped as part of our initial options assessments and have been taken into account in our provisional analysis of potential impacts on cultural heritage. The dataset used for the route assessment was obtained from HES.

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 Consultee	Noted. A Bird Survey Scoping Report was issued to the statutory nature conservation body, NatureScot, in early 2023 seeking opinion on the proposed methodology for bird surveys required to inform the EIA that will be prepared for the project. NatureScot agreed with the proposed approach that would include season-appropriate surveys for a number of types of species (including breeding and wintering seasons) in addition to Vantage Point surveys to monitor and record flight activity. 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.
We object to the proposed new overhead power lines on the following grounds; detriment to tourism in the area, the proximity to housing of the proposed power lines and their effect on health and a need for protection of the unspoilt archaeology.	Non-statutory Consultee	The potential for direct and setting impacts on historic monuments will be fully assessed and the results presented in the EIA Report We recognise the importance of tourism to the area. A socio-economic assessment will be undertaken and will be presented as part of the EIA Report.

		Consultation with local archaeological groups will be maintained as the project progresses through the alignment and EIA stages. For responses to the other points raised including health, please refer to the FAQs.
NOSAS provided a range of advice on archaeological investigation and information relating to assets.	Non-statutory Consultee	We welcome this advice and information which will be used to inform the alignment design stage of the project. Consultation with local archaeological groups will be maintained as the project progresses through the alignment and EIA stages.
The Trust objects to the Project on account of the likely direct loss of irreplaceable ancient woodland and important native LEPO habitat. Any development resulting in loss or deterioration of ancient/LEPO woodland must consider all possible measures to ensure avoidance of adverse impact.	Non-statutory Consultee	Where possible, forestry habitats will be avoided. However, due to the scale of the proposed development, this will not always be possible. Potential effects on 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 on forestry at the alignment stage.

Economic Considerations

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
A suggestion was made that properties directly affected by the project should receive a discount to their electricity bills.	Community members and local organisations	The UK Government has committed to set out guidance for Community Benefit for transmission infrastructure, which we expect will set out the parameters under which it will apply and the scope of what that funding can be used for. We will provide further updates on Community Benefit funding for transmission infrastructure once this guidance is available.
Is the remuneration and compensation for landowners going to be reviewed as the amounts seem outdated.	Community members and local organisations	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	We understand our projects may impact land and property. Compensation for any impact is determined by law, specifically the Electricity Act 1989 and the Land and Compensation Act 1973. Each compensation case will be reviewed individually based on these laws. We aim to limit the impacts and welcome feedback to help in this effort.
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 overhead line 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 may look to utilise our statutory powers under the Electricity Act 1989 in the form of Necessary Wayleaves and Compulsory Purchase Orders.
How will we address potential impact on local tourism?	Community members and local organisations	As part of the current process of identifying potential routes, we consider the potential impacts that the proposals may have on communities, including businesses potentially impacted by our proposed development. We will be undertaking further detailed assessment on the potential for landscape and visual impact as we work towards developing and confirming alignment options. For further information please refer to our Common Themes and FAQ.
How have you considered the impact on crofting communities	Community members and local organisations	The potential for impacts on crofting land will be discussed with occupiers through the design stages of the development. At routeing stage, with a 1km wide route option, it is not possible to assess in detail the physical or economic impact of the proposals on individual crofts.

You have chosen the cheapest route option	Community members and local organisations	We are obliged to develop our network in a coordinated, economic and efficient manner to ensure the GB energy consumer receives value for money, as the cost of investing in the electricity transmission network is ultimately paid for by GB electricity consumers. For further information please refer to our FAQ.
How have you considered the interaction of the proposed route options with renewable energy developments that are planned within the area.	Community members and local organisations	We monitor planning applications to ensure we are aware of consented and proposed developments. Cumulative effects will be considered in detail as part of the EIA report and planning applications will continue to be monitored and reviewed as we develop alignment options.
In parts of England and Scotland, National Grid and others are now taking down pylons and replacing them with underground cabling to remove their negative visual impact.	Community members and local organisations	The GB energy regulator, Ofgem, has created a fund to allow the three GB Transmission Owners to address the visual impact of historical overhead transmission infrastructure in National Parks and National Scenic Areas. This funding cannot be applied for and used to mitigate the visual impact of new or planned infrastructure projects, or for any projects out with qualifying designated landscapes. It is also worth noting that undergrounding sections of 400kV OHL creates many technical, environmental and economical challenges. For further information please refer to our Common Themes and FAQ.

Section Specific Feedback

In order to facilitate focussed feedback from communities, statutory consultees and key stakeholders, the proposed OHL has been divided into five sections as shown in the route maps presented at consultation[6] and listed below:

- **Section A** Spittal to Brora
- **Section B** Brora to Golspie
- **Section C** West of Dornoch
- **Section D** Dornoch to Dingwall
- **Section E** Dingwall to Beauly

These section names were chosen to reflect the connections between the larger settlements along each section of route and were not intended to indicate the start and end points of each section of the route.

Each section contains a series of route options which were assessed in terms of a wide array of constraints, including environmental and technical issues, which are likely to affect the ability to deliver a new overhead line in this area.

This part of the Report sets out the feedback received from the communities, statutory consultees and other key stakeholders on each individual section and the route options proposed therein.

[6] spittal-to-loch-buidhe-to-beauly-preferred-alignment-constraints-maps-sections-abcde.pdf (ssen-transmission.co.uk)

Section A – Spittal to Brora

Constraints between Spittal and Brora include a collection of local settlements, various built and planned onshore wind farms and there are a number of RSPB Reserves and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), as well as the Causeymire – Knockfin Flows Wild Land Area (WLA) and the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest WLA. The terrain in the area is a mix of moderate hills with some steep slopes, and areas with more gradual undulated terrain.

For section A, there were two main routes identified, A1 and A2. There are three pairs of sub options within Option A1; an assessment of each of these pairs was undertaken (A1.1 vs A1.2, A1.3 vs A1.4, A1.5 vs A1.6).

At the time of consultation in early 2023, we presented Option A1 as our preferred option; this was based on our assessment that Option A1 (including a combination of sub-routes within Option A1) was considered to be the environmentally and technically preferred option over Option A2 due to the reduced potential to impact designated sites, peat, habitat and landscape character, including areas designated as wild land and an RSPB reserve. Despite A1's higher ratings in most of the assessments related to crossings and proximity to third party infrastructure, Option A2's terrain is expected to be more challenging with significant areas of unavoidable peatland, making access and construction within this corridor more detrimental, challenging and costly compared to Option A1.

Following the consultation, comments received from the local community in relation to this Route Section focused on, wildlife, peat, the candidate flow country world heritage site, cultural heritage, visual amenity, tourism and private water supplies.

HES advise that there are significant challenges with all route options, although A1.4 and A1.6 are preferred, and careful design of an alignment will be required to avoid issues of national interest.

NatureScot indicates that from a landscape and visual perspective option A1 would be likely to have less impacts than A2, with options A1.1 and A1.4 potentially creating less impact than the other sub-options, A1.2 and A1.3. Routes A1.5 and A1.6 require further work to minimise impact to landscape character and wild land. From a habitat and protected species perspective, option A1 was considered to be less impactful than Option A2, with the latter traversing an area of Wild Land and crossing into a large extent of the Caithness Flows peatlands which are a Candidate World Heritage Site and also designated as a SAC/SPA/SSSI/Ramsar site. All other routes in Section A have potential challenges with regard to habitat and/or protected species and further information will be required as the design of the project progresses in order to assess potential impact on protected species and designated habitats.

As a result of our analysis of the feedback from communities, statutory consultees and other local groups and key agencies, we remain of the opinion that Option A1 is a more preferential route than Option A2 on environment and technical grounds. We acknowledge that there remain challenges to deliver an

overhead line in sections of the options within A1, however the feedback from the consultation has informed our preferred routes as set out below. These routes have been selected on the basis that an alignment will be designed to take account of the key issues raised during the consultation and will incorporate mitigation measures, for example through tower positioning and micro-siting, in order to avoid or minimise impact on the ecological, cultural heritage, landscape and visual receptors and designations highlighted in the feedback. The route option has also been selected with consideration for technical challenges, including terrain and access, throughout this section.

Our proposed route options to be taken forward to alignment stage are:

- **A1**
- **A1.1**
- **A1.3**
- **A1.5**
- **A1.6 (southern section only)**

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken in order to find an acceptable alignment and/or design solution through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Table 3.1: Section A Overhead Line Consultation Responses

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Route A1.2 is a better, less intrusive option, given that the area already contains numerous wind farms.	Community members and local organisations	Both Options A1.1 and A1.2 pass close to existing and proposed windfarms. Route A1.2 passes close to Causeymire wind farm and Route A1.1 passes close to Halsary wind farm and the proposed Toftingall wind farm. A1.1 offers greater potential to achieve the required separation distance between OHL towers and wind turbines. Option A1.1 is considered a more technically viable option from an engineering perspective as A1.2 crosses the existing overhead line between Mybster and Spittal twice. A1.1 is preferable as it avoids the RSPB Forsinard Flows reserve and avoids passing through a designated area of wild land.
Options A1.3 and A1.4 are far too close to parts of the NC500 route. It would be far better to take Route Option A2 which is much more unobtrusive.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise that the NC500 route runs along the A9 in proximity to option A1.4 and is a key tourist transport corridor connecting Caithness to southern Scotland and beyond. The eastern routes through Section A and in closest proximity to the existing infrastructure corridor hosting the A9, are considered a more viable option than the internal

		route option at A2 from environmental, engineering and cost perspectives due to the reduced potential to impact designated sites, peat, habitat and landscape character, including areas designated as wild land and an RSPB reserve. Option A2's terrain is more challenging than the route options along A1 with a significant expanse of unavoidable peatland resulting in impact to this habitat. Additionally, access and construction within this corridor will be more detrimental, challenging and costly compared to the eastern routes. Option A1 is the proposed route option with A1.3 included. A1.3 is located further west of residential property and would be less visible from the A9 than A1.4.
Route A1.6 will drastically impinge on the greatly valued and outstanding scenery in the Strath of Kildonan.	Landowners and occupiers	Potential impacts on the landscape character of, and visual receptors within, the Strath of Kildonan will be considered during development of the OHL alignment and will be minimised where possible. We will consult with HES and local archaeological groups throughout the design process.
The route is too close to the community, which already has an overhead line in the area. There are uncharted historical sites on the hill behind Marrel and Gartymore.	Community members and local organisations	We will undertake an assessment of the alignment and will consider potential impacts to the cultural heritage and visual amenity. This assessment will consider both designated and undesignated heritage assets.
Option A1.5 is too close to Helmsdale village and power lines may pose a risk to anglers. A2 option preferable.	Landowners and occupiers	Effects on the visual amenity of residents in and around Helmsdale will influence the design of the alignment and will be fully assessed in the EIA.

		The potential risk to anglers from overhead powerlines will be considered during the design on an alignment in consultation with landowners. Option A2 is discounted as the terrain is more challenging with a significant expanse of unavoidable peatland resulting in impact to this habitat. Additionally, access and construction within this corridor will be more detrimental, challenging and costly compared to the eastern routes.
Option 1.5 is preferred as 1.6 will blight far more of the landscape, cause more damage to the hill, habitat and disturb the hunting grounds of birds of prey and there is risk of damage to listed ancient ruins. It would also appear more expensive.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the sensitivity of the landscape in this section. Potential impacts on the landscape character and visual receptors will be considered during development of an overhead alignment. We recognise the importance of the various historic monuments and assets in this section and aim to find an OHL alignment that will reduce direct and indirect impact on both the assets and their setting. Bird surveys are currently underway and habitat surveys will be undertaken and will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation.
The route may affect the John O'Groats Trail	Community members and local organisations	Effect on core paths and other established routes such as the John O'Groats Trail are a key recreational and visual receptor and have been considered as part of the routeing assessment. Further studies will be undertaken to

		minimise impact to visual amenity and identify mitigation. For instance, the sensitive siting of towers.
Concern about the impact of option A1.5 on residents in West Helmsdale, Gartymore, Marrel and Portgower. There is a fear that the additional pylons will increase the risks to the health of those families living nearby.	Community members and local organisations	The UK Government sets guidelines for exposure to electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) in the UK on advice from Public Health England (PHE). In March 2004 the UK adopted the 1998 guidelines published by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). These guidelines are designed to set conservative exposure levels for the general public to electric and magnetic fields, and they are endorsed by the UK's Health Protection Agency, the World Health Organisation and the UK Government. We abide by these rules. For further information please refer to our FAQ.
Concern regarding the size of the scheme and the potential impact of your preferred route on local residents, in particular in West Helmsdale, Marrel and Gartymore. Concern regarding the visual impact of the pylons on the coastal hills of East Sutherland, in particular in the Glen Loth and Loch Fleet Special Landscape Area (SLA).	Community members and local organisations	Potential impacts on the landscape character of, and visual receptors within the area will be considered during development of the OHL alignment and will be minimised where possible. We will continue to consult with communities throughout the design process.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Why put these pylons on arable land within a populated fragile environment when the A1.6 option goes over a virtual wilderness?	Community members and local organisations	Option A1.6 crosses over an environmentally sensitive area, which includes sections of ancient and native woodland, the Berriedale Water Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Wild Land, Class 1 and 2 peatland as well as the candidate Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS). With regards to agricultural land, Options A1.5 and A1.6 primarily traverse Class 5.3 and 6.3 land, which is classified by the Hutton Institute (formerly Macaulay Land Institute) to be of lower value in terms of Land Classification for Agriculture
How will impacts on the candidate Flow Country World Heritage Site be managed?	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the candidate Flow Country WHS. Section A of the proposed OHL passes through the proposed designated area; Option A1 is preferred as there is less potential to impact the Flow Country, with sub-route Option A1.1 considered to have potential for lesser impact than sub-option A1.2. Full regard will be given to The Highland Council's 'The Flow Country Candidate World Heritage Site' Planning Policy Statement (April 2023). The OHL will be assessed using The Highlight Council's 'Flow Country Candidate World Heritage Impact Assessment' tool and detailed discussions are expected to take place with THC,

		NatureScot and SEPA during the design development stages of the project. An EIA will be undertaken that will identify and assess any impact on the proposed world heritage site and identify mitigation required. A Peat Management Plan will be developed as part of the application for consent and will be subject to scrutiny by the appropriate consultees including NatureScot and SEPA.
Queries around the significance of the archaeology along Route Option A1.5. This included the section truncating the preserved prehistoric landscape of Caen and Kilphedir, as well as a cluster of well-preserved prehistoric archaeological sites, i.e., chambered cairns, hut circles and souterrains.	Community members and local organisations	Cultural heritage sensitivities within this section will be further informed by detailed desk-based studies and a site walkover survey by the project archaeological team. This work will be used during the design stage to consider potential impacts on the historic environment and inform alignment options and appropriate mitigation.
The damage to peatlands in Section A would be detrimental, and there would be a loss of sequestered carbon. The peatlands will take a long time to fully recover.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the presence of Class 1 and Class 2 peatland and the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA) / Special Area of Conservation (SAC). We are also aware of the candidate Flow Country World Heritage Site and have taken this into account in the consideration of Options A1 and A2. The proposed route Option A1 is selected partly in order to reduce the potential for impact on peatland that would arise if we selected Option A2. Minimising impact on peatland will be a central consideration during development of an alignment in this section.
To the south of Ramscraig is a privately developed nature area with abundant flora and fauna.	Community members and local organisations	Species and habitat surveys will be undertaken along the proposed OHL alignment and bird surveys are already

		underway. This information will inform an EIA and the identification of mitigation including biodiversity enhancement as required by planning policy. The nature area identified is within section A1.4. The proposed route includes A1.3 and not A1.4 so direct impact to the nature area should be avoided.
The area between Loch Watten and Toftingall is a very important route for many birds including ospreys, herons, divers, cormorants, hen harriers and many wading and waterfowl. Has this been considered?	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the diversity of bird life in these areas and that the area between Loch Watten and Toftingall is an RSPB Important Bird Area; the 'Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands'. Bird surveys, including wintering bird and flight activity surveys, are currently underway and will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation. An EIA will be undertaken including assessment of the ornithological impacts and identifying mitigation as required.
The pylons will affect the movement of a number of species of rare birds that specifically breed in the Strath of Kildonan every year, including Oyster Catchers, Sandpipers and the increasingly rare Cuckoo which has been declining in numbers over much of the rest of Britain.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the diversity of bird life in these areas and bird surveys, including wintering bird and flight activity surveys, are currently underway and will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation. An EIA will be undertaken including assessment of the ornithological impacts and identifying mitigation as required.
The Highland Council The Highland Council is supportive of renewable energy developments in principle, including the necessary grid connections. The Highland Council's priorities at present relate to minimising the effects on surrounding landscapes and visual	**The Highland Council** Statutory Consultee	We welcome THCs in principle support for renewable energy projects. We will continue to liaise with THC's Landscape Officers to further develop the detailed design of the project.

amenity, demonstrating biodiversity enhancement, the provision of sufficient design information and cumulative effects with other offshore wind farm connections and their associated substations. The Highland Council have provided constraints mapping of environmental and social baseline information including natural heritage, landscape and flood risk designations. The highland council have also identified the information required in support of the consent application. A full description of the relevant planning policy context is provided including separate references to the landscape and design policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. Further detail and discission is provided on the topics of noise, dust, transport and contaminated land, providing further detail on the application requirements. The highland council notes the location of parts of the proposed transmission routes close to the candidate Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS). The Council has produced a toolkit for developers to use during the development of projects that could affect the WHS, as included in the response pack. The Council would be unlikely to be in a position to support any proposals that impact on the outstanding universal value of the WHS or its setting.		Photomontages and visualisations will be prepared as the project progresses. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the final route will identify and assess effects on landscape character, landscape designations and visual amenity. Where applicable this will include assessment of the effects on WLAs, SLAs and the World Heritage Site, focussing on the key qualities that are likely to be significantly affected. We are committed to 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. We have also introduced robust policies and procedures to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats, like peatland and ancient woodland. We welcome THC's description of the planning policy context. We welcome THC's baseline mapping, which THC acknowledges is not comprehensive but remains reflective of the constraint mapping that we have undertaken.

		We acknowledge the supporting information requirements, the full extent of which will be subject to agreement via the EIA Scoping Report. We recognise the sensitive landscape with the section, most notably the two Special Landscape Area's (SLAs) (Flow country and Berriedale Coast and Loch Fleet SLA and Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA). Visualisations will be produced to illustrate potential impacts. Ongoing consultation with THC will be maintained as the project progresses through the detailed design stage, including EIA scoping and will include consultation on viewpoint selection. Full regard will be given to The Highland Council's 'The Flow Country Candidate World Heritage Site' Planning Policy Statement (April 2023). The OHL will be assessed using The Highlight Council's 'Flow Country Candidate World Heritage Impact Assessment' tool. Concerns in relation to peatland and carbon-rich soils are acknowledged. We are aware of Class 1 peatlands within the section, as well as Shielton Peatlands SSSI and Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA/SAC/Ramsar Site. Impacts and mitigation in relation to priority peatlands will be fully assessed based on site survey work.
NatureScot <u>Landscape and visual</u>	**NatureScot**	We note NatureScot's position, and emphasise that, based on present information, options A1.2 and A2 are not our

NatureScot acknowledges that Route Option A1.1 is preferred. NatureScot advises against Route Option A1.2. NatureScot advises against Route Option A1.3 as the southern stretch is in closer proximity to WLA 36 and passes through the Flow Country and Berriedale Coast Special Landscape Area (SLA). Option A1.4 is NatureScot's preferred route. NatureScot does not support either Route Option A1.5 or Route Option A1.6. Both route options run through the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA and may result in significant and adverse effects on the landscape character of the 'Sutherland Kyles and Coast'. NatureScot also raises concerns regarding the potential for significant adverse effects on WLA 36. Between Beinn nan Coireag and Helmsdale NatureScot recommend aligning the proposal with the existing 132kV line from Beinn nan Coireag to Cnoc an Tubhadair (A1.5) before diverging inland taking route A1.6 at Creag Thoraraidh north of Helmsdale. NatureScot advises against Route Option A2. The route passes through a remote area and crosses through two Wild Land areas (WLA) and would be 1 km from a third WLA. <u>Protected Areas</u> <u>There are challenges with all route options.</u>	Statutory Consultee	currently preferred route. Environmentally, this is due to greater potential for impact on peatland and landscape and visual impact including impact on wild land. Options A2 and A1.2 also impact the RSPB Forsinard reserve and have greater potential to impact on the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC and SPA. A1.3 and not A1.4 is selected as the proposed route because it crosses fewer other overhead lines and contains fewer residential properties. An alignment outwith the SLA will be identified if practicable. We have acknowledged NatureScot's recommendations in relation to Routes 1.5 and 1.6 including review of the potential for a hybrid option combining stretches of both routes in order to minimise adverse effects on regional landscape character. A1.5 is proposed due to the terrain, challenges with access and because it avoids the less developed interior. For the northern section A1.5 is proposed. As suggested, in the southern section, both route sections will be taken to alignment stage to enable a hybrid of A1.5 and A1.6 to be considered.

A2 appears that it may, on balance, have potential for greater impacts on the Caithness and Sutherland Peatland SPA. A2 and A1.2 have greater potential for adverse effects on the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC		
Historic Environment Scotland (HES) <u>Scheduled Monuments</u> Potential for impact on the setting of a large number of scheduled monuments along the routes. A1.4 preferred over A1.3 if an alignment to the west (inland) of the existing OHL is chosen. A1.6 not preferred by HES due to scheduled monuments in Glen Loth. <u>Category A listed buildings and Inventory Gardens & Designed Landscapes</u> Potential for impact on the setting on A listed buildings along the route as well as Dunbeath Castle GDL. Sub option A1.3 less likely to have an impact.	**HES** Statutory Consultee	We recognise the importance of the various historic monuments and assets in this section and the challenge of finding an OHL alignment that will reduce direct and indirect impact on both the asset and its setting. Route options A1.3 is selected because it crosses fewer other overhead lines, contains fewer residential properties and has less potential to impact on Dunbeath castle A listed building and GDL. Options A1.5 and the southern portion of A1.6 will be taken to alignment stage and the monuments in Glen Loth will be taken into consideration. Consultation with HES and local archaeological groups will be maintained as the project progresses through the alignment stage and will include consultation on alignment options and viewpoint selection for the setting assessment.
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) SEPA considers that the following key issues must be addressed in project design:-	**Scottish Environmental Protection Agency** Statutory Consultee	We recognise the importance of peatland along the proposed route, including priority peatland and the Caithness and Sutherland and Shielton Peatlands designated sites and will undertake peat surveys of the preferred alignment and will consult with SEPA on an appropriate method for peat probing. A GWDTE

(a) Minimising impacts on peat and peatland – this includes all peat, and should not be limited to NatureScot Priority Peatland Habitats (Class 1 and 2 peatlands) (b) Avoiding good quality or rare GWDTE habitats and minimising impacts on other GWDTE habitats, (c) Avoiding impacts on watercourses and other water features by ensuring suitable buffers, and using best practice design crossings and (d) Avoiding flood risk impacts.		assessment will be undertaken during the EIA stage of the project. This will include NVC mapping data and provide a description of the bedrock and superficial geology. A flood risk assessment will be prepared as required and SEPA's guidance on assessing the impacts of development proposals on groundwater abstractions is noted and will be taken into account during preparation of the EIA.
RSPB RSPB welcomes the preferred route that avoids the Forsinard Flows Reserve, however notes that the preferred route passes through a significant section of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA, SAC and Ramsar site, and the Shielton Peatlands SSSI. This area is also within the candidate Flow Country World Heritage Site boundary. It is not clear why this designated site cannot be avoided and the line skirt the northern boundary of the site.	Non-statutory Consultee	Avoidance of the RSPB Forsinard Flows Reserve was a key factor in how we identified the original route for the option A1.2. However, we acknowledge that Option A1.2 also passes through the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA, SAC and Ramsar site, and that following this route would be likely to have a greater impact on that designated site than if Option A1.1 were followed. For option A1.1 technical constraints, namely retaining sufficient stand off distance from the location of the existing Halsary wind farm and the proposed Loch Toftingall Wind Farm, means that skirting the northern boundary of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA, SAC and Ramsar site, and the Shielton Peatlands SSSI is unavoidable. We are aware of the candidate Flow Country World Heritage Site and will seek to minimise an impact; detailed discussions are expected with the statutory consultees on

		this matter as design of the proposed development progresses. Further work to consider potential impact on ornithological interests and habitat will continue throughout the design and EIA stages of the project to identify an alignment that minimises impacts on the qualifying interests of these designated sites.
The route where it crosses near Marrel appears close to Long Carin ancient burial mound	Community members and local organisations	We welcome this information which will be used to inform the alignment design stage of the project.
Route A1.6 would spoil the landscape character of River Helmsdale.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the potential impacts on the landscape character and visual receptors will be considered during development of an overhead alignment.
Concerned that route 1.5 would damage assets in Helmsdale Valley and that sediment released into the waterways would adversely affect salmon breeding. Further concerned that A.16 would cause damage to the habitats not only of the salmon, but other wildlife within the strath and the river.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the potential for sediment pollution during construction and the importance of salmon fisheries on the River Helmsdale. Further consultation will be undertaken at alignment stage with landowners and the salmon fisheries board to understand any impact. Mitigation will be identified to reduce the potential for impacts to the hydrological environment during construction.
Concerned that the development of roads and infrastructure to construct the pylons lead to soil erosion and contamination of the local watercourses including the River Helmsdale.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the potential for sediment pollution during construction and the importance of salmon fisheries on the River Helmsdale Further consultation will be undertaken at alignment stage with landowners and the salmon fisheries board to understand any impact.

		Mitigation will be identified to reduce the potential for impacts to the hydrological environment during construction.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The Preferred Route from Spittal to the A9 Causeymire Road runs in full view of the biggest loch in the county - Loch Watten - a recreational area and attraction to people from far and wide.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the importance of Loch Watten, as both a recreational area and designated SSSI/SAC/SPA. Route option A1.1 is approximately 2 km south-west of Loch Watten. Option A1.1 is both the environmentally and technically preferred option at this section as it avoids the Causeymire-Knockfin Flows WLA, Forsinard Flows RSPB Reserve, avoids existing wind farms and crosses fewer other overhead lines compared to route option A1.2.
The Proposed Route A1.6 will harm the beautiful landscape in the Strath of Kildonan, which is one of the main reasons so many people visit the area. This will destroy the fragile local tourist industry.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the sensitivity of the Strath of Kildonan. Potential impacts on the landscape character and visual receptors within the Strath of Kildonan will be considered during development of an overhead alignment. Potential impacts on the Strath of Kildonan, including potential tourism impacts, will be identified and assessed as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Section B Brora to Golspie

Constraints between Brora and Loch Buidhe include local settlements, a number of designated areas such as the Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors Special Protection Area (SPA) and SSSI, the Dornoch Firth and Loch Fleet Ramsar and SPA, Mound Alderwoods Special Area of Conversion (SAC) and SSSI and Strathfleet SSSI. The terrain in this section has a mix of high hills and steep slopes and there are a number of wind farms to avoid including the constructed Kilbraur wind farm and the consented Kilbraur extension wind farm. On the approach to the Loch Buidhe substation, there are a number of OHLs that need to be avoided where possible.

At the time of consultation in early 2023, we did not present a preference between Options B1 (with B1.1 and B1.2) or B3; this was on the basis that further detailed assessments and consultation with communities and statutory consultees was required to inform identification and consideration of the constraints along route options in this area. However, at the time of consultation we did identify that Option B2 was not our preferred option as there were considerable constraints associated with B2 including terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/ maintenance challenges.

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on whether the existing transmission corridors could be used, wildlife, cultural heritage, access tracks and private water supplies.

HES advise that there are significant challenges with all routes although B3 is preferred, and careful design of an alignment will be required.

NS advises that from a landscape and visual perspective options B2 and B3 are potentially less impactful than Option B1. From a protected species perspective option B1, B1.1 and B3 are potentially better options within this section, although all routes have challenges.

As a result of our analysis of the feedback from communities, statutory consultees and other local groups and key agencies, we are of the opinion that Option B1 (with sub-option B1.1) is likely to be a more preferential route than Options B2 or B3, both on environment and technical grounds. We acknowledge that there remain challenges to deliver an overhead line in sections of the options within B1, however the feedback from the consultation has informed our preferred routes as set out below. These preferred routes have been selected on the basis that an alignment will be designed to take account of the key issues raised during the consultation and will incorporate mitigation measures, for example through tower positioning to follow existing infrastructure more closely where possible, and micro-siting, in order to avoid or minimise impact on the ecological, cultural heritage, landscape and visual receptors and designations highlighted in the feedback. The route option has also been selected with consideration for technical challenges, including terrain and access, throughout this section.

Our proposed route options to be taken forward to alignment stage are:

- B1
- B1.1

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken in order to find an acceptable alignment and/or design solution through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Table 3.2: Section B Overhead Line Consultation Responses

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
It is clear that the existing transmission corridor should be used rather than blighting the countryside and local communities with route B2.	Community members and local organisations	Option B2 has now been discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges.
The B2 route would be a deviation from the existing established transmission corridor rather than simply reinforcing the existing corridor and accordingly this would lead to a greater cumulative effect on the visual amenity of the landscape of the area.	Community members and local organisations	Option B2 has now been discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges.
Concerns around private water supplies in the Section.	Landowners and occupiers	Once a preferred alignment for the OHL is identified, landowners will be consulted and surveys undertaken to confirm the location of private water supplies. The outcome of this work and subsequent assessment will be presented in the EIA Report, with mitigation measures identified where required to safeguard private water supplies.
Concerns with Route B2 option (Dalreavoch, Tressady/Blairich to Inchcape and South Strathfleet Common Grazing land). The route runs through the heart of Strathfleet and Rogart.	Community members and local organisations	Option B2 is discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges.
There is an area of unspoilt natural beauty around Loch Brora. A hydrogen plant is proposed in the area.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise that Loch Brora is within a Special Landscape Area and that the landscape character is sensitive to development.

		We are aware of the proposed hydrogen plant and this will be considered as part of the cumulative impact assessment to be reported in the EIA.
The new line should be kept as far away from Golspie and the east coast as possible. There is already one pylon along the east coast around Golspie, through the crofting area of Backies and along the front of Ben Bhraggie.	Community members and local organisations	Route Options B3 and B1.2 (closest to the east coast) have been discounted and do not form part of the proposed route. The proximity to residential areas influenced this decision.
Agree that B2 is less preferred because: 1. Longer and required more raw materials resulting in greater cost and carbon footprint. 2. Potential to interfere with the operation of 2 existing telecoms masts. 3. Impact on visual amenity and potential health risks to communities at Rogart and Pittentrail 4. Interference with productive croft land, apportionments and common grazings. 5. Does not follow an existing established transmission corridor increasing impact on visual amenity. 6. Visible from residential properties 7. Closer to the SPA.	Community members and local organisations	Option B2 is discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges.
Particular objection to B2 due to the loss of amenity, unique environment within Strath and Brora residents and impacts on businesses and tourism.	Community members and local organisations	Option B2 is discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges. A socio-economic assessment will be undertaken and will be presented as part of the EIA Report.

Concerned over the impact of development on water sources that may be used for industrial business operations, particularly as a result of options B1.2 or B3.	Landowners and occupiers	Options B1.2 and B3 have been discounted from further consideration. Potential effects on the water environment will be given full consideration in the EIA Report. Tower positions will be sited, as far as possible, to avoid any direct impact on the water environment. Appropriate mitigation will be identified for both the construction and operational stages of the Proposed Development to minimize the risk of any contamination to the local water environment.
Route Option B1.1 is near to homes in Eiden and the north side of Strath Fleet. Option B1 would be preferable as this takes the line further from residential dwellings.	Landowners and occupiers	SSEN notes the location of homes in this area. Proximity to dwellings will influence the detailed design of the OHL at the alignment stage.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The Highland Council The Highland Council is supportive of renewable energy developments in principle, including the necessary grid connections. The Highland Council's priorities at present relate to minimising the effects on surrounding landscapes and visual amenity, demonstrating biodiversity enhancement, the provision of sufficient design information and cumulative effects with other offshore wind farm connections and their associated substations. The Highland Council have provided constraints mapping of environmental and social baseline information including natural heritage, landscape and flood risk designations. The highland council have also identified the information required in support of the application. The Highland Council noted concerns with the B1 and B3 options due to the potential impacts on the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA A full description of the relevant planning policy context has been provided including separate references to the landscape and design policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan.	**The Highland Council** Statutory Consultee	We welcome THC's in principle support for renewable energy projects. We would be happy to continue to liaise with THC's Landscape Officers to further develop the detailed design of the project. Photomontages and visualisations will be prepared as the project progresses. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the final route will identify and assess effects on landscape character, landscape designations and visual amenity. Where applicable this will include assessment of the effects on WLAs, SLAs and the World Heritage Site, focussing on the key qualities that are likely to be significantly affected. We are committed to 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. We have also introduced robust policies and procedures to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats, like peatland and ancient woodland.

Further detail and discission is provided on the topics of noise, dust, transport and contaminated land, providing further detail on the application requirements.		We welcome THC's description of the planning policy context. We welcome THC's baseline mapping, which THC acknowledges is not comprehensive but remains reflective of our constraints mapping. We acknowledge the supporting information requirements, the full extent of which will be subject to agreement via the EIA Scoping Report. THC have identified potential impacts on the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA associated with options B1 and B3. Option B3 is no longer being progressed. Ongoing consultation with THC will be maintained as the project progresses through the detailed design stage, including EIA scoping and will include consultation on viewpoint selection.
Historic Environment Scotland (HES) <u>Scheduled Monuments</u> Route B3 is preferred. An alignment along the northern (inland) side of the B1 route would be preferable to one along the southern (seaward) side of the route, and both would be preferable to an alignment using B1.2. Route B1.1 contains two scheduled monuments with sensitive settings: East Kinnauld, fort and East Kinnauld School. This impact	**Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** Statutory Consultee	We note that Option B3 has less potential to impact Scheduled Monuments. This option has now been discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include the potential for impacts on visual amenity and Dunrobin Castle A listed building and GDL. SSEN recognise the presence and location of scheduled monuments and the potential for change to their setting resulting from the proposed OHL. We agree that options

could potentially be lessened by picking an alignment along the western perimeter of B1.1. Impact on Carn Liath, cairn and chambered cairn, could potentially be reduced by picking an alignment along the southern perimeter of option B3, or along the very northwest edge of option B1.1. <u>Category A listed buildings and Inventory Gardens & Designed Landscapes</u> Route B1.2 would have impacts on the Dunrobin Castle Inventory Garden and Designed Landscape and A-listed Dunrobin Castle. B3 would cross the Inventory site at Dunrobin Glen and its waterfall and has potential to have a significant adverse impact on the Inventory site.		B1 and B1.1 are preferable to B1.2. We will attempt to find an alignment in this section that is acceptable to all stakeholders. Consultation with HES will be maintained as the project progresses through the alignment stage and will include consultation on viewpoint selection for the setting assessment.
NatureScot <u>Landscape and visual</u> Given the high sensitivity of the landscape, B1 is expected to result in significant effects on the landscape between Brora and Golspie. As such, B2 and B3 are preferable to B1, though at this stage there is no clear preference between B2 and B3. If route B1 is taken, sub route B1 is preferred to B1.2. There is no preference between options B1.1 and B1 at this stage. We note that route options B1 and B3 are sited within the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA. At this stage, we expect B1	**NatureScot** Statutory Consultee	Option B2 is discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges, and crossing of existing transmission infrastructure. B1.2 is discounted due to length, potential impact on the GDL and as it is more challenging to build than B1. B1 is selected as the proposed route because it results in less impact on visual amenity and communities particularly around Backies and Golspie. Additionally, further technical

to result in greater adverse effects on the SLA than options B2 and B3. The Highland Council will advise on this matter. <u>Protected Areas</u> All options have challenges		assessment on B3 has raised construction and maintenance issues associated with the length and steepness of some of the side slopes presented along this route option, particularly passing close to Mound Rock and behind Golspie.
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) SEPA consider that the following key issues must be addressed in project design (a) Minimising impacts on peat and peatland – this includes all peat, and should not be limited to NatureScot Priority Peatland Habitats (Class 1 and 2 peatlands) (b) Avoiding good quality or rare GWDTE habitats and minimising impacts on other GWDTE habitats, (c) Avoiding impacts on watercourses and other water features by ensuring suitable buffers, and using best practice design crossings and (d) Avoiding flood risk impacts.	**Scottish Environmental Protection Agency** Statutory Consultee	We recognise the importance of peatland along the proposed route and will undertake peat surveys of the preferred alignment and will consult with SEPA on an appropriate method for peat probing. A GWDTE assessment will be undertaken during the EIA stage of the project. This will include NVC mapping data and provide a description of the bedrock and superficial geology. A flood risk assessment will be prepared as required and SEPA's guidance on assessing the impacts of development proposals on groundwater abstractions is noted and will be taken into account during preparation of the EIA.
Option B2 would bring transmission lines closer to the SPA.	Community members and local organisations	Option B2 has now been discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges.
It seems that only cost & technological challenges to the installer have been considered. Ramsar, SSSI, SPA, SLA sites all seem to have been ignored.	Community members and local organisations	Environmental considerations including nationally and internationally designated sites are a central consideration of the route selection process. How these sites have influenced route selection is detailed in the published Consultation Document.

Options B1, B1.2 and B3 are far too close to Dunrobin Castle and Dunrobin home farm. These are a collection of listed buildings with huge significance to the history of the Scottish Highlands.	Community members and local organisations	We acknowledge that Route Options B1.2 and B3 run adjacent to Dunrobin Castle Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) and within 2 km of Dunrobin Castle Grade A Listed Building. Option B1 is selected as the proposed route and is furthest away at over 3 km from the GDL. This is one of reasons Route B1 is selected.
Queries around woodland removal required for Preferred Route B1.	Community members and local organisations	Woodland removal will be required to maintain an operational corridor around the OHL. Impacts on woodland will be presented in the EIA Report. We are committed to achieving biodiversity enhancement and this means that compensatory habitat will be developed to mitigate the loss of woodland.
B1 and B2 pass through extremely sensitive landscapes. The damage to the environment will be irreversible and catastrophic to flora and fauna.	Community members and local organisations	Option B2 has now been discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. The reasons for this include difficult terrain, steep gradients, peat and construction/maintenance challenges. We recognise that route B1 passes through areas of high value for landscape, flora and fauna. Ecological surveys will be conducted to identify ecological sensitives and this will be used to inform the alignment of the OHL and tower positions. Survey results, assessment of any impact and mitigation will be presented in an EIA Report.
The land at Loch Buidhe is designated and two of the options plough through this important area of land.	Community members and local organisations	We acknowledge that the route options at and around the Loch Buidhe area pass through an ecological designation. NatureScot has provided an initial response on designated species and habitat priorities in this area and will continue

		to engage through the design of the alignment stages of the proposals. Bird surveys to capture seasonal activity (breeding and wintering) commenced in spring 2023 in this area and will continue into 2024; additionally, Vantage Point surveys have been underway since spring 2023 to assess flight activity in the area around Loch Buidhe. The results of these surveys, and further habitat and other species surveys, have been taken into account during the route assessment stages and will continue to inform alignment design. The surveys will inform and be reported within the EIA that will be prepared to support the application for consent for the proposed development.
RSPB We note that there is no overall preference for this section. However, the text states that B2 is marginally preferred, but the map indicates that B1 is preferred. RSPB Scotland would prefer the least environmentally sensitive option that completely avoids designated sites such as the Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA, and any important functionally linked habitat as revealed by surveys.	Non-Statutory Consultee	The Preferred Route for Section B is a combination of sub-options B1 and B1.1. Whilst Option B2 was the environmentally preferred option, due to technical constraints associated with B2 (terrain, steep gradients and peat), Route Options B1 and 1.1 have been taken forward. These comments and the information provided by RSPB will be considered during the detailed design stage of the project to seek to minimise potential impacts on protected bird species, in combination with other environmental considerations, whilst also informing appropriate mitigation measures.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Route Options B3 and B1.2 go into a crofting settlement and an area with a lot of crofting heritage and two brochs.	Landowners and occupiers	Route options B3 and B1.2 have been discounted and do not form part of the proposed route.
The B1 and B3 routes will impact on economic operations in and around Dunrobin Castle.	Landowners and occupiers	Route B3 does not form a part of the proposed route. Effects on businesses and the local economy will be identified and assessed in the EIA Report. For further information please see our Common Themes and FAQ.
Concerns that Route B1 will impact on agricultural operations in and around Loch Brora and Carroll Hill areas.	Landowners and occupiers	Further work and engagement with landowners will be undertaken in selecting a proposed alignment in order to minimise disruption as far as practicable.

Section C - West of Dornoch

Proximity to local properties around the Bonar Bridge area and toward Invershin were noted as a key constraint in this section. Other constraints included several natural heritage designations such as the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area (NSA), Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA and SSSI, the River Oykel SAC and Kyle of Sutherland Marshes SSSI. There is also a number of scheduled monuments, the Battle of Carbisdale Registered Battlefield and areas of ancient woodlands within this section.

At the time of consultation in early 2023, we presented Option C1 as our preferred option; this was based on our assessment that Option C1 had fewer constraints associated with crossing the Kyle of Sutherland than C2. Option C1 gives a less challenging crossing to Kyle of Sutherland at its narrow end; the crossing span for Option C2 is more challenging with respect to construction, operation, and maintenance. Option C1 was therefore the preferred overall route option.

Both options C1 and C2 pass through areas of ancient woodland and natural heritage designations. Both Options C1 and C2 pass through the Kyle of Sutherland Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest; Option C1 passes near to the Battle of Carbisdale Registered Battlefield and Carbisdale Castle, while Option C2 would be more visible from Bonar Bridge. Following the existing infrastructure directly in this option would be constrained by residential properties. Specifically, the C2 route option is constrained by presence of existing transmission infrastructure in proximity to established residential areas at Tulloch and Airdens. The ability to deliver a new overhead line within this route is therefore challenging; a solution in this area would be likely to require larger towers to account for a longer span needed to cross the Kyle of Sutherland to the north side of the existing crossing at Bonar Bridge, and thereafter routing around settlements Tulloch and Airdens through Maikle Wood.

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on use of visualisations at consultation, visual amenity, wildlife and habitat, cultural heritage, access tracks, flood risk and private water supplies.

HES advises that C2 is preferred due to the potential impacts on the battlefield landscape and scheduled monuments along Route C1.

NS advises that there is no preference from a landscape and visual perspective but that C1 would be less likely to have an impact from a protected areas perspective.

We acknowledge feedback from communities, statutory consultees and other local groups and key agencies, in relation to options along C1 and C2. However, our route option has also been selected with consideration for technical challenges, including terrain and access. We remain of the opinion that Option C1 is

likely to be a more preferential route than Option C2. We acknowledge that there remain challenges to deliver an overhead line within C1. The proposed route has been selected on the basis that alignment will be designed to take account of the key issues raised during the consultation and will incorporate mitigation measures, for example through tower positioning within local landscape and micro-siting, in order to avoid or minimise impact on the ecological, cultural heritage, landscape and visual receptors and designations highlighted in the feedback.

Our proposed route section to be taken to alignment stage is:

- **C1**

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken in order to find an acceptable alignment through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Table 3.3: Section C Overhead Line Consultation Responses

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
All the proposed routes (west of Dornoch) visualisations should be provided during your consultation phase (e.g. as Highland Council specifies with wind farm proposals).	Community members and local organisations	Photomontage and wirelines will be provided in the EIA report to accompany the application for consent. We will consider the use of visualisations to support the next round of public consultation.
There is already an established electricity infrastructure down the east side of the Kyle, making addition far less invasive (as with other Highlands areas pylons could be placed side by side). Route C2 is shorter and less invasive on visual amenity, also easier to access.	Community members and local organisations	The existing 275kV OHL crosses the Kyle approximately to the north of Bonar Bridge. The existing 132kV OHL runs to the east of the Kyle before crossing at Invershin and continuing on the west side of the Kyle. Options C1 and C2 are considered to have a similar potential for impact on visual amenity. Option 1 would be visible from communities around Culrain and Invershin however option C2 would be more visible from Bonar Bridge, Tulloch and Airdens
From a safety point of view, Route C2 presents less of a hazard to the many low flying military aircraft that use the Kyle as a flight path.	Community members and local organisations	Consultation will be undertaken with the Ministry of Defence where proposed routes are within known training zones or have the potential to impact on flight paths. Consultation with the appropriate aviation authorities will also be undertaken in any instance where there is potential for interaction with civil aviation activity.

The access road to this area is not capable of taking large, heavy and bulky loads due to the railway bridges, the bailey bridge and severe bends.	Community members and local organisations	Construction and operational access is currently being investigated by the engineering team. This will identify any challenges where road widening or structural reinforcement may be required. An abnormal loads assessment report will be submitted with the application for consent.
Will it contaminate the water system as a lot of residents have private water supplies (wells and spring water)?	Landowners and occupiers	Once a preferred alignment for the OHL is identified, landowners, the Local Authority and SEPA will be consulted and surveys undertaken to confirm the location of private water supplies. The outcome of this work and subsequent assessment will be presented in the EIA Report, with mitigation measures identified where required to safeguard private water supplies.
Suggest using the existing transmission infrastructure corridor close to Culrain for a new overhead line.	Community members and local organisations	Route option C1 passes to the west of Culrain and we are aware of the existing 132kV OHL to the east of Culrain. Option C1 is the technically preferred option as it enables a shorter crossing of the Kyle of Sutherland which is less challenging with respect to construction, operation and maintenance. Further environmental and engineering studies will be undertaken to detail an alignment. This will include assessment and input by a landscape architect to site towers sensitively.
Existing infrastructure corridor along the C2 route option with pylons crossing the Kyle – why is this option not being used over	Community members and local organisations	In undertaking our assessment of rout options C1 and C2, we considered the existing infrastructure in the area. Both options presented similar environmental and technical

C1 as this would use existing service and access points and reduce the environmental impact of C1		constraints. However C2 option was considered to be slightly more constrained of the two options, particularly in relation to the potential for cumulative visual impact in proximity to the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area.
The community of Culrain were unaware that these proposals would impact upon them and a consultation event was not held in the area	Community members and local organisations	The consultation materials including maps and the booklets, showing Route Options C1 and C2 were published on the project webpage ahead of the consultations commencing on 20 February. We acknowledge that a map at the front of our website, which was intended to guide website visitors to the project webpage included representation of an existing overhead line, which was confused by some as a possible route Option in this area As soon as we became aware of this, we removed it from the website to avoid any further confusion. For further information please refer to the Consultation Process in earlier sections of this report. We held a series of consultation events along the route with the most local to Culrain being held at Bonar Bridge. This venue was selected due to its proximity to the Loch Buidhe substation as well as the overhead line options.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The Highland Council The Highland Council is supportive of renewable energy developments in principle, including the necessary grid connections. The Highland Council's priorities at present relate to minimising the effects on surrounding landscapes and visual amenity, demonstrating biodiversity enhancement, the provision of sufficient design information and cumulative effects with other offshore wind farm connections and their associated substations. The Highland Council did not make any specific comments in relation to the route Options in Section C.	**The Highland Council** Statutory Consultee	We welcome THC's in principle support for renewable energy projects. We will continue to liaise with THC's Landscape Officers to further develop the detailed design of the project. Photomontages and visualisations will be prepared as the project progresses. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the final route will identify and assess effects on landscape character, landscape designations and visual amenity. We are committed to 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. We have also introduced robust policies and procedures to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats, like peatland and ancient woodland.
Historic Environment Scotland (HES)	**Historic Environment Scotland (HES)**	We recognise the cultural heritage importance of the Battlefield of Carbisdale and this will have a strong influence on an OHL alignment through this area

Scheduled Monuments and Historic Battlefields HES indicates that route C2 would have less impact than route C1 ion the Inventory battlefield at Carbisdale. Scheduled Monuments present to the east of the River Shin. Category A Listed Buildings Option C1 would be likely to have impacts on the setting of the Shin Viaduct however these are not likely to raise issues of national interest.	Statutory Consultee	In relation to potential impacts on scheduled monuments, any setting impact on the Shin Viaduct will be assessed and reported in the EIA Report. Cultural heritage assessment within this section will be further informed by a detailed desk-based analysis and site walkover survey including setting assessment. Consultation with HES will be maintained as the project progresses through the alignment stage and will include consultation on viewpoint selection for the setting assessment.
NatureScot Landscape and visual There is no preference expressed for either C1 or C2 in terms of landscape impact. Protected Areas C1 offers greater potential to span both the Kyle of Sutherland SSSI and the River Oykel SAC.	**NatureScot** Statutory Consultee	We agree with Nature Scot that option C1 offers greater potential to span protected areas. Tower positions will be sited, as much as is possible, outwith the protected areas to avoid any direct impact on the water environment and wetland habitats and species.
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) SEPA consider that the following key issues must be addressed in project design (a) Minimising impacts on peat and peatland – this includes all peat, and should not be limited to NatureScot Priority	**Scottish Environmental Protection Agency** Statutory Consultee	We recognise the importance of peatland along the proposed route and will undertake peat surveys of the preferred alignment and will consult with SEPA on an appropriate method for peat probing. A GWDTE assessment will be undertaken during the EIA stage of the

Peatland Habitats (Class 1 and 2 peatlands) (b) Avoiding good quality or rare GWDTE habitats and minimising impacts on other GWDTE habitats, (c) Avoiding impacts on watercourses and other water features by ensuring suitable buffers, and using best practice design crossings and (d) Avoiding flood risk impacts.		project. This will include NVC mapping data and provide a description of the bedrock and superficial geology. A flood risk assessment will be prepared as required and SEPA's guidance on assessing the impacts of development proposals on groundwater abstractions is noted and will be taken into account during preparation of the EIA.
Concerns around the threat of flooding for both potential routes.	Community members and local organisations	Both Routes C1 and C2 have a comparatively high portion of their respective routes within a flood risk area (9% and 10%, respectively). Siting towers in an area at risk of flooding will be avoided where possible to reduce construction and maintenance challenges. C1 is preferred as there is more opportunity to avoid siting towers in the flood plain.
The project talks of reinforcing existing lines- this is a totally new line cutting through Carbisdale Forest (Ancient Woodland concerns).	Community members and local organisations	Route C1 at Carbisdale contains ancient woodland of native origin and long established of plantation origin. An alignment will be developed to avoid impact to ancient woodland of native origin if practicable. Compensatory habitat will be proposed to replace any woodland lost.
Route C1 creates a new crossing point of the Kyle and passes adjacent to Invershin Castle (a registered ancient monument) and Carbisdale Castle, an important historical, listed building. Carbisdale Castle's prominent position on the Kyle means that a line of giant pylons close to it (Route C1) would be a significant detriment.	Community members and local organisations	SSEN recognise that Invershin Castle is within Route C1 and that the category B listed Carbisdale Castle is adjacent to the south of this route option The potential for direct and setting impacts on historic monuments will be fully assessed and the results presented in the EIA Report.

The historic site of the Battle of Culrain (1650) is significant in Scotland's history. 'Section C' clearly shows the battlefield site, which includes an area of the hill of Creag Choineachan. Proposed Route 'C1' would however appear to conflict with some of this protected area.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the cultural heritage importance of the Battlefield of Carbisdale and this will have a strong influence on an OHL alignment if Route C1 is selected. Consultation with HES will inform selection of an alignment with appropriate mitigation identified to minimise any impact on the battlefield.
Section C crosses the Kyle of Sutherland Marshes SSSI and SPA on the hill behind Inchcape.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise that both Route C1 and C2 pass through the Kyle of Sutherland Marshlands SSSI and Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA. Further environmental studies will be undertaken at the subsequent alignment and EIA stages in order to identify and mitigate adverse effects on these environmental designations. Towers will be sited out of the SSSI if possible and C1 offers more opportunity to achieve this.
Carbisdale Woods are home to the endangered red squirrel which are protected by law.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise that red squirrels and their dreys are protected under Schedules 5 and 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Surveys will be undertaken to identify presence along the alignment and inform the EIA, including mitigation as required.
The woods are home to all sorts of birds including ground nesting birds, and Tawny Owls. There have been nesting herons at Carbisdale for many years.	Community members and local organisations	Bird surveys are currently underway and will be undertaken throughout all appropriate seasons in consultation with Nature Scot. These surveys will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation. An EIA will be undertaken including assessment of the ornithological impacts and identifying mitigation as required.

Marshlands and waterways in the section are breeding ground for swans, ducks, wading birds including herons and oyster catchers, and many migratory bird species including geese. The habitat is vitally important for fish, frogs and newts.	Community members and local organisations	Bird surveys are currently underway and habitat surveys will be completed in the appropriate season. These surveys will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation.
Wildcats and Capercaillie have both been sighted in these woods – how will they be protected?	Community members and local organisations	Bird surveys are currently underway and protected species surveys will be scoped in consultation with NatureScot and completed in the appropriate season. These surveys will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation.
Route C1 contains a historical Pictish Tower: Rhuinamain Drovers Village; red squirrels; roe deer: red kites and many core paths.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise that there are assets of cultural heritage significance within C1, areas used for recreational amenity and a range of wildlife. These factors will influence the design of an alignment and the construction strategy.
C2 passes close to local crofts and the villages of Bonar Bridge, Strathconnon and Ardgay and would present a safety risk. There is also a lot of wildlife including red kites.	Community members and local organisations	Route Option C2 is at this stage discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. Option C1 is the preferred route as there are fewer technical constraints associated with crossing the Kyle of Sutherland.
Option C1 attracts greater numbers of people for recreation including cyclists, anglers and walkers and has greater visual amenity value.	Community members and local organisations	Visual amenity includes both recreational and residential users. Options C2 passes closer to Bonar Bridge and so both routes are considered to have similar potential for impact on visual amenity.
C1 will impact the setting of Carbisdale Castle, including the loch and surrounding woods.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the category B listed Carbisdale Castle and surrounding woodland and loch. These assets will strongly influence the design of an alignment in this area. The cultural heritage assessment within this section of the route will be further informed by a detailed desk-based

		analysis and site walkover survey including setting assessment. The alignment process will review the topography and its surrounds to tackle potential impacts to setting.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
This area relies heavily economically on tourism and the proposed development, along with other infrastructure developments already consented, represents a threat to the community.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the importance of tourism to the area within Section C. A socio economic assessment will be undertaken and will be presented as part of the EIA Report. For further information please refer to our Common Themes and FAQ.
C1 will result in impacts to wildlife and the well-being of the community, businesses, and tourism the Culrain area	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the importance of tourism and wildlife to the area within Section C. EIA will be undertaken including a socio economic and wildlife assessment. For further information please refer to our Common Themes and FAQ.

Section D – Dornoch to Dingwall

Local settlements including Ardross, Alness, Dingwall, Evanton, Contin and Strathpeffer were key constraints in this section. Other constraints in this section include a number of commercial forestry areas and areas of ancient woodland, the Novar SPA, the Amat Wood SAC and SSSI, Grade A listed buildings such as the Ardross Castle and Ardross Castle Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL). There are a number of existing OHLs within this section including the existing 132kV Beauly – Shin OHL and 275kV Beauly – Loch Buidhe OHL. The terrain in this section varies with large sections comprising very challenging hilly terrain.

For section D, there is one sub option for each of D1 and D2, and a single option for D3 in the west of this section. At the time of consultation in early 2023, we presented Option D1 with sub option D1.1 as our preferred option; this was based on our assessment that Option D1 with D1.1 was considered to be the environmentally and technically preferred option over Options D2 and D3 as it avoids direct impact on SAC, SPA and SSSI sites and also has lower potential for impact on cultural heritage receptors as well as landscape character and designations. In addition, it has comparatively lower gradients with fewer construction challenges and access road requirements. It also has fewer interactions with existing infrastructure and dwellings.

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on core paths, recreation and tourism, technology choice, visual amenity, wildlife, habitat and cultural heritage.

HES does not advise of a preference although identifies the potential for significant adverse impacts in option D2 and a pinch point in option D1 northwest of Dingwall, highlighting considerations for historical assets in this area being required as the design progresses.

From a landscape and visual perspective, NS advise that Option D1 is their preference between Dornoch and the River Glass with Option D2.1 from the River Glass to Strathpeffer. NS prefers option D1 from a protected areas perspective.

In response to the consultation, local community groups from the Strathpeffer area suggested an alternative route option in Section D that would re-route the proposed southern section of D1 to the west of Strathpeffer; the suggested route would be an overhead line solution across land at Tarvie, Little Scatwell and then following a route to the south of Loch Achonachie until it joins up with the northern part of the Section E route options. Exploration of this new route option was supported by THC. Further detail of the reasons underpinning the suggested alternative route are included in this section.

As a result of our analysis of the feedback from communities, statutory consultees and other local groups and key agencies, we remain of the opinion that Option D1 is a more preferential route than Options D2 or D3 on environment and technical grounds. Based on further assessment, we are not intending to proceed with the option D1.1; rather the northern section of D1 is now our preferred route.

We acknowledge that there remain challenges to deliver an overhead line in sections of route Option D1, however the feedback from the consultation has informed our preferred route as set below. The preferred route have been selected on the basis that alignment will be designed to take account of the key issues raised during the consultation and will incorporate mitigation measures, for example through tower positioning and micro-siting, in order to avoid or minimise impact on the ecological, cultural heritage, landscape and visual receptors and designations highlighted in feedback. The route options have also been selected with consideration for technical challenges, including terrain and access, throughout this section.

Our proposed route options to be taken to alignment stage are:

- **D1**
- **Alternative route option proposed by the community**

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken in order to find an acceptable alignment through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Table 3.4: Section D Overhead Line Consultation Responses

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
How close does the Proposed Route go to the Designated Landscape of Castle Leod and will it be seen from there?	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of Castle Leod Garden and Designed Landscape, which is close to the proposed Route D1. The GDL will influence the design of an alignment in this section and potential setting impacts on the GDL will be identified and assessed as part of the EIA. HES in their response identify Castle Leod and the GDL as a receptor but suggest an OHL in this location would not raise issues of national interest.
Option D3 seems least impactful on people and the communities although it may be slightly longer.	Community members and local organisations	Option D3 has now been discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. Option D1 is a preferred option over option D3 from both an environmental and engineering perspective as it avoids direct impact on a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the Ben Wyvis Wild Land area. D3 was less preferred by both NatureScot and HES.
The views of Ben Wyvis from the south are iconic, it would appear that the option to the west (D3) would be preferable.	Community members and local organisations	Option D1 is a preferred option over option D3 from both an environmental and engineering perspective as it avoids direct impact on a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the Ben Wyvis Wild Land area, as well as landscape character. In addition, it has comparatively lower gradients

		with fewer construction challenges and access road requirements.
Route D2 proposes a corridor alongside the Peffery Way, which is being submitted as part of a Core Path Plan.	Community members and local organisations	Option D2 has now been discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. Proposed route D1 does not encroach on the proposed Peffery Way.
Core Path network in the Strathpeffer/Contin area contributes to local quality of life, connected communities, active travel, outdoor leisure, and the tourism offering of the area: all routes in stage D heavily impact Core Paths.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the Core Path Network within Section D, in particular at Strathpeffer and the surrounding area. Core paths are a key recreational and visual receptor and have been considered as part of the routeing assessment. Further environmental and engineering studies will be undertaken to minimise impact to recreation and visual receptors. For instance, sensitive siting of towers.
The 'Preferred' D1 and D2 routes take no consideration of the community aspect, nor the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan.	Community members and local organisations	As per our Routeing Guidance, planning policy has been considered as part of the routeing assessment. This included a review of the Proposed Development against both national (National Planning Framework 4) and regional (Highland-Wide Local Development Plan 2012) planning policy. An EIA will be completed for the project, and this will consider aspects such as noise, traffic and recreation.
The Strathpuffer is a renowned mountain bike event which is held on the tracks around Loch Kinellan and Contin woods. The unspoilt natural beauty of the area is a major factor in hosting the competition here.	Community members and local organisations	SSEN is aware of the annual Strathpuffer mountain bike event at Contin Woods. Potential impacts on landscape and visual receptors, population and human health, woodland and recreation will be considered further during the alignment and EIA stages of the Project. Further consultation will be held in 2024 on a preferred alignment.

Community has suggested an alternative route that would bring the proposed line to the west of Stathpeffer and overland at Tarvie	Community members and local organisations	The community groups at Strahpeffer provided an alternative route for the OHL that the community would prefer. The suggested alternative route branches off from route D1 west of Bottacks, travelling southwest to Tarvie, south to Little Scatwell then southeast to Muriton Mains where it joins option E1.1. The alternative was identified during the consultation period and suggested as being preferable by the community as it is considered to reduce the impact on communities in the Strathpeffer / Jamestown / Contin area, whilst also routeing around Fairburn Tower, a Category A listed building. We have been in discussions with representatives from the Strathpeffer community during the assessment of route options to assess the potential impacts and feasibility of the route. The suggested alternative route is being taken forward into the next stage of the proposed development as an additional route option, and an alignment will be developed for consultation and public feedback also.
Request for visualisations of the effect of the pylons in Strathrusdale.	Community members and local organisations	Photomontage and wirelines will be provided in the EIA report to accompany the application for consent. We will consider the use of visualisations to support the next round of public consultation.

Concerns over Route D2.1 as passes directly through Swordale, a small hamlet of around 25 homes. Route Option D1 would be far less intrusive.	Community members and local organisations	Route Option D2.1 is discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. Option D2.1 is not selected as the proposed option due to the extent of other OHL that would need to be undergrounded, due to the proximity of the existing infrastructure and limited route options to join the overall route D1 after Dingwall.
Support for Route D1 as it takes advantage of running parallel to an existing windfarm road which would allow ease of construction and access.	Community members and local organisations	We welcome the support for Route D1, which is the proposed option.
Potential for pylons to impact residential properties in Strathrusdale. Option D3 would be the best route to limit impacts on the rural community of Strathrusdale and Ardross. There is a discussion about D1 being routed further west of Strathrusdale where there would be better access, less disruption to livestock and people, and this would be preferable if Options D2 and D3 are not viable.	Community members and local organisations	Any impact on the residential properties and visual amenity in Strathrusdale will be considered at alignment and EIA stages. Route Option D3 is discounted. This is due to the technical challenges including terrain, steep gradients and construction/maintenance challenges as well as impact on designated sites. We have listened to the community and moved route D1 to the west in this area.
We agree with SSEN that route D3 is not a suitable route for this proposed powerline through our community due to the landscape designations, landscape characteristics, peatland, water courses, elevation and terrain, route length, access to the powerline for maintenance, angled towers and being so near to Ben Wyvis.	Community members and local organisations	Route Option D3 is discounted. This is due to the technical challenges including terrain, steep gradients and construction/maintenance challenges as well as impact on designated sites.
D2 would be inappropriate and would result in three transmission lines and two wind farms (Beinn Tharsuinn and Strathrory) in close proximity resulting in industrialisation of this area.	Community members and local organisations	Route D2 is discounted and is not part of the proposed route. This is partly due to the extent of other infrastructure and property in this section.

Concern about route D3. I understand it is not preferred, but feel that option particularly impacts locations used for leisure/tourism such as Little Garve walks, hiking up Little Wyvis, Ben Wyvis, swimming and water leisure on Loch Achilty, cycling routes in Strath Garve.	Community members and local organisations	Route Option D3 is discounted due to the technical challenges including terrain, steep gradients, the construction/maintenance challenges as well as impact on designated sites.
D2 goes through a listed castle, a substantial amount of ancient woodland and plantation and impacts a large portion of the rural community of Ardross (Wester Lealty, Lealty Lodge, Ardross Castle, Ardross Distillery, Dublin, to name a few).	Community members and local organisations	Route Option D2 is discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. This is partly due to the location of cultural heritage assets.
D1 passes directly over/through a special area in Strath Sgitheach. Concern that the rock art panels there are not yet on the record, hard to find, and as such may be at risk from construction and maintenance.	Community members and local organisations	Thank you for the information on pre-historic rock art in proximity of Route option D1 as it passes in and around Strath Sgitheach.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedba.ck	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The Highland Council The Highland Council is supportive of renewable energy developments in principle, including the necessary grid connections. The Highland Council's priorities at present relate to minimising the effects on surrounding landscapes and visual amenity, demonstrating biodiversity enhancement, the provision of sufficient design information and cumulative effects with other offshore wind farm connections and their associated substations.	**The Highland Council** Statutory Consultee	We welcome THC's in principle support for renewable energy projects. We will continue to liaise with THC's Landscape Officers to further develop the detailed design of the project. Photomontages and visualisations will be prepared as the project progresses. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the final route will identify and assess effects on landscape character, landscape designations and visual amenity.

The Highland Council have provided constraints mapping of environmental and social baseline information including natural heritage, landscape and flood risk designations. The highland council have also identified the information required in support of the application. A full description of the relevant planning policy context has been provided including separate references to the landscape and design policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. Further detail and discission is provided on the topics of noise, dust, transport and contaminated land, providing further detail on the application requirements. The merits of the community alternative route proposed in the locus of the southern area of Section D should also be given due consideration and should form part of any further routing options developed for further consultation with the Council and other consultees. The Highland Council note the density of human population within the southern part of Section D and need for due consideration of undergrounding options.		Where applicable this will include assessment of the effects on WLAs and SLAs focussing on the key qualities that are likely to be significantly affected. We are committed to 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. We have also introduced robust policies and procedures to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats, like peatland and ancient woodland. We welcome THC's description of the planning policy context. We welcome THC's baseline mapping, which THC acknowledges is not comprehensive but remains reflective of the constraint mapping undertaken by us. We acknowledge the supporting information requirements, the full extent of which will be subject to agreement via the EIA Scoping Report. We acknowledge THC's comments in regard to the assessment of the community alternative route and are committed to giving this option thorough consideration.

		We acknowledge the density of population in Section D and the presence of existing electricity transmission infrastructure. The detailed alignment will seek to both minimise cumulative effects with the existing infrastructure and minimise impacts to communities.
Historic Environment Scotland (HES) <u>Scheduled monuments</u> Pinchpoint in Strath Sgitheach, to the northwest of Dingwall. <u>Category A listed buildings and Inventory Gardens & Designed Landscapes</u> D1 preferred over D2 due to impact on Ardross Castle Inventory Garden and Designed Landscape, and category A listed Ardross Castle.	**Historic Environment Scotland (HES)** Statutory Consultee	We note the pinchpoint in Route D1 at Strath Sgitheach. These assets will have a strong influence on the alignment in this area. Route D2 is now discounted and does not form a part of the proposed route. Potential impacts on the Ardross Castle GDL, Novar GDL and category A listed buildings were important factors in this decision. Cultural heritage assessment within this section will be further informed by a detailed desk-based analysis and site walkover survey including setting assessment. Consultation with HES and local archaeology groups will be maintained as the project progresses through the alignment stage and will include consultation on viewpoint selection for the setting assessment.
NatureScot <u>Landscape and visual</u>	**NatureScot** Statutory Consultee	We agree with Nature Scot that option D1 has lower potential for impact on protected areas and this was an important factor in identifying D1 as the proposed option.

NS advise that Option D1 is their preference between Dornoch and the River Glass with Option D2.1 from the River Glass to Strathpeffer. <u>Protected Areas</u> All routes have potential to impact protected areas.		We note that, in terms of landscape and visual, Nature Scot agrees with the proposed option D1 as far south as the River Glass; south of the River Glass it is noted that D2.1 is preferred. Option D2.1 is not selected as the proposed option due to the extent of other OHL that would need to be undergrounded, due to the proximity of the existing infrastructure and limited route options to join the overall route D1 after Dingwall.
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) SEPA consider that the following key issues must be addressed in project design (a) Minimising impacts on peat and peatland – this includes all peat, and should not be limited to NatureScot Priority Peatland Habitats (Class 1 and 2 peatlands) (b) Avoiding good quality or rare GWDTE habitats and minimising impacts on other GWDTE habitats, (c) Avoiding impacts on watercourses and other water features by ensuring suitable buffers, and using best practice design crossings and (d) Avoiding flood risk impacts.	**Scottish Environmental Protection Agency** Statutory Consultee	We recognise the importance of peatland along the proposed route, including priority peatland and the Caithness and Sutherland and Shielton Peatlands designated sites and will undertake peat surveys of the preferred alignment and will consult with SEPA on an appropriate method for peat probing. A GWDTE assessment will be undertaken during the EIA stage of the project. This will include NVC mapping data and provide a description of the bedrock and superficial geology. A flood risk assessment will be prepared as required and SEPA's guidance on assessing the impacts of development proposals on groundwater abstractions is noted and will be taken into account during preparation of the EIA.
Strathpeffer is in a conservation area. Surely this is a constraint. – More information is needed to justify why the route goes over Strathpeffer	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the Strathpeffer Conservation Area . Option D1, the proposed route, is approximately 600m to the north-west of the Conservation Area at its nearest point. There is no potential for direct impact and setting

		impact will be considered in the EIA. The route is upslope from Strathpeffer and visibility from the conservation area will be limited.
There has been a lack of thought given to historical and archaeological sites, e.g., the remains of a Neolithic chambered cairn to the north of the River Sgitheach.	Community members and local organisations	We are aware of the prehistoric chambered cairn: Balnacrae, chambered cairn 230m WSW. The cairn's setting includes outward views down into the valley containing the route. Further detailed consideration will be undertaken during alignment stage to identify an acceptable solution in consultation with Historic Environmental Scotland and local archaeology groups.
The impact on landscaped and garden development (LGD) is inaccurate. The maps of our local area are woefully inaccurate, especially regarding a gross underreporting of LGD.	Community members and local organisations	We note the following Garden and Designed Landscapes (GDLs) within Section D of the route, as recognised by Historic Environment Scotland (HES): Ardross Castle GDL, Novar GDL, Castle Leod GDL, The Spa Gardens Strathpeffer GDL, Brahan GDL and Fairburn GDL. These designated areas will influence the identification of a preferred alignment.
Route D3 is totally inappropriate due to environmental designated areas and wild land.	Community members and local organisations	Route D3 is discounted and does not form a part of the preferred route. This is partly due to the environmental designations along the route.
Fodderty Lodge is a Grade C listed building dated 1730 and has various stones engraved with this date. How can a power line/60m pylons be constructed over/near a listed property with such history?	Landowners and occupiers	We are aware of the location of Fodderty Lodge, located approximately 3 km east of the proposed option D1. It is unlikely that there will be no direct impact and significant setting impact on this C listed asset.

The area around Strathpeffer and Loch Kinellan is home to many protected and endangered species such as pine martens, Wildcats, Slavonian grebe, red kites, red squirrels and great crested newts. D1, the preferred route, will destroy the habitats of these species.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the diversity of wildlife in these areas. Bird surveys, including seasonal surveys to monitor and record breeding activity and flight activity, are currently underway and will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation. Similarly, protected species surveys will scoped in consultation with Nature Scot and will be completed in advance of the submission of a future application to Scottish Ministers. An EIA will be undertaken including assessment of the impact on wildlife and identifying mitigation as required.
Strathrusdale is a migration route for geese in the spring and autumn where they follow the route of the Blackwater.	Community members and local organisations	Bird surveys, including surveys of seasonal activity, are currently underway and will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation. An EIA will be undertaken including assessment of the ornithological impacts and identifying mitigation as required.
There is a UXO area at the back of Kinnellan (Strathpeffer).	Non-Statutory Consultee	Thank you for this information which has been passed to the engineering team and will be considered at alignment stage.
RSPB RSPB Scotland welcomes that the preferred route avoids all designated sites in this area but notes that there is likely to be large impacts on peat. Although it passes west of the Novar SPA, designated for Capercaillie, there is a risk it will fragment current continuous forest cover within dispersal distance of the designated site, which would have a likely negative effect on the	Non-Statutory Consultee	Comments are welcomed and concerns in relation to Class 1 peatlands and the potential for fragmentation of forest is acknowledged. Minimising impact on peatland will be a central consideration during development of the project and a peat management plan will be developed.

species and their ability to travel between suitable areas of habitat.		Woodland removal will be limited to that required for safe construction and operation. Compensatory planting will be identified.
The landscape around Strathpeffer and Contin is home to protected species such as the Scottish Wildcat, Red Kite, Great Crested Newts, Pine Marten, Badgers, as well as the BTO red listed Slavonian Grebe and Woodcock.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the diversity of wildlife in these areas. Bird surveys are currently underway and will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation. Similarly, protected species surveys will be scoped in consultation with Nature Scot and will be completed. An EIA will be undertaken including assessment of the impact on wildlife and identifying mitigation as required.
D1 would have impact west of Strathpeffer as it crosses an area of mixed wetland and native woodland between Loch Kinellan and An Dubh-Lochan with high biodiversity value.	Community members and local organisations	Woodland removal will be minimized where practicable, and potential impacts on woodland will be considered during the detailed design and EIA stages of the project.
Potential impacts at Loch Kinellan, the site of a Crannog, a Scheduled Monument.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the potential for impacts on the crannog on Loch Kinellan. Effects on this scheduled monument and mitigation options will be considered during the alignment and subsequent EIA process.
Knockfarrel and the Cat's Back is of high cultural heritage value and popular with walkers and D2 would impact this. The Black Water includes several very popular locations for visitors and walkers including Rogie Falls; Little Garve; Loch Garve. OHL D3 is highly unsuitable.	Community members and local organisations	Route Option D2 is discounted from further consideration and is not part of the proposed route. This is partly due to the extent of other infrastructure and property in this section. Route Option D3 is discounted. This is due to the technical challenges including terrain, steep gradients and construction/maintenance challenges as well as impact on designated sites.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Route D2 runs close to Cnoc Fyrish, one of the best architectural follies in the UK. Therefore, it is an important tourist facility for the Highlands.	Community members and local organisations	Route D2 is now discounted and does not form a part of the proposed route.
Strathpeffer relies on tourism for a large portion of its economy. The North Coast 500 route attracts many people to the area of this historic Victorian Spa Town during the summer.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the importance of tourism to the Strathpeffer area. It is acknowledged that the NC500 route runs along the A835 to the south of the village, with the potential to be impacted by all route options within Section D. A socio economic assessment will be undertaken and will be presented as part of the EIA Report.
Concerns around the proposed line D2 bisecting farm units.	Landowners and occupiers	Route D2 is now discounted and does not form a part of the proposed route.
Route D2 comes very close to Ardross business units.	Landowners and occupiers	Route D2 is now discounted and does not form a part of the proposed route.
D1 will enclose a significant portion of the Clare plantation, a commercial woodland which generates local employment in the processing of raw products and also replanting operations.	Landowner and occupiers	We recognise Route Option D1 covers a portion of the Clare Plantation, adjacent to the River Sgitheach. A socio economic assessment will be undertaken and will be presented as part of the EIA Report. Woodland removal will be minimised where practicable, and potential impacts on woodland will be considered during the detailed design and EIA stages of the project.

We strongly oppose both D1 and D2 options. Route D1 and the alternative D2 would have significant impact on views from our business and the landscape character. These views dominate the playing and social (clubhouse) environment of the course and the Project would have a negative impact on the club and revenues	Landowner and occupiers	We recognise the importance of tourism to the area. Potential impacts on the landscape character, and visual receptors in and around Strathpeffer will be considered during development of the OHL alignment and will be minimised where possible. A socio-economic assessment will be undertaken and will be presented as part of the EIA Report. For further information please refer to our Common Themes and FAQ.

Section E – Dingwall to Beauly

Constraints in this section included areas of ancient woodland, the Fairburn GDL and Grade A-listed Fairburn Tower, Conon Islands SAC and Lower River Conon SSSI, and the Brahan GDL. There are a number of existing OHLs in the area including the 132kV Beauly – Corriemoillie OHL near to Muirton Mains and Loch Achonachie. Proximity to properties in this area was also a key consideration.

For section E, there is one sub option for E1, in addition to route Option E2 and E3. At the time of consultation in early 2023, we presented Option E1 with sub option E1.1 as our preferred option; this was based on our assessment that Option E1 with E1.1 was considered to be the environmentally and technically preferred option over Options E2 and E3 as it presents the best opportunity to reduce impact on the Fairburn GDL, visual receptors and habitat.

Option E1 (without sub option E1.1) was considered the technically preferred option considering ease of access, construction and less terrain/gradient challenges; it is considerably shorter in length and avoids peatland. However, Option E1.1 offered the opportunity to lessen potential impacts on the Fairburn GDL as it followed a westerly route around the edge of the GDL. Whilst Option E1 is the preferred route option, at this stage it is not clear whether the final route should incorporate sub option E1.1. Although there are technical and engineering challenges associated with E1.1, there is greater potential for environmental impact via incursion on the GDL area if E1.1. is not incorporated.

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on core paths, recreation and tourism, visual amenity, technology choice, wildlife, habitat and cultural heritage.

HES do not advise of a preference although identify the potential for significant adverse impacts in option E1 and E1.1 due to scheduled monuments in the south and the Fairburn GDL and A listed tower in the north.

From a landscape and visual perspective, NS advise that Option E1 is their preference and that options E1 and E1.1 are preferred from a protected areas perspective.

Our proposed route sections to be taken to alignment stage are:

- **E1**
- **E1.1**

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken in order to select a proposed route and find an acceptable alignment through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Table 3.5: Section E Overhead Line Consultation Responses

Community Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The transmission towers on the OHL line at E1 as it descends the Strath will sit low in the landscape. Option E1.1 deflects the OHL westwards which would be less intrusive. However, the non-preferred route E2 would be better but has been discounted with no explanation.	Community members and local organisations	From a landscape perspective, impacts on designations (National Scenic Areas (NSAs), Wild Land Areas (WLAs) and Inventory Garden and Designed Landscapes (GDLs)), character and visual amenity were assessed during the Route Selection Stage. Option E2 was discounted for technical engineering reasons due to challenges with peat, access, terrain and gradient making construction and maintenance difficult. Options E1 and E1.1 are preferred by NS due to lower potential for impact on protected areas and landscape and visual impact.
Access route concerns to the proposed pylons for E1 and E1.1. Current access would be via a single-track road and a listed stone bridge.	Community members and local organisations	The consideration of construction access solutions will be undertaken at the detailed design and EIA stages. A transport routing and abnormal loads report will be prepared identifying any risks to transport and access. We are aware of the Orrin Bridge C listed building and this will inform the transport routing report.

The Preferred route (E1) crosses close to Jamestown and Contin, which will have a significant visual impact on a landscape that has no existing OHL lines and will dominate the landscape as it crosses the Conon River.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise that the Proposed Route Option E1 crosses close to the villages of Jamestown and Contin. We note that the existing 132kV and 275kV lines cross the River Conon south west of Conon Bridge. Potential landscape and visual impacts will be considered during development of the alignment stage. Any impacts will be identified and assessed as part to the EIA.
Torr Achilty and the Strathconon valley are hugely significant as they represent the gateway to the northwest and to put pylons across or down the valley would be hugely detrimental.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise the significance Torr Achilty and Strathconon Valley. Potential landscape and visual impacts will be considered during development of the alignment stage. Any impacts will be identified and assessed as part to the EIA.
The A834, A835, NC500 route and their panoramic views would be ruined for local residents and those who travel from all over the UK and the rest of the world to enjoy the outstanding scenery of the area.	Community members and local organisations	We recognise that the NC500 route runs along the A835 to the south of Jamestown. Potential landscape and visual impacts will be considered during development of the alignment stage. Any impacts will be identified and assessed as part to the EIA.
Queries over the impact on the Core Path Network within the route options identified in Section E.	Community members and local organisations	We note the following core paths within section E which the route options pass over; Orrin Dam track, Orrin Circular-Fairburn, Coul Wood, Clash Wood and Ord Hill. Further environmental and engineering studies will be undertaken to minimise impact to recreation and visual receptors. For instance, sensitive siting of towers.
The Preferred Route (E1) follows the NW shore of Loch nam Bonnach. The forest roads and paths through the woods	Community members and local organisations	The recreational value of the forestry land adjacent to Loch nam Bonnach is recognised and is one reason that Route

between Dunmore and Loch Nam Bonnach and around Ord Hill are popular places for walkers, cyclists (FLS recognised mountain bike trails) and horse riders.		E1 is preferred over E3 in this area. Further environmental and engineering studies will be undertaken to seek to find an acceptable alignment and/or other design solution through this sensitive landscape and environment, together with appropriate mitigation.
Routes E1 and E3 would impact on valuable salmon fishing activities at River Orrin.	Community members and local organisations	The comment is noted and the importance of salmon fisheries in the River Orrin is recognised. Further consultation will be undertaken at detailed design stage with landowners and the Salmon Fisheries Board on the proposed alignment to mitigate any impact.
All crofts, homes and farms in the Breakachy area are on Private Water Supplies and interference could lead to serious problems with the already fragile water supply to these properties. There is no alternative in this area.	Landowners and occupiers	Once a preferred alignment for the OHL is identified, landowners will be consulted, and surveys undertaken to confirm the location of private water supplies. The outcome of this work and subsequent assessment will be presented in the EIA Report, with mitigation measures identified where required to safeguard private water supplies.
Impact on recreation and amenity if route E1 selected. The line will be visible from the Cnoc Croit na Maoile (Ord Hill) walk and viewpoints from Loch nan Bonnach and the circular track around Tor Breac.	Community members and local organisations	Potential impacts on the landscape character and visual receptors will be considered during development of the OHL alignment and will be minimised where possible.

Environmental Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
The Highland Council The Highland Council is supportive of renewable energy developments in principle, including the necessary grid connections. The Highland Council's priorities at present relate to minimising the effects on surrounding landscapes and visual amenity, demonstrating biodiversity enhancement, the provision of sufficient design information and cumulative effects with other offshore wind farm connections and their associated substations. The Highland Council have provided constraints mapping of environmental and social baseline information including natural heritage, landscape and flood risk designations. The highland council have also identified the information required in support of the application. A full description of the relevant planning policy context has been provided including separate references to the landscape and design policies of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. Further detail and discission is provided on the topics of noise, dust, transport and contaminated land, providing further detail on the application requirements.	**The Highland Council** Statutory Consultee	We welcome THC's in principle support for renewable energy projects. We would be happy to continue to liaise with THC's Landscape Officers to further develop the detailed design of the project. Photomontages and visualisations will be prepared as the project progresses. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) of the final route will identify and assess effects on landscape character, landscape designations and visual amenity. Where applicable this will include assessment of the effects on WLAs, SLAs and the World Heritage Site, focussing on the key qualities that are likely to be significantly affected. We are committed to 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. We have also introduced robust policies and procedures to manage and mitigate any impacts on irreplaceable habitats, like peatland and ancient woodland.

The Highland Council note the density of human population within Section E and need for due consideration of undergrounding options.		We welcome THC's description of the planning policy context. We welcome THC's baseline mapping, which THC acknowledges is not comprehensive but remains reflective of the constraint mapping undertaken by us. We acknowledge the supporting information requirements, the full extent of which will be subject to agreement via the EIA Scoping Report. We acknowledge the density of population in Section E and the presence of existing electricity transmission infrastructure. The detailed alignment will seek to both minimise cumulative effects with the existing infrastructure alongside minimising affects on communities.
Historic Environment Scotland <u>Scheduled monuments</u> Potential for significant adverse impact on the setting of the monuments, particularly in the south of the route section. <u>Category A listed buildings and Inventory Gardens & Designed Landscapes</u>	**Historic Environment Scotland** Statutory Consultee	We are aware of the scheduled Iron Age fort and these assets will strongly influence the design of an alignment in this area. We are aware of the Fairburn GDL and the A listed Fairburn tower. Option E1.1 was identified as an alternative route to Option E1 in an attempt to reduce the impact on these designations. Noted that there is still potential for significant impact and work will continue to identify an acceptable design solution in this area.

E1.1 marginally preferred over E1 as there may be more scope for reducing impacts on Fairburn Tower and GDL by mitigation through design and micro siting.		Cultural heritage assessment within this section will be further informed by a detailed desk-based analysis and site walkover survey including setting assessment. Consultation with HES and local archaeology groups will be maintained as the project progresses through the alignment stage and will include consultation on viewpoint selection for the setting assessment.
NatureScot <u>Landscape and visual</u> NS advise that Option E1 is their preference <u>Protected Areas</u> Options E1 and E1.1 offer greater potential to avoid direct impact on the Conon Islands SAC and the Lower River Conon SSSI.	**NatureScot** Statutory Consultee	We note that, in terms of landscape and visual, Nature Scot agrees with the proposed option E1. We agree that proposed options E1.1 and E1 presents the best opportunity to span the Lower River Conon SSSI and Conon Islands SAC.
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) SEPA consider that the following key issues must be addressed in project design (a) Minimising impacts on peat and peatland – this includes all peat, and should not be limited to NatureScot Priority Peatland Habitats (Class 1 and 2 peatlands) (b) Avoiding good quality or rare GWDTE habitats and minimising impacts on other GWDTE habitats, (c) Avoiding impacts on watercourses and other water features by ensuring suitable buffers, and using best practice design crossings and (d) Avoiding flood risk impacts.	**Scottish Environmental Protection Agency** Statutory Consultee	We recognise the importance of peatland along the proposed route, including priority peatland and the Caithness and Sutherland and Shielton Peatlands designated sites and will undertake peat surveys of the preferred alignment and will consult with SEPA on an appropriate method for peat probing. A GWDTE assessment will be undertaken during the EIA stage of the project. This will include NVC mapping data and provide a description of the bedrock and superficial geology.

		A flood risk assessment will be prepared as required and SEPA's guidance on assessing the impacts of development proposals on groundwater abstractions is noted and will be taken into account during preparation of the EIA.
The "Strathpeffer Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan", Highland Council, makes frequent references to importance of valley views to preserving the character of the conservation area.	Community members and local organisations	We acknowledge the importance of the Strathpeffer Conservation Area, as stated in a previous Section above. Additionally, we note the recent minor changes to the designation that have recently come into effect following a Conservation Character Appraisal carried out in 2022-23. The changes were approved by the Highland Council with effect from 17/08/2023. Further assessment will be undertaken at the detailed design and EIA Stages to seek to find an acceptable alignment and design solution through this sensitive landscape and environment, together with the identification of any appropriate mitigation.
E1 (and a section of E1.1) crosses an area of ancient semi-natural upland birchwood (Auchmore Wood and surrounding areas).	Community members and local organisations	We note that all Route Options within Section E cross areas of Ancient and Native Woodland. From a forestry perspective there is no preferred option. Any woodland removal would be minimised as much as possible and where practicable. Potential impacts on woodland will be considered during the detailed design and EIA stages of the project in consultation with Scottish Forestry.
The route crosses old battle sites and ancient crannogs and would be visible from Contin Church, of medieval origin.	Community members and local organisations	Contin Church is a B listed building approximately 400 m north of E1.1. Whilst there are no registered battlefields within the Section, further desktop and targeted site walkovers will be undertaken by the project archaeological team. This work will be used during the detailed design and

		EIA stage to consider potential impacts on the historic environment and inform alignment options and appropriate mitigation.
Route Option E1 scored Low for peatland in the 'key topics…' matrix, however, much of the hilltop area adjacent to Loch nan Eun is blanket bog vegetation growing on deep peat.	Community members and local organisations	We note the presence of Class 1 and Class 2 peatland within this Section, which is more extensive at the hillock adjacent to Loch nan Eun. As Option E2 runs through this blanket bog habitat for much of its Route, a high RAG rating has been applied to the peatland and habitat categories or Option E2. By contrast, the Preferred Route Option E1 was assigned a low RAG rating for peatland as the route avoids this section of peatland for the majority; this was one of the reasons that led to Option E1 being preferred and taken forward over E2
Concerns that the Proposed Route E1 crosses right over a "Waxcap Grassland' which is a rare, ancient fungal community that occurs in grass. Its conservation is a global priority.	Community members and local organisations	Habitat surveys will be completed in the appropriate season. These surveys will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation.
Option E1 is the most damaging to habitats and wildlife. It crosses the greatest area of biodiversity. The GDL is an astonishing area - felled plantations, standing plantations and only a small area that could be classed as garden.	Community members and local organisations	From a natural heritage perspective (which includes protected species and habitats) there is no clear preferred route option. NatureScot identify that Options E1 and E1.1 offer greater potential to avoid impact on the Conon Islands SAC and Lower River Conon SSSI. An EIA will be undertaken including assessment of the impact on wildlife and identifying mitigation as required.
RSPB It is concerning that the preferred route is located in very close proximity to Loch nam Bonnach and would pass between this loch and Loch nan Eun as birds will likely fly between the two	**RSPB** Non-Statutory Consultee	SSEN recognises that the Preferred Route Option E1 is close to both Loch nam Bonnach and Loch nan Eun. Further consideration of alignment options, design solutions and appropriate mitigation will be undertaken during the

lochs, with the line creating a collision risk. Surveys will be key in this area.		detailed design stage, informed by data from bird surveys, including flight activity surveys, currently being undertaken
There is a Black Grouse Lek taking place on Auchmore. The proposed route E1 crosses this area of moorland.	Landowners and occupiers	Bird surveys, including black grouse lekking surveys, are being undertaken by the project. These will be used to identify and assess impacts and inform design and mitigation.

Economic Impact

Summary of feedback	Contributing Stakeholder Group	Our Response
Concern about the impact on land holdings in the area around Faebait.	Landowners and occupiers	We recognise the Preferred Route Option E1 runs adjacent to land at Faebait farm. Throughout the detailed design stage further work and engagement with all affected landowners will be undertaken in determining the proposed alignment, seeking to minimise disruption as far as practicable. All landowners are also encouraged to be kept up to date through our Community Liaison Manager and mailing list. We are aware of a number of planned developments along the route and this will inform the detailed design and alignment.

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 decisions 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.

After the consultation period closed, we have analysed the feedback received as part of a review of each route option in sections A to E. 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.

The review undertaken resulted in changes to, or further assessment of, the preferred route options previously presented for Sections A, and D. In some sections this has resulted in further exploration of previously lesser preferred options, changes to preferred route option corridors, and exploration of new route options identified via consultation. The route options to be taken forward to the alignment development stage of the project are shown on shown in Figure 2 and in Appendix B - Proposed Route Options for Alignment.

Route options being taken forward to alignment

The following paragraphs provide a summary of the responses received from stakeholders on a Section-by-Section basis, and the decision we have made on the progression to the next stages of the design process.

Section A

We are proposing the following route sections are to be taken forward to the alignment stage:

- A1
- A1.1
- A1.3
- A1.5
- A1.6 (southern section only)

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on wildlife, peat and the candidate flow country world heritage site, cultural heritage, visual amenity, tourism and private water supplies. HES advise that there are significant challenges with all routes although A1.4 and A1.6 were preferred and careful design of an alignment will be required to avoid issues of national interest. NatureScot advise that from a landscape and visual perspective option A1 is less likely to have impact than A2 with options A1.1 and A1.4. Routes A1.5 and A1.6 require further work to minimise impact to landscape character and wild land. From a protected species perspective options A2 and A1.2 are less preferred, although all routes have challenges.

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken to find an acceptable alignment and/or design solution through this Section, particularly in reference to routeing south of Helmsdale, where no clear preference has been established currently. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Section B

Our proposed route options to be taken forward to alignment stage are:

- B1
- B1.1

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on whether the existing transmission corridors could be used, wildlife, cultural heritage, access tracks and private water supplies. HES advise that there are significant challenges with all routes although B3 is preferred and careful design of an alignment will be required. NS advise that from a landscape and visual perspective options B2 and B3 may have less impact than Option B1. From a protected species perspective option B1, B1.1 and B3 have potential for less impact, although all routes have challenges.

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken to find an acceptable alignment and/or design solution through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Section C

Our proposed route option to be taken to alignment stage is:

- C1

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on use of visualisations at consultation, visual amenity, wildlife and habitat, cultural heritage, access tracks, flood risk and private water supplies. HES advise that C2 is preferred due to the battlefield landscape and scheduled monuments along Route C1. NS advise that there is no preference from a landscape and visual perspective but that C1 has potential for less impact than C2 from a protected areas perspective.

Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken to find an acceptable alignment through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Section D

Our proposed route options to be taken to alignment stage are:

- D1
- Community alternative option D1.3

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on core paths, recreation and tourism, visual amenity, technology choice, wildlife, habitat and cultural heritage. HES do not advise of a preference although identify the potential for significant adverse impacts in option D2 and a pinch point in option D1. From a landscape and visual perspective, NS advise that Option D1 is their preference between Dornoch and the River Glass with Option D2.1 from the River Glass to Strathpeffer. NS notes option D1 interacts with lower number of protected areas.

Feedback from the local community in this section has identified an alternative route option, now named D1.3. This option will be taken to the alignment stage and fully appraised.

There is general support from statutory consultees for the preferred route put forward, however there are challenges along the route. Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken in order to select a proposed route and find an acceptable alignment through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Section E

Our proposed route options to be taken to alignment stage are:

- E1
- E1.1

Comments received from the local community in relation to this Section focused on core paths, recreation and tourism, visual amenity, technology choice, wildlife, habitat and cultural heritage. HES do not advise of a preference although identify the potential for significant adverse impacts in option E1 and E1.1 due to scheduled monuments in the south and the Fairburn GDL and A listed tower in the north. From a landscape and visual perspective, NS has highlighted potential for landscape impact across all options and that options E1 and E1.1 may have less potential for impact than other options in this section from a protected areas perspective.

There is general support from statutory consultees for the preferred route put forward, however there are challenges along the route. Further environmental and engineering survey work will be undertaken in order to select a proposed route and find an acceptable alignment through this Section. This work is currently being undertaken and will be reported on during the next design stage.

Summary

The proposed route identified within this document is shown on the following page (Figure 2), and in Appendix B - Proposed Route Options for Alignment. Figure 2 is also available to download from the project webpage. As discussed in this report, further work is being undertaken to evaluate route, alignment and design solutions in order to finalise the proposed options in Sections A, and D and to find an acceptable solution which minimises potential significant adverse environmental effects where possible. In all other Sections (Section B, C, and E) the preferred route put forward in the Consultation Document is taken forward as the proposed route.

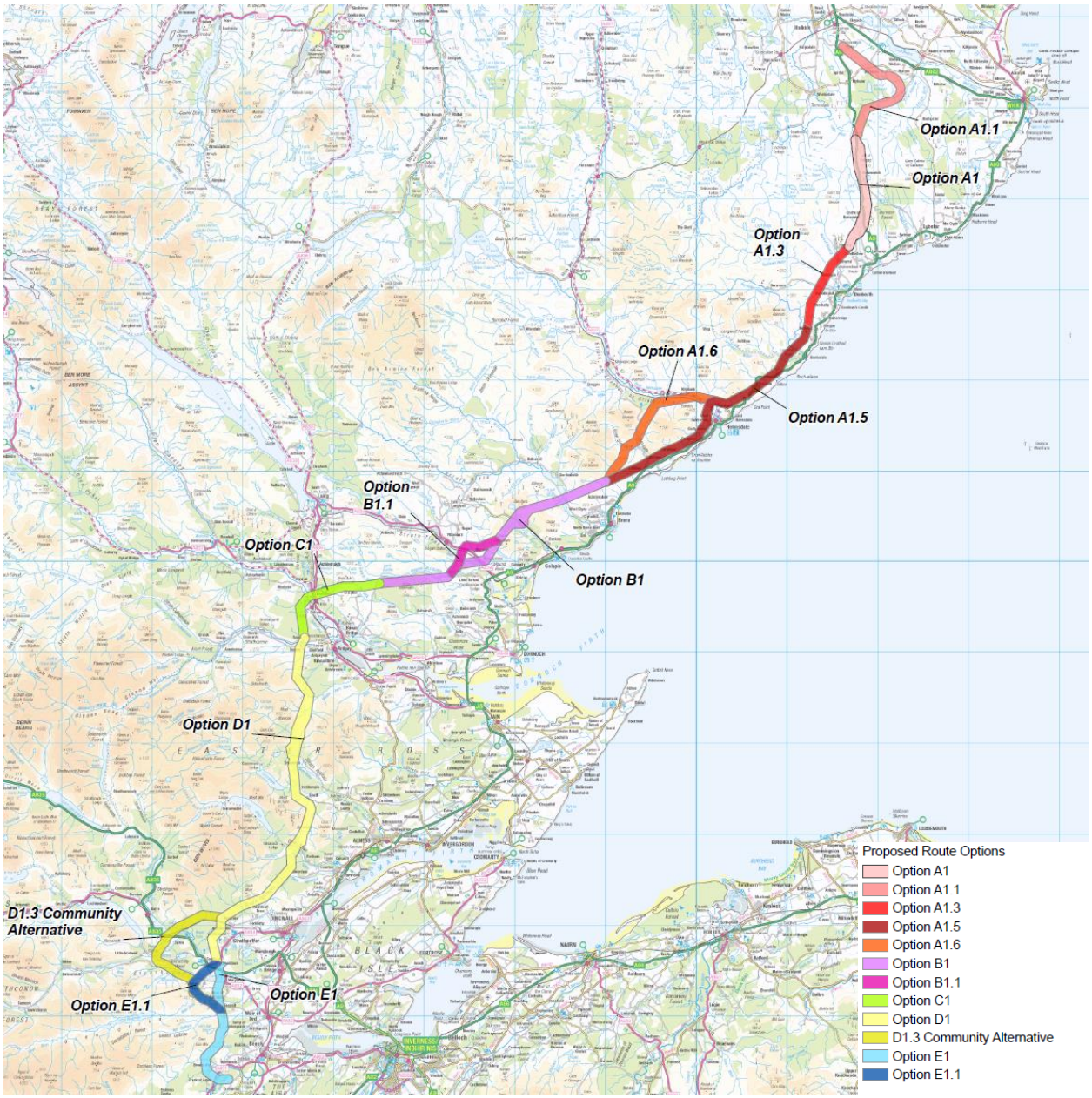
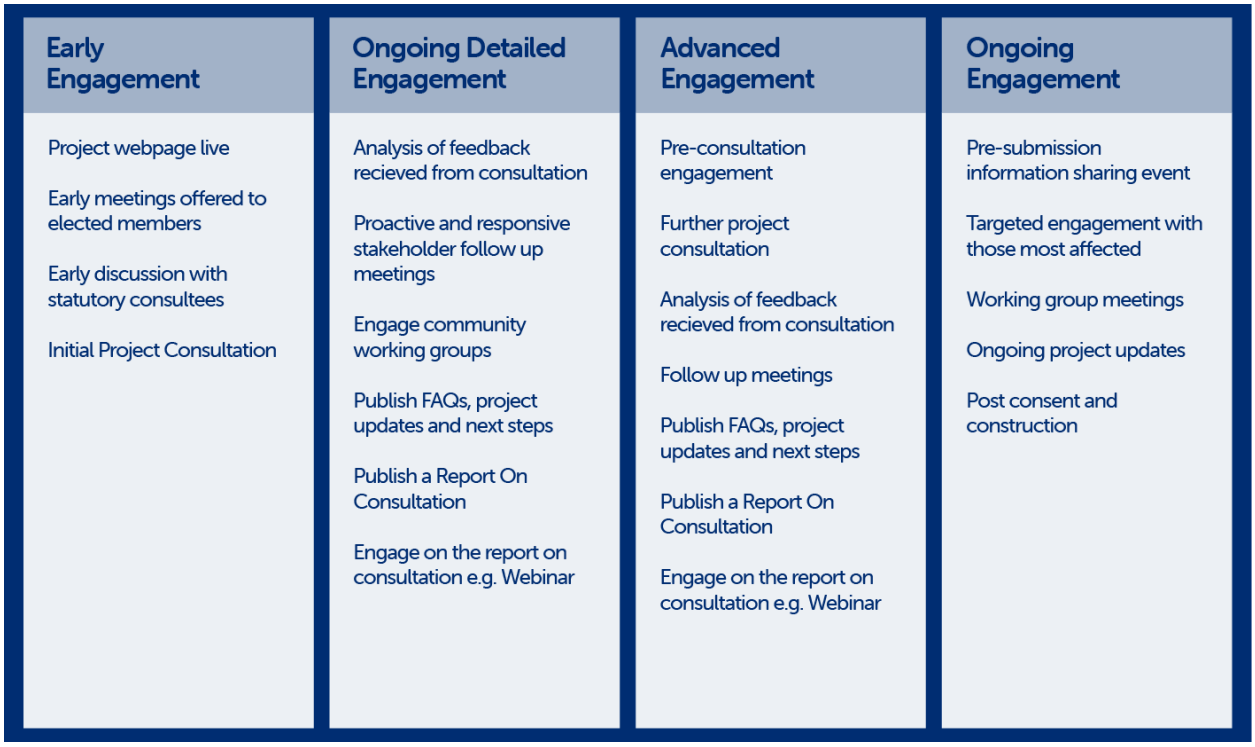


Figure 2 - Proposed Route options to take forward to alignment phase

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.

As part of the next steps, 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.

consent. The request for an EIA Scoping Opinion, on which consultees, including community councils will have an opportunity to comment, will likely be made in Spring 2024.

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 at slbb@sse.com.

Or write to us at:

Community Liaison Manager

SSEN Transmission

10 Henderson Road,

Inverness

IV1 1SN

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

ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/spittal--loch-buidhe--beauly-400kv-connection/

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.

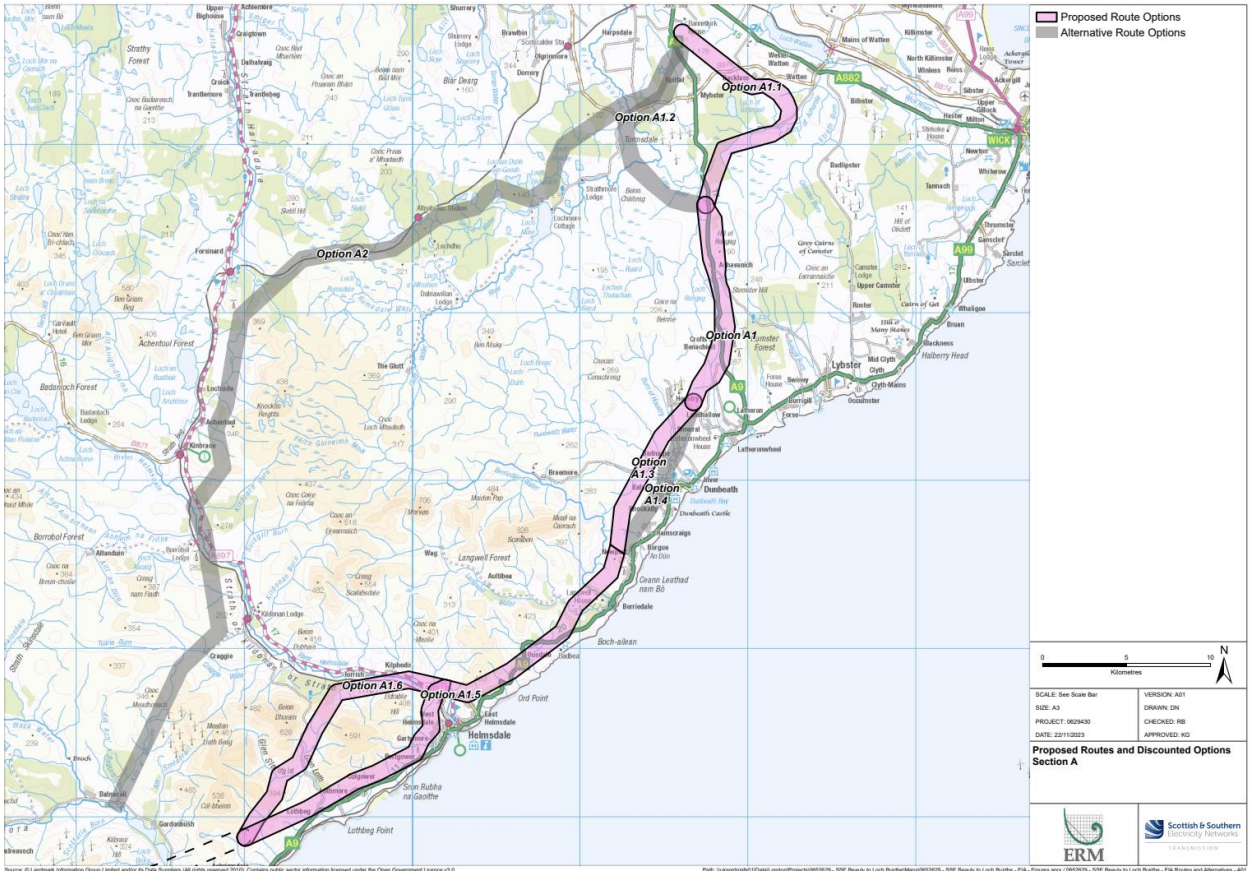
Special Protection Area (SPA)	An area designated under the Wild Birds Directive (Directive74/409/EEC) to protect important bird habitats. Implemented under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
Stakeholders	Organisations and individuals who can affect or are affected by SHE Transmission works.
Study 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

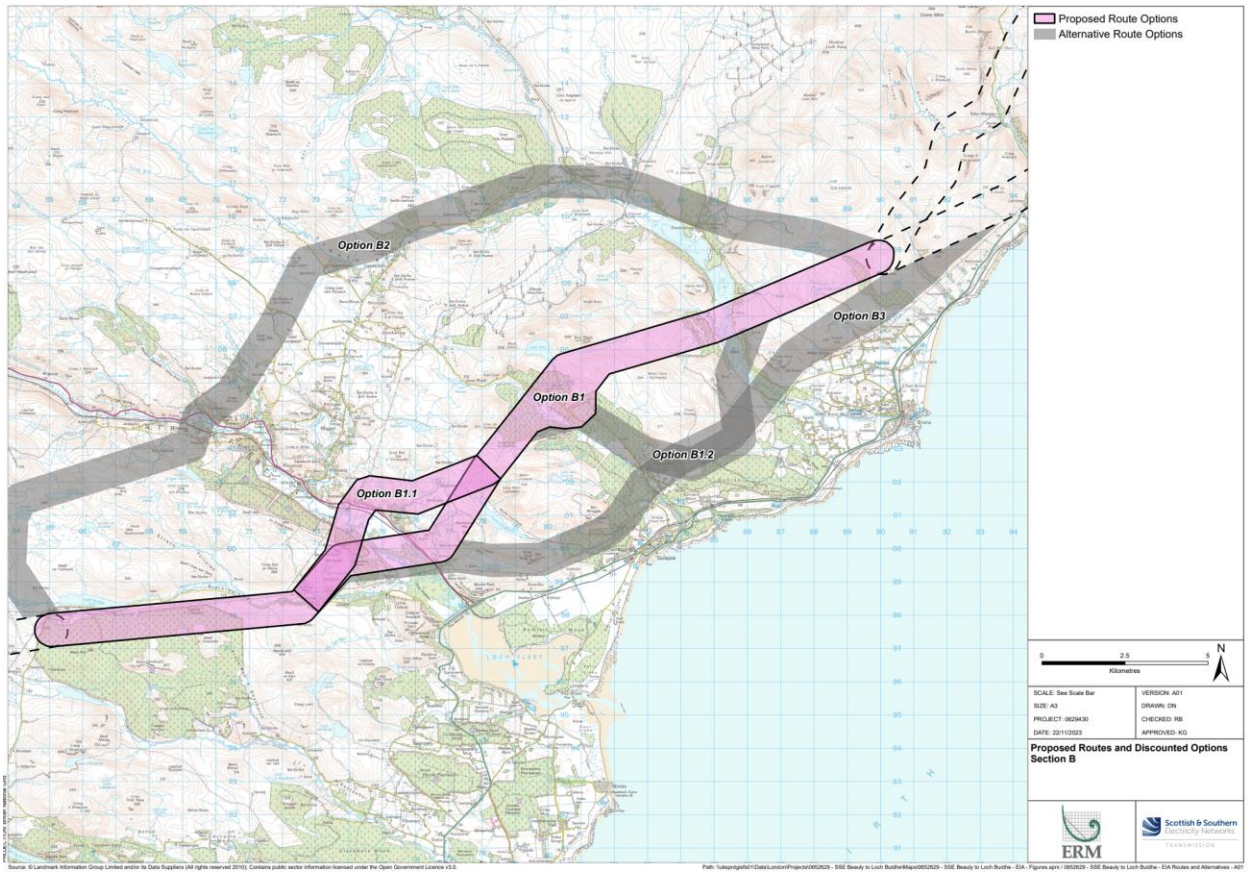
Appendix A – Postcard Invites

Appendix B - Proposed route options to be taken to alignment stage

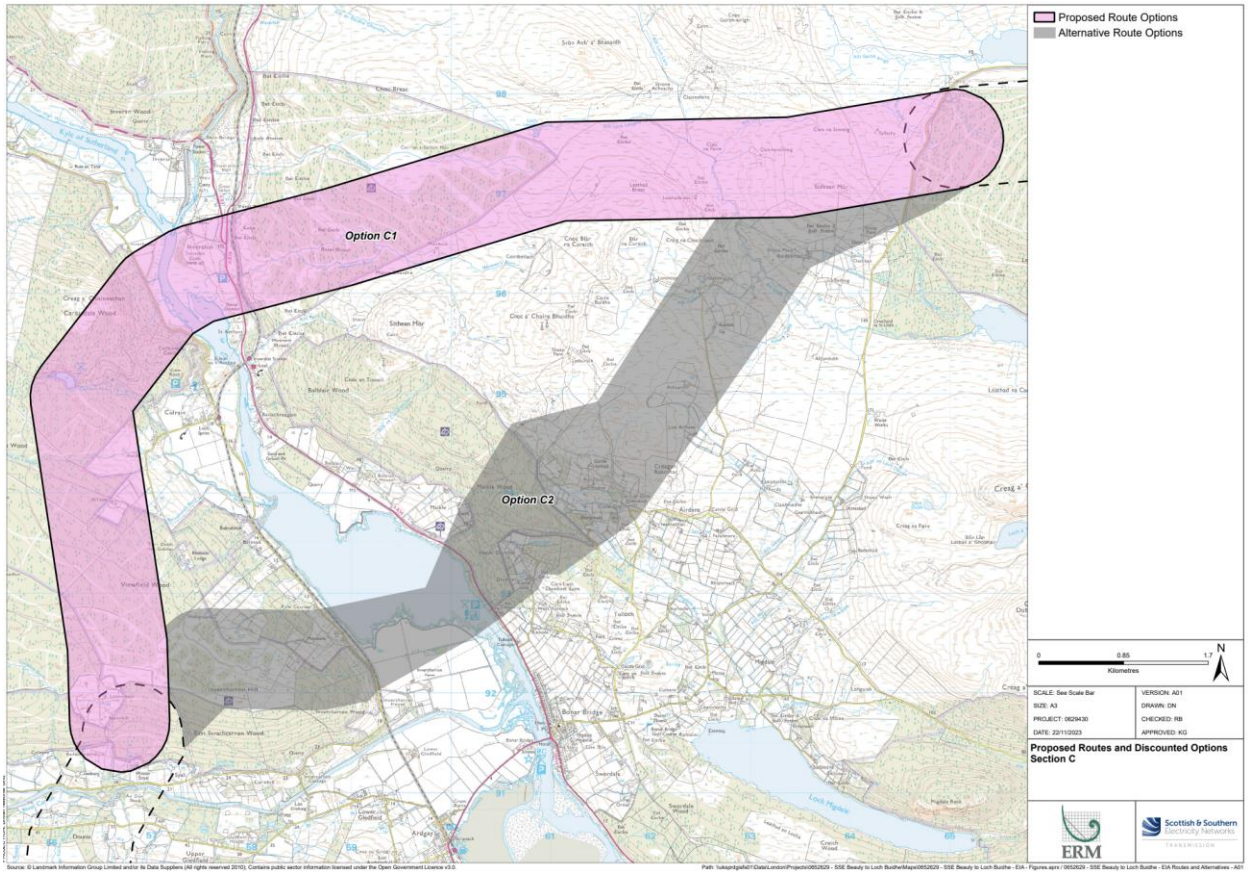
Section A



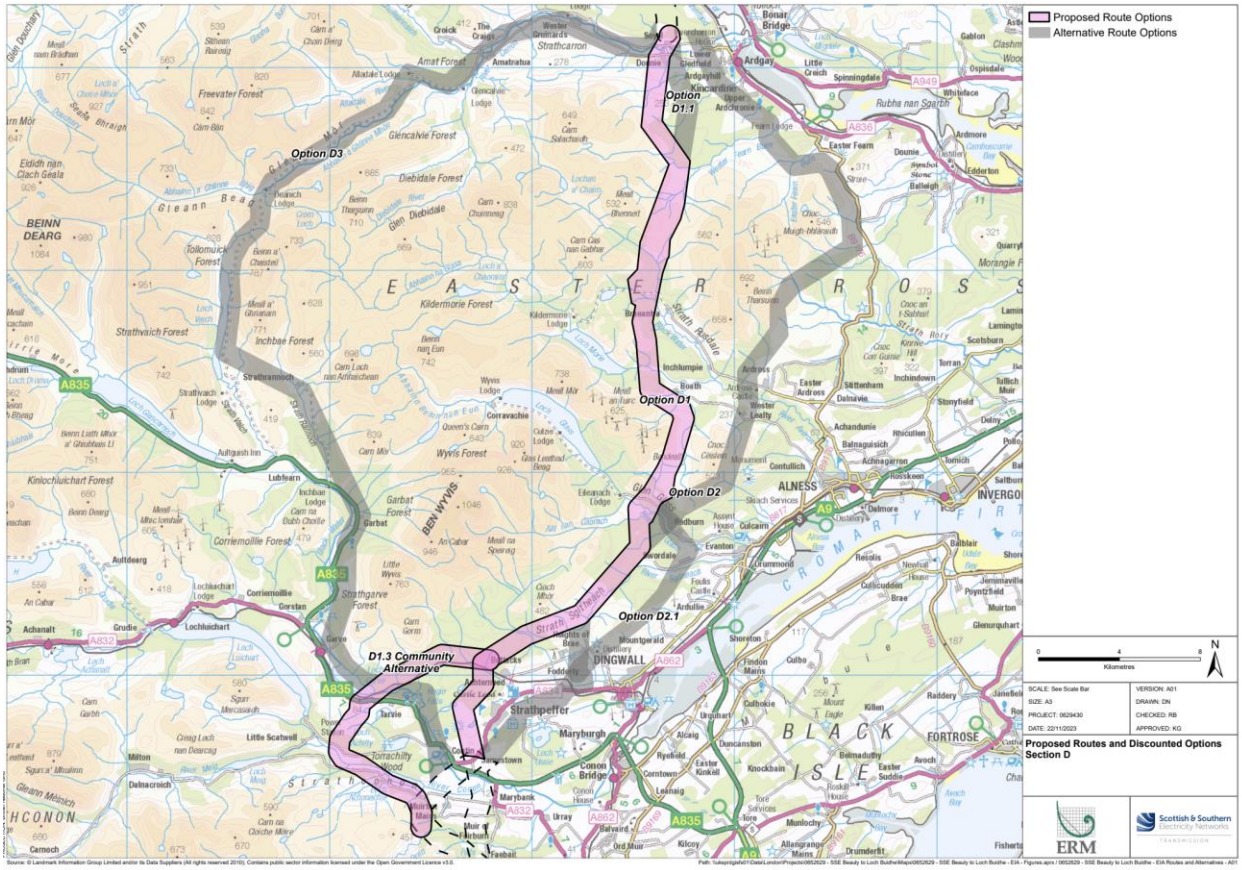
Section B


Proposed Route Options
Alternative Route Options
Option B2
Option B3
Option B1
Option B1.2
Option B1.1
Kilometres
Proposed Routes and Discounted Options
Section B
ERM
Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

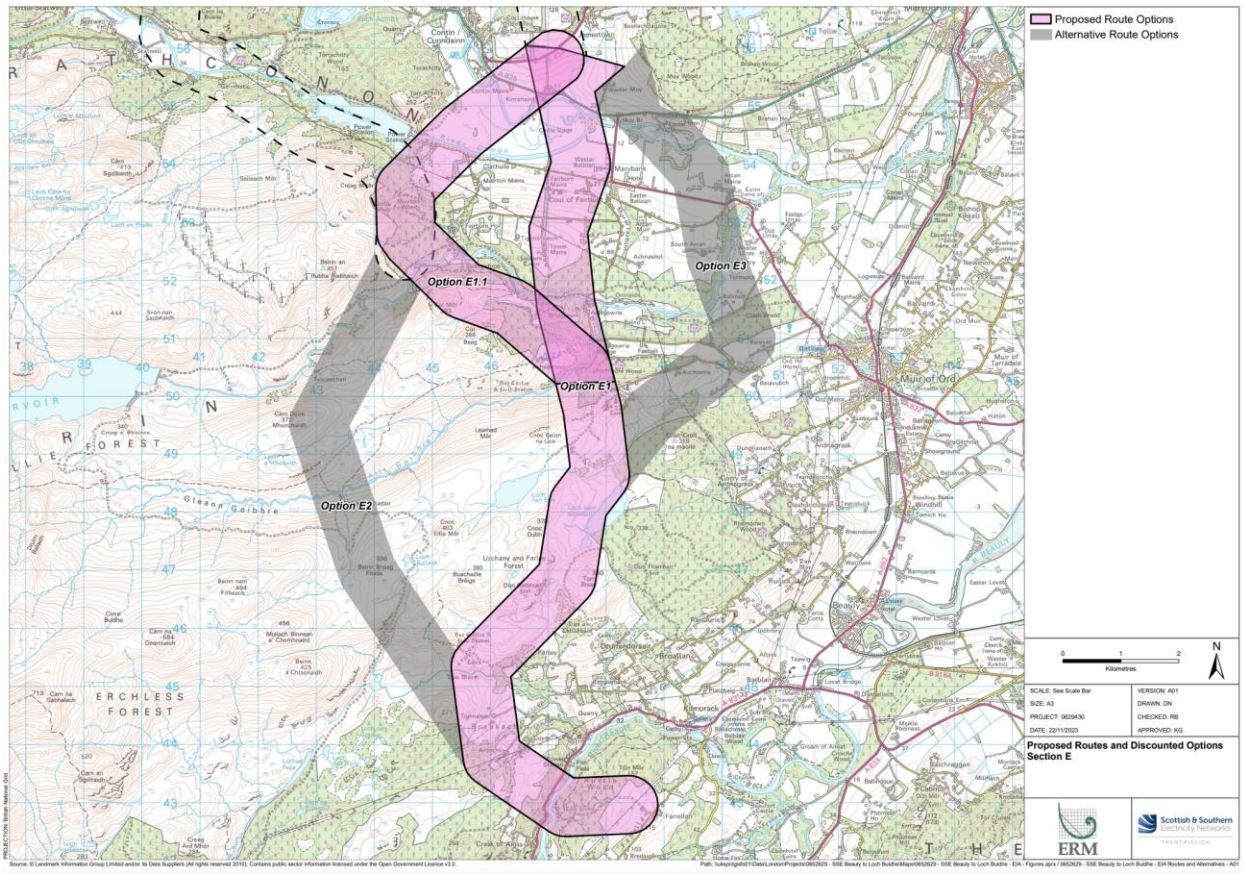
Section C


Proposed Route Options
Alternative Route Options
Option C1
Option C2
Kilometres
Proposed Routes and Discounted Options
Section C
ERM
Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

Section D


Proposed Route Options
Alternative Route Options
Option D1.1
Option D3
Option D1
Option D2
Option D2.1
D1.3 Community Alternative
Proposed Routes and Discounted Options
Section D
Kilometres
N
ERM
Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

Section E


Proposed Route Options
Alternative Route Options
Option E1.1
Option E1
Option E2
Option E3
Kilometres
Proposed Routes and Discounted Options
Section E
ERM