

## **APPENDIX V2-3.2: LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY**

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# 1. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This Appendix provides details of the LVIA assessment methodology and criteria for the Proposed Development.

1.1.2 This comprises an overview methodology. Any elements specific to individual Section assessments are detailed within the respective Section reports included in the Volume 2 of the EIA Report.

### *Assessment Guidance*

1.1.3 The LVIA has been prepared with reference to the *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, Third Edition (GLVIA3)<sup>1</sup> and *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*<sup>2</sup>. The following additional guidance documents have also been referred to where relevant:

- For assessment of Special Landscape Qualities of designated landscapes: *Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities (Working Draft 11)* (Scottish Natural Heritage<sup>3</sup> (SNH) and Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), 2018)<sup>4</sup>; and
- For assessment of Wild Land Areas (WLAs): *Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance* (NatureScot, 2020)<sup>5</sup>.

### *Professional Judgement*

1.1.4 GLVIA3 places a strong emphasis on the importance of professional judgement in identifying and defining the significance of landscape and visual effects. As part of this assessment, professional judgement has been used in combination with structured methods and criteria to evaluate landscape value and landscape and visual sensitivity, magnitude and significance of effect. The assessment has been undertaken and verified by two Landscape Professionals (Chartered Landscape Architects) to provide a robust and consistent approach.

## 1.2 Key Stages of the Assessment

1.2.1 GLVIA3 advises that landscape and visual effects should be assessed from a clear understanding of the development proposed and any mitigation measures which are being adopted.

1.2.2 The GLVIA3 methodology for landscape assessment involves an appreciation of the existing landscape resource, the susceptibility of its key components to accept the change proposed, and an understanding of the potential effects which could occur and how these could affect these key components.

1.2.3 Familiarity with the site and the extent, nature and expectation of existing views by visual receptors is a key factor in establishing the visual sensitivity in terms of the development proposed. The guidelines require evaluation of magnitude of change to views experienced by sensitive receptors, comprising individuals living, working, travelling and carrying out other activities within the landscape, and the subsequent evaluation of the significance of effects.

1.2.4 The potential to mitigate adverse effects should also be considered for both landscape and visual assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. (2013). *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition*

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage, The Countryside Agency. (2002). *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*.

<sup>3</sup> In 2020, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) rebranded as NatureScot. However when referencing publications produced by the organisation before this date, SNH has continued to be referred to as this was the name under which the document was published at that time.

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage and Cairngorms National Park Authority (2018) *Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities (Working Draft 11)*

<sup>5</sup> NatureScot (2020) *Assessing Impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance*. Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/doc/assessing-impacts-wild-land-areas-technical-guidance>. [accessed on 24.05.22]

1.2.5 There are five key stages to the assessment:

- Establishment of the baseline;
- Appreciation of the development proposed;
- Identification of key landscape and visual receptors;
- Identification of potential effects; and
- Assessment of significance of effect.

### 1.3 Establishment of the Baseline

1.3.1 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through a combination of desk study and site appraisal. The desk review has involved review the following general documents and sources:

- The *Highland-wide Local Development Plan* (HwLDP) (THC, 2012<sup>6</sup>) and *West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan* (WestPlan) (THC, 2019<sup>7</sup>).
- The Scoping Opinion and other consultation responses for the Proposed Development (refer to Volume 1, Chapter 6: Scope and Consultation) for the Proposed Development;
- Online mapping and aerial photography resources from Ordnance Survey, Google, Bing and National Library of Scotland.
- Work undertaken at previous stages of the design process, including the Environmental Route Options Report, Alignment Consultation Document, Reports on Consultation and previous landscape and visual studies undertaken as part of the Routeing and Alignment stages. Further detail is provided in **Volume 1: Chapter 4 - The Routeing Process and Alternatives**;
- Consultation feedback from the routeing and alignment phase;
- ZTVs produced for the Proposed Development (see **Figures V2-3.1-S0 to V2-3.1-S5** and **Appendix 3.3**); and
- Data and photographic records and notes obtained from previous site visits undertaken in 2016, 2017, 2019 and 2021.

1.3.2 In addition, the following specific baseline activities were undertaken for the two differing assessments of landscape and visual effects:

#### *Landscape Assessment Baseline Tasks*

1.3.3 The desk review for the landscape assessment has included review of the following additional documents and resources:

- *The Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas* (NSAs)<sup>8</sup>;
- NatureScot Landscape Character Types (LCTs) and Descriptions<sup>9</sup> (SNH, 2019 [online]);
- NatureScot *Map of Relative Wildness and Attribute Mapping* datasets<sup>10</sup>;
- Mapping and Descriptions for Wild Land Areas (WLA)<sup>11</sup>; and

<sup>6</sup> The Highland Council (2012) *Highland-wide Local Development Plan*. Available at:

[https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local\\_and\\_statutory\\_development\\_plans/199/highland-wide\\_local\\_development\\_plan](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/199/highland-wide_local_development_plan) [accessed June 2022]

<sup>7</sup> The Highland Council (2019) *West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan*. Available at:

[https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local\\_and\\_statutory\\_development\\_plans/582/west\\_highland\\_and\\_islands\\_local\\_development\\_plan](https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/178/local_and_statutory_development_plans/582/west_highland_and_islands_local_development_plan) [accessed July 2022]

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (2010): *The Special Qualities of the National Scenic Areas*. SNH Commissioned Report No. 374

<sup>9</sup> NatureScot: (2019): *Scottish Landscape Character Types Map and Descriptions* [ONLINE] <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions> [accessed August 2021].

<sup>10</sup> NatureScot, Natural Spaces [ONLINE]- <https://gateway.snh.gov.uk/natural-spaces/> [accessed July 2021]

<sup>11</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (2017): *Wild Land Areas Map and Descriptions* [ONLINE] <https://www.nature.scot/doc/wild-land-areas-map-and-descriptions-2014> [accessed January 2022]

- Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes<sup>12</sup>.

#### Identification of Landscape Character Zones and Baseline Landscape Value

- 1.3.4 A combination of desk and site survey has been used to define geographic areas along the length of the Proposed Development where a uniformity of landscape characteristics is considered to be present. Baseline analysis of these Landscape Character Zones (LCZs) has involved the identification and description of their key defining landscape characteristics and evaluation of relative landscape value. This process is further described in **Appendix V2-3.1**.
- 1.3.5 The value of the landscape is an important consideration in informing later judgement of the significance of effects. Landscape value concerns the perceived importance of the landscape when considered as a whole, and within the context of the study area and is established through consideration of the following factors:
- Presence of landscape designations, other inventory or registered landscapes / landscape features or identified planning constraints;
  - The scenic quality of the landscape;
  - Perceptual aspects, such as wildness or tranquillity;
  - Conservation interests such as cultural heritage features or associations, or if the landscape supports notable habitats or species;
  - Recreational value; and
  - Rarity, either in the national or local context, or if it is considered to be a particularly important example of a specific landscape type.
- 1.3.6 It should be noted that absence of a designation does not necessarily mean that a landscape or component is not highly valued, as factors such as accessibility and local scarcity can render areas of nationally unremarkable quality highly valuable as a local resource.
- 1.3.7 Criteria for the allocation of perceived landscape value are outlined in **Table 1** below:

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<sup>12</sup> Historic Environment Scotland [ONLINE] <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/gardens-and-designed-landscapes/> [accessed January 2022]

**Table 1: Landscape Value Criteria**

Landscape Value	Criteria
<b>High</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The landscape is closely associated with features of international or national importance which are rare within the wider context;</li> <li>The landscape is of high scenic quality and forms a key part of an important designated landscape or planning constraint; and/or</li> <li>The landscape is an example of a scarce resource within the local context and is of considerable local importance for its, scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The landscape is associated with features of national or regional importance which are relatively common within the wider context;</li> <li>The landscape forms part of a designated landscape or is associated with other features of importance but is not rare or distinctive within the local context; and/or</li> <li>The landscape is one of a number within the local context appreciated for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.</li> </ul>
<b>Low</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The landscape characteristics are common within the local and regional context and the landscape is not associated with any particular features or attributes considered to be important; and/or</li> <li>The landscape is of poor scenic quality and is not appreciated for any recreational or cultural associations.</li> </ul>

#### *Visual Assessment Baseline Tasks*

- 1.3.8 A combination of desk and field survey was used to establish the range and distribution of potential visual receptors within the study area. Visual receptors can be defined as individuals occupying and using the study area with the potential to obtain views of the Proposed Development. Potential visual receptors included in the assessment have included those experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes and popular viewpoints used by the public.
- 1.3.9 The following additional resources were used to enhance understanding of the use of the study area by potential visual receptors:
- The Highland Council (THC) Core Paths Interactive Map<sup>13</sup> [online];
  - The Highland Council: Outdoor Highlands [online]<sup>14</sup>;
  - Scottish Hill Tracks (Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways), 2011)<sup>15</sup>; and
  - Other web based and published sources providing information on local resources and activities within the study area (see **Appendix V2-3.14: List of References**).
- 1.3.10 Site visits were undertaken to verify the visual receptors identified through desk study, identify any further potential receptors which had been missed and collate information on baseline visual amenity, including information on the types and activities of visual receptors likely to be present, and the nature of the existing views which are obtained. Site recording involved the completion of standardised recording forms and annotation of 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 Ordnance Survey plans, supported by a photographic record of views from key receptor locations.

## **1.4 Appreciation of the Development Proposed**

- 1.4.1 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline landscape, and any peripheral or ancillary features proposed.

<sup>13</sup> The Highland Council, Core Paths Interactive Map [ONLINE]:

<https://highland.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2fd3fc9c72d545f7bcf1b43bf5c8445f> [accessed January 2022].

<sup>14</sup> The Highland Council, Outdoor Highlands [ONLINE]: <https://www.highland.gov.uk/outdoorhighlands/> [accessed January 2022]

<sup>15</sup> The Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways) (2011): Scottish Hill Tracks (Fifth Edition) Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

Analysis of the proposed activities and changes which would take place leads to an understanding of the potential effects that may occur to the landscape and visual resource.

- 1.4.2 This stage has included review of all available desk-based information relating to the Proposed Development in terms of its long term physical appearance and requirements for construction and access. Site visits were also undertaken to view developments of a similar type and description to those proposed.

## 1.5 Identification of Key Landscape and Visual Receptors

- 1.5.1 The identification of key landscape and visual receptors with the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development is the first step in the analysis of the potential for significant effects to occur. Landscape and visual receptors can be described as follows:

- **Landscape receptors** comprise key characteristics or individual features which contribute to the value of the landscape and have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. Landscape receptors are identified through analysis of baseline characteristics when considered in relation to the impacts which might result from a development of the type proposed.
- **Visual receptors** comprise individuals experiencing views from locations such as buildings, recognised routes and popular viewpoints used by the public. Potential visual receptors are identified through analysis of desk resources, mapping and field survey, as described under 'Establishment of the Baseline' above. A review of the ZTV in the context of site survey is used to identify the potential for visual receptors to be affected by the Proposed Development.

## 1.6 Identification of Potential Effects

- 1.6.1 The second step in the assessment process involves the identification of potential effects which may occur as a result of the interaction of the Proposed Development with the identified landscape and visual receptors.

- 1.6.2 The assessment takes into account direct effects upon existing views, landscape elements, features and key characteristics and, also, indirect effects which may occur secondarily to changes affecting another landscape component or area. The identification of potential effects is a two-fold process, giving consideration as to how these effects may arise from aspects of the Proposed Development and how they may be accommodated by the existing baseline features.

- 1.6.3 Where it is established that potential effects could be limited by mitigation measures, these are also given consideration.

- 1.6.4 Potential effects are evaluated through the allocation of criteria for sensitivity and magnitude.

### *Landscape and Visual Sensitivity*

- 1.6.5 Sensitivity concerns the nature of the baseline landscape or visual receptor, and the ability to accommodate development of the type proposed without compromising the key characteristics and / or composition.

- 1.6.6 There are two aspects which contribute to the evaluation of landscape and visual sensitivity: value and susceptibility to change. The consideration of these two separate aspects in the differing assessments for landscape and visual amenity are outlined below:

### Landscape

- Value: The baseline value of the landscape and the contributory value of individual landscape receptors to the landscape as a whole; and
- Susceptibility: The ability of landscape receptors to accommodate development of the type proposed without changing the intrinsic qualities of the landscape as a whole.

### Visual Amenity

- Value: The baseline value of a particular view to the visual receptor, including the perceived; and
- Susceptibility: The susceptibility of the viewer to changes to the view, giving consideration to the particular activity they may be involved in and also the composition of the baseline view and importance of the proposed area of change as a part of the view.

1.6.7 Criteria for the evaluation of sensitivity to change are presented in **Table 2**.

**Table 2: Landscape and Visual Sensitivity Criteria**

Sensitivity Rating	Landscape Sensitivity	Visual Sensitivity
<b>High</b>	A highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and</li> <li>• recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium</b>	A reasonably valued landscape with a composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present;</li> <li>• recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present;</li> <li>• roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is an important element in the view and there are no detracting features present; and</li> <li>• workplaces where the changed aspect is an important element of the view and there are no detracting features present.</li> </ul>
<b>Low</b>	A relatively unimportant landscape which is potentially tolerant of a large degree of change of the type proposed.	Visual receptors obtaining views from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dwellings and publicly accessible buildings where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and / or numerous detracting features are present;</li> <li>• recreational routes and locations where the changed aspect is an unimportant element in the view and / or where numerous detracting features are present;</li> <li>• roads and transport routes where the changed aspect is a less important element</li> </ul>



		<p>in the view and / or where some detracting features are present; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>workplaces where the changed aspect is a less important element in the view and / or where some detracting features are present.</li> </ul>
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*Landscape and Visual Magnitude*

1.6.8 Magnitude of change concerns the extent to which the existing landscape character or view would be altered by the Proposed Development. Elements specific to the evaluation of magnitude of change for the differing assessments of landscape and visual amenity are detailed below:

Landscape

- The degree to which features or characteristics may be removed, altered or added within the landscape;
- The geographical extent of proposed changes;
- Whether changes would be direct or indirect; and
- The potential duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).

Visual Amenity

- The scale or extent of proposed changes within the view;
- The location of proposed changes within the view, relevant to other existing features;
- The extent to which this may alter the composition or focus of the view; and
- The duration and reversibility of proposed changes (taking into consideration proposed mitigation measures where relevant).

1.6.1 Criteria for the evaluation of magnitude of change are presented in **Table 3**. In recognition of the differing changes that would occur over time, two ratings for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development, and during operation, assumed to be approximately 10 years post construction, once landscape / habitat reinstatement and any other mitigation or planting has had time to establish.

**Table 3: Landscape and Visual Magnitude of Change Criteria**

Magnitude Rating	Landscape	Visual
<b>High</b>	Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive change over a more limited area.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a very noticeable change in the existing view.
<b>Medium</b>	Perceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to notable change in a localised area.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a noticeable change in the existing view.
<b>Low</b>	Virtually imperceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or perceptible change in a localised area.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a perceptible change in the existing view.
<b>Negligible</b>	No discernible change in any landscape characteristics or components.	Where the Proposed Development would result in a barely perceptible change in the existing view.

## 1.7 Assessment of Significance of Effects

1.7.1 Evaluation of the predicted significance of effect has been carried out through the analysis of the anticipated magnitude of change in relation to the landscape or visual sensitivity, taking into account any proposed mitigation measures, and is established using professional judgement.

1.7.2 In recognition of the potential for effects to vary over time, where relevant, the assessment has been undertaken at two different stages: during the construction phase, and during operation, once landscape / habitat reinstatement measures and any mitigation measures or other planting have been allowed to establish. For the operational effect this is assumed to be approximately 10 years after the completion of construction and reinstatement works.

1.7.3 The significance of effect for landscape and visual elements is considered as follows:

### Landscape Effects

- The assessment takes into account identified effects upon existing landscape receptors and assesses the extent to which these would be lost or modified in the context of their importance in determining the existing baseline character.

### Visual Effects

- The assessment takes into account likely changes to the visual composition, including the extent to which new features would distract or screen existing elements in the view or disrupt the scale, structure or focus of the existing view.

1.7.4 The assessment takes into consideration the potential for effects to be adverse, where changes such as the addition of new distracting features, or the removal of existing positive features, are anticipated to negatively affect the landscape or view; or beneficial, where changes, such as the removal of existing distracting features or the addition of associated planting or other mitigation measures are anticipated to positively influence the landscape or view.

1.7.5 Criteria used for the assessment of effects are presented in **Table 4**. For the purposes of the LVIA, effects with a rating of Moderate or greater are considered to be significant in terms of the EIA Regulations.

**Table 4: Landscape and Visual Significance of Effect Criteria**

<b>Effect Significance</b>	<b>Landscape Effects</b>	<b>Visual Effects</b>
<b>Major Adverse</b>	The Proposed Development is at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and would be a dominant feature, resulting in considerable reduction in scenic quality and large scale change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would become a prominent and very detracting feature and would result in a very noticeable deterioration to an existing highly valued and well composed view.
<b>Moderate Adverse</b>	The Proposed Development is out of scale with the landscape, or inconsistent with the local pattern and landform and may be locally dominant and/or result in a noticeable reduction in scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would introduce some detracting features to an existing highly valued view or would be more prominent within a pleasing or less well composed view, resulting in a noticeable deterioration of the quality of view.
<b>Minor Adverse</b>	The Proposed Development does not quite fit with the scale, landform or local pattern of the landscape and may be locally intrusive but would result in an inappreciable reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a perceptible but not detracting feature within a pleasing or valued view or would be a prominent feature within a poorly composed view of limited value, resulting in a small deterioration to the existing view.
<b>Negligible</b>	The Proposed Development sits well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and would not result in any discernible reduction in scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.	The Proposed Development would form a barely perceptible feature within the existing view and would not result in any discernible deterioration or improvement to the view.
<b>Minor Beneficial</b>	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a small or localised improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a fairly attractive feature and / or remove a fairly detracting feature from an existing less well composed view, resulting in a small improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.
<b>Moderate Beneficial</b>	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would become a new attractive feature within, or result in the removal or partial removal of an existing detracting feature from, a poorly composed or less well composed view leading to a noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.
<b>Major Beneficial</b>	The Proposed Development would add / remove landscape features or alter the composition of landscape components which would result in a very noticeable improvement to the landscape characteristics and scenic quality of the landscape.	The Proposed Development would form a prominent new attractive feature within, or result in the removal of an existing very detracting feature from, a poorly composed view leading to a very noticeable improvement to the attractiveness, composition and value of the existing view.

## 1.8 Assumptions and Limitations

1.8.1 The LVIA is subject to the following limitations and assumptions:

- The prominence of the Proposed Development in the landscape and views will vary according to the prevailing weather conditions. The LVIA has been carried out, as is best practice, by assuming the 'worst case' scenario i.e. on a clear, bright day in winter, when neither foreground deciduous foliage nor haze can interfere with the clarity of the view obtained.
- The assessment of operational effects assumes that disturbed areas not required for the operation of the Proposed Development (temporary tracks, laydown and working areas, excavations for tower foundations etc.) would be successfully reinstated to reflect, as far as possible, similar vegetation types and appearance to that present prior to construction. It is noted that these vegetation types may not necessarily comprise identical habitat types and value to those previously present. Habitat change is discussed separately in **Volume 2: Chapter 4**.
- ZTVs are used to inform the landscape, visual and cumulative assessments. The limitations and technical specifications for production of ZTVs are included in **Appendix V2-3.3**.
- The field assessment of visual effects has been undertaken from public roads, footpaths or open spaces. For residential receptors, assumptions have been made about the types of rooms in buildings and about the types and importance of views from these rooms. For there to be a visual effect, there is the need for a viewer and therefore only buildings that are in use have been considered in the visual assessment.
- The assessment of effects on visual receptors occupying buildings such as residences and public buildings includes consideration of potential for views from exterior areas associated with the building including gardens where appropriate. These effects are referenced where relevant.
- The assessment reflects the baseline situation at the time of site work (i.e. February – March 2022) and therefore does not take account of any changes to the landscape fabric which have taken place after this date.
- The LVIA considers the design as presented in **Volume 1: Chapter 3** and **Figures V1-2.1A – V1-2.1QQ**. It is assumed that where movement of permanent features may be taken within the LoD, this would be carefully considered to ensure that landscape and visual effects would not be substantially greater and further mitigation measures would be employed as necessary.