Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Overhead Line

Summary Alignment Report on Consultation

January 2025

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

Introduction

The purpose of this Report is to summarise the consultation responses received as part of our Refined Route and Alignment Options consultation for the proposed Spittal – Loch Buidhe - Beauly 400kV Overhead Line (OHL) project and show how the Proposed Alignment that is being taken forward to consent application under section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 has been informed by this process.

Consultation with the public, statutory and non-statutory bodies and landowners / occupiers was open from 26 February until 28 April 2024 for the Refined Routes, and from 27 May until 22 July 2024 for the Alignment Options. We hosted public consultation events as well as meetings with a wide range of stakeholders and welcomed feedback via a range of methods including online feedback forms, emails and letters.

Public events were held in March and June 2024 throughout the proposed overhead line route seeking feedback on Refined Route and Alignment options respectively. Information presented at, and related to, these events can be found on the project webpage. The Refined Route and Potential Alignment maps can be accessed directly by clicking on the relevant link.

This Report summarises the consultation process undertaken, including details of consultation methods and advertising together with those consulted and/or contributing to the process. It also summarises the feedback received including concerns, questions and areas of support and how this has influenced our actions and decision-making. The full Report on Consultation is available on the project webpage.

The sections of the proposed overhead line for consultation are as follows:

- **Section A (Spittal to Brora)**
- **Section B (Brora to Loch Buidhe)**
- **Section C (Loch Buidhe to Dounie)**
- **Section D (Dounie to near Strathpeffer)**
- **Section E (Near Strathpeffer to Beauly)**

We also received feedback covering a number of common themes such as the need for the project, the impact of electromagnetic fields (EMFs) and the impact on property prices and private water supplies. Some of these common themes are addressed within the full Report on Consultation, but we have also developed a suite of documents which provide detailed information on each of these themes, as well as a set of responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) which can all be viewed here.

This report summarises feedback received from all stakeholders who provided a response during the consultation period. The feedback has been summarised into each route section A to E and the Proposed Alignment being taken forward to consent application is shown in Figure 1.

Summary of Public Consultation Engagement

March 2024 - Refined Route

14 Consultation events

858 Registered attendees

186 Pieces of written feedback

June 2024 - Alignment

14 Consultation events

552 Registered attendees

130 Pieces of written feedback

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

Useful links

- **Pathway to 2030** – Projects delivering a Network for Net Zero
- **Why are the Pathway to 2030 Projects needed?**
- **Frequently Asked Questions** on our Pathway to 2030 Projects

*Please note that relevant feedback received during the Refined Routes consultation was considered as part of the Alignment Options consultation feedback analysis.

Summary of Project Specific Feedback and Our Decisions

Section A – Spittal to Brora

What we presented

Refined Route
Refined Route A1 (comprising sub-options A1.1, A1.3, A1.5) plus alternative sub-option A1.6

Alignment
Potential Alignment (comprising sub-sections A1.1, A1.2, A1.3, A1.4 and A1.5)
Alternative Alignments A1.1 and A1.3

Feedback received

Concerns were received from the local community regarding visual amenity (particularly near Berriedale), access arrangements and traffic (particularly around Gartymore / West Helmsdale), impacts on ancient woodland (particularly at Learnaich Hill), wildlife (particularly near Rangag Loch), cultural heritage impacts (particularly around Helmsdale) and flood risk.

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Response to feedback

From our studies and based on feedback, the Refined Route and Potential Alignment continue to provide the best balance between environmental protection and engineering requirements for construction and operation.

The location of Ancient Woodland (AW) was a key consideration during the OHL design process. As much as possible the Route options sought to minimise the impact on AW. Our approach to AW as an Irreplaceable Habitat is by restoring a greater area of AW than has been lost. This will be in addition to Biodiversity Net Gain calculations and commitments.

We are continuing to liaise closely with Historic Environment Scotland (HES) in relation to minimising impacts on Cultural Heritage assets at key points along the route.

A full suite of ecology, landscape and cultural heritage surveys and assessments is being undertaken and will be provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) accompanying the s37 consent application.

Explanation of decision

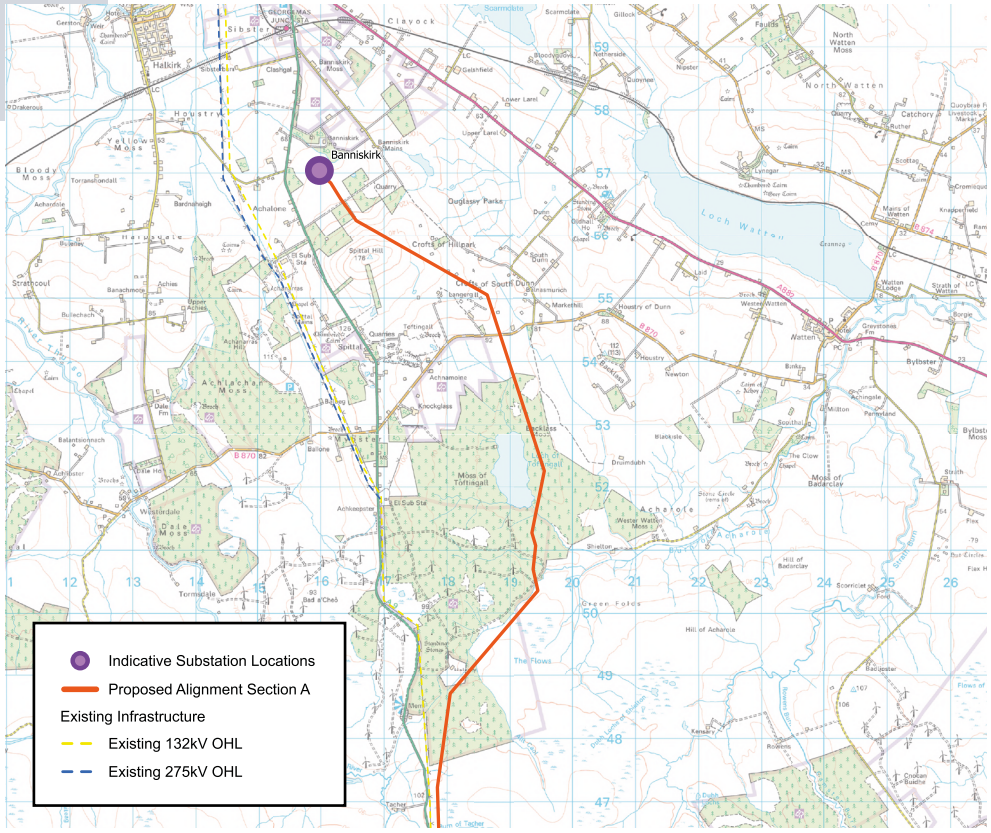
Refined Route
Refined Route A1 (comprising sub-options A1.1, A1.3, A1.5) was taken forward to alignment development. After carefully considering the feedback received, inland route options (including A1.6) at Berriedale have been discounted due to the presence of a number of Schedule Monuments, ecological designations and Class 1 peatland. The Refined Route A1 as presented continues to provide the overall best balance of environmental and engineering requirements.

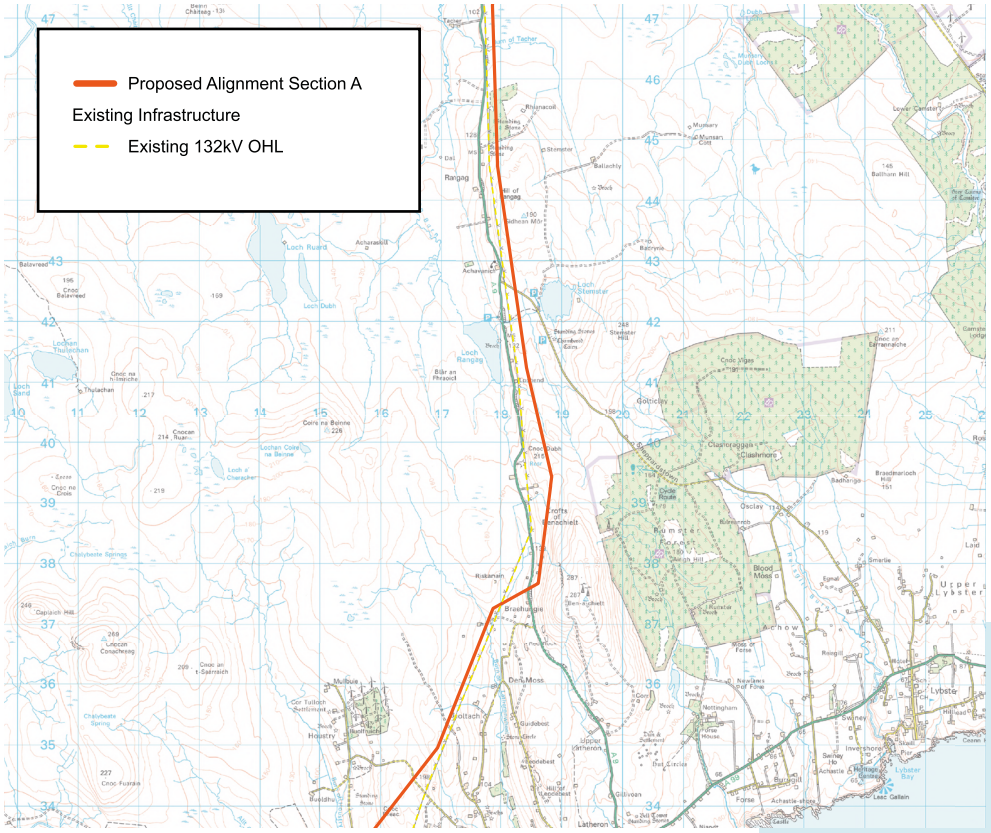
Alignment
The Potential Alignment in all sub-sections will be taken forward to consent application as Proposed Alignment Section A.

Alternative Alignments A1.1 and A1.3 have been discounted from further consideration on the basis of various environmental and engineering constraints. Given the lack of options in this Section we are progressing on the Potential Alignment and are continuing to refine the design to minimise impacts on protected assets and ecologically sensitive areas.

Section A – Spittal to Brora

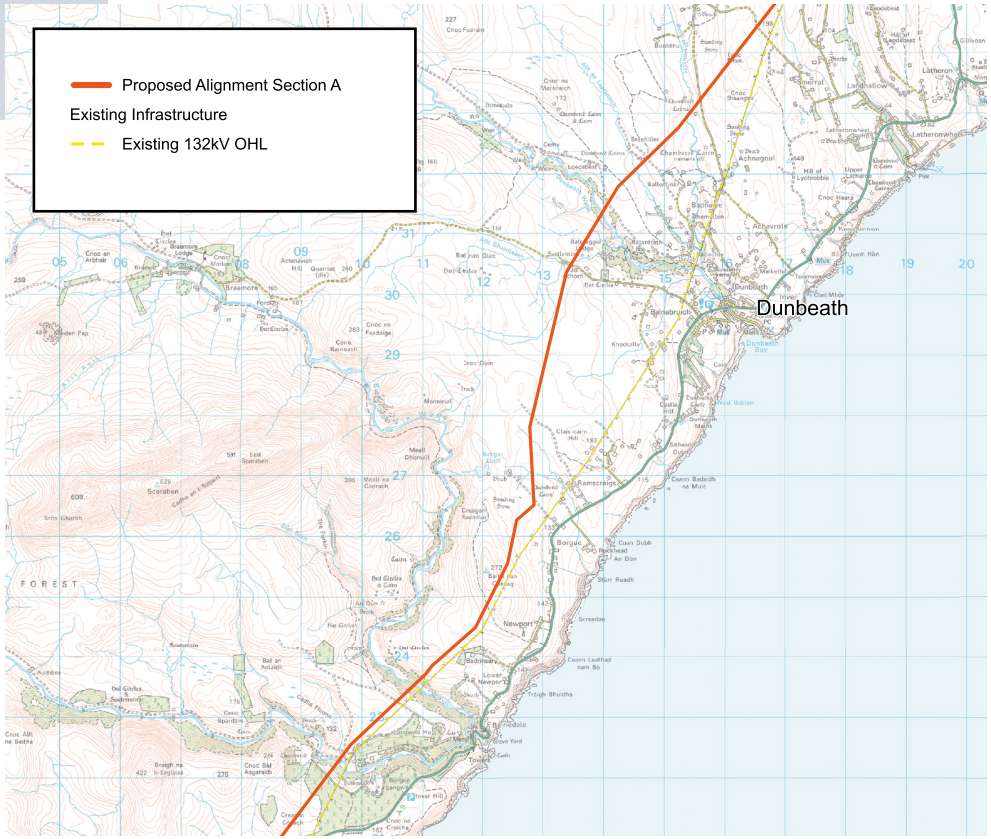
Proposed Alignment

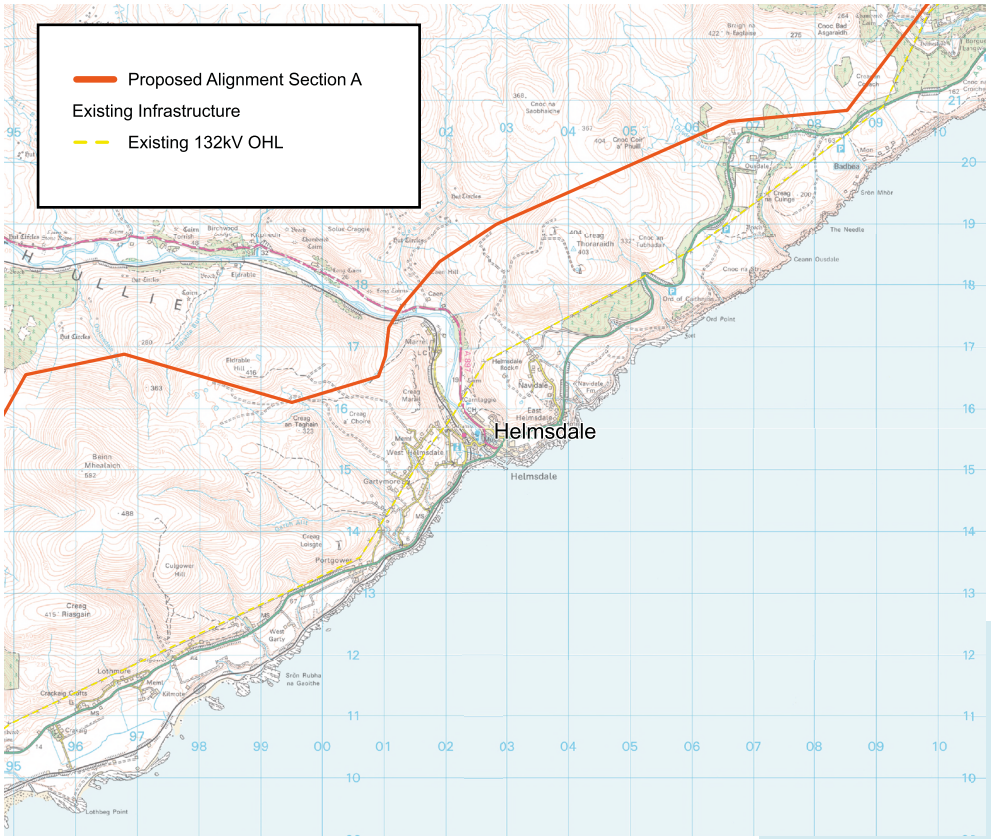




Section A – Spittal to Brora

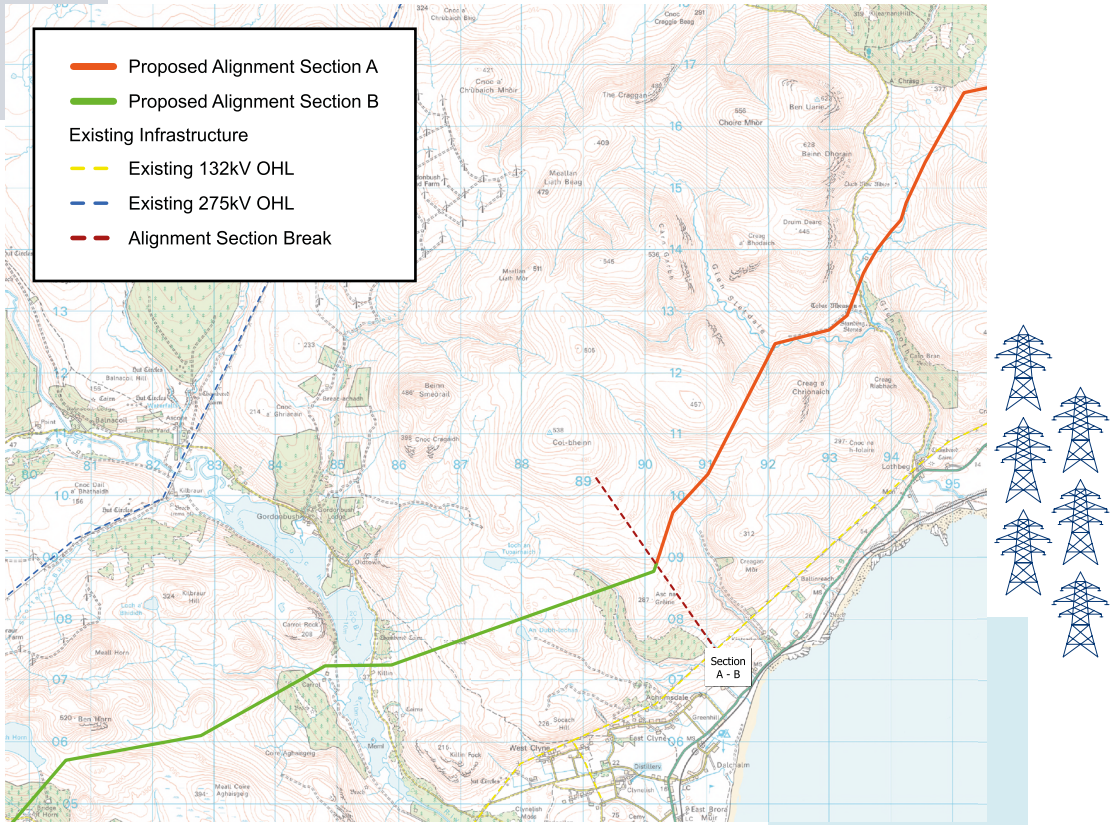
Proposed Alignment





Section A – Spittal to Brora

Proposed Alignment



Section B – Brora to Loch Buidhe

What we presented

Refined Route
Refined Route B1
Alternative route B1.1

Alignment
Potential Alignment (comprising sub-sections B1.1 and B1.2)

Feedback received

Concerns were received from the local community regarding visual amenity, wildlife and habitat, cultural heritage, access tracks and flood risk.

Response to feedback

From our studies and based on feedback, the Refined Route and Potential Alignment continue to provide the best balance between environmental protection and engineering requirements for construction and operation.

We recognise key environmental considerations in this section include Ancient Woodland, Carrol Rock SSSI, Strathfleet SSSI, Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SSSI/SPA, Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA, peatland, recreational activities and the potential to affect the setting of scheduled monuments.

The key engineering constraints in the area included crossing of Loch Brora, A839, railway and existing overhead line infrastructure and topography and slopes.

A full suite of ecology, landscape and cultural heritage surveys and assessments is being undertaken and will be provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) accompanying the s37 consent application.

Explanation of decision

Refined Route
Refined Route B1 including Alternative route B1.1 was taken forward to alignment consultation.

This decision was made based on the consideration of the potential impacts to cultural heritage assets, ancient woodland, engineering challenges and feedback from the community.

Alignment
Section B was split into 2 sub-sections for the purpose of alignment development and consultation (B1.1 and B1.2).

For sub-sections B1.1 and B1.2 only one alignment option was identified as being viable due to the presence and complexity of environmental and engineering constraints.

The Potential Alignment in all sub-sections will be taken forward to consent application as Proposed Alignment Section B.

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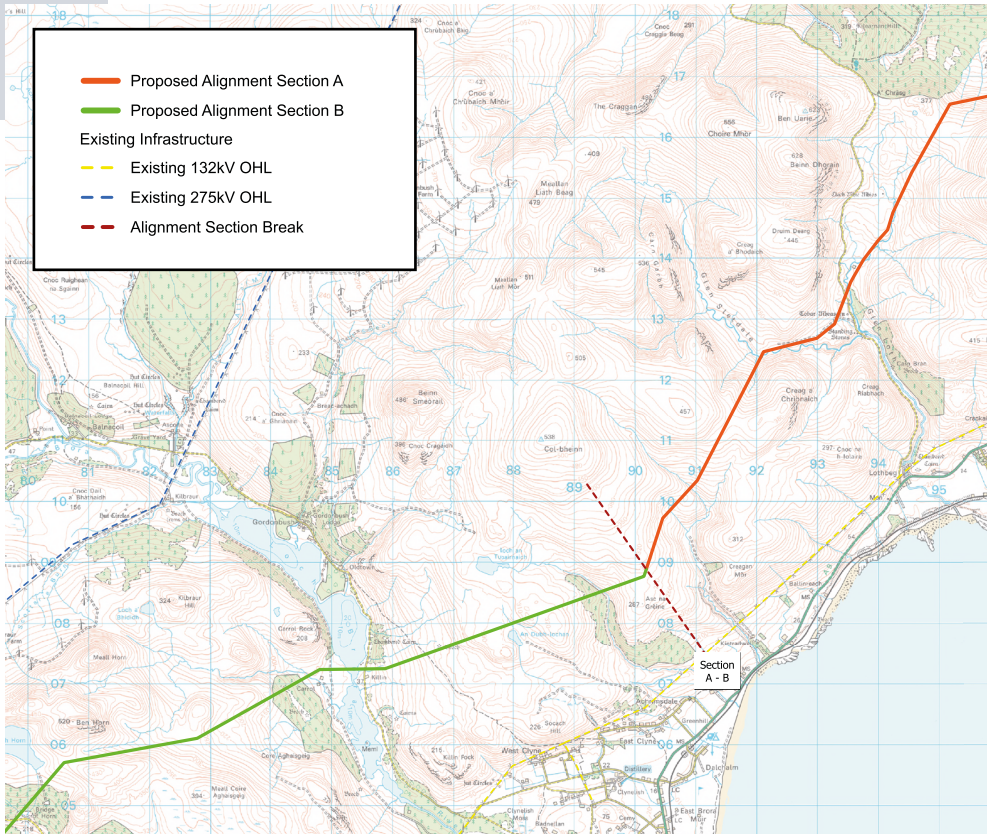
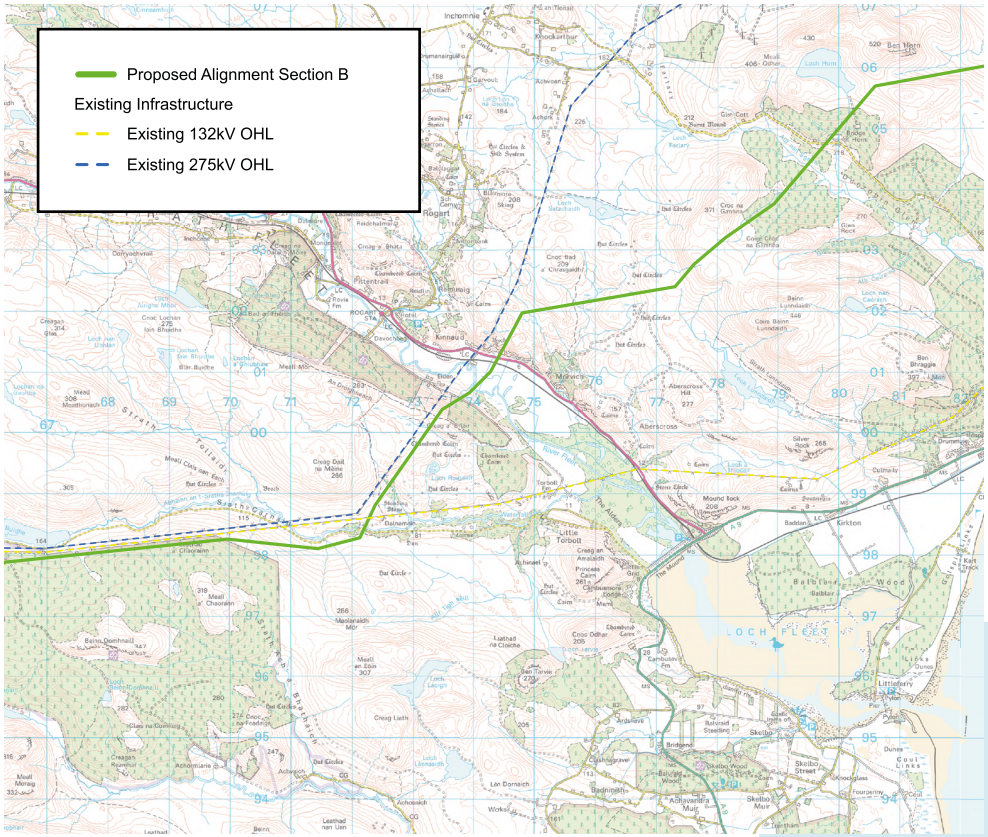
Section B – Brora to Loch Buidhe

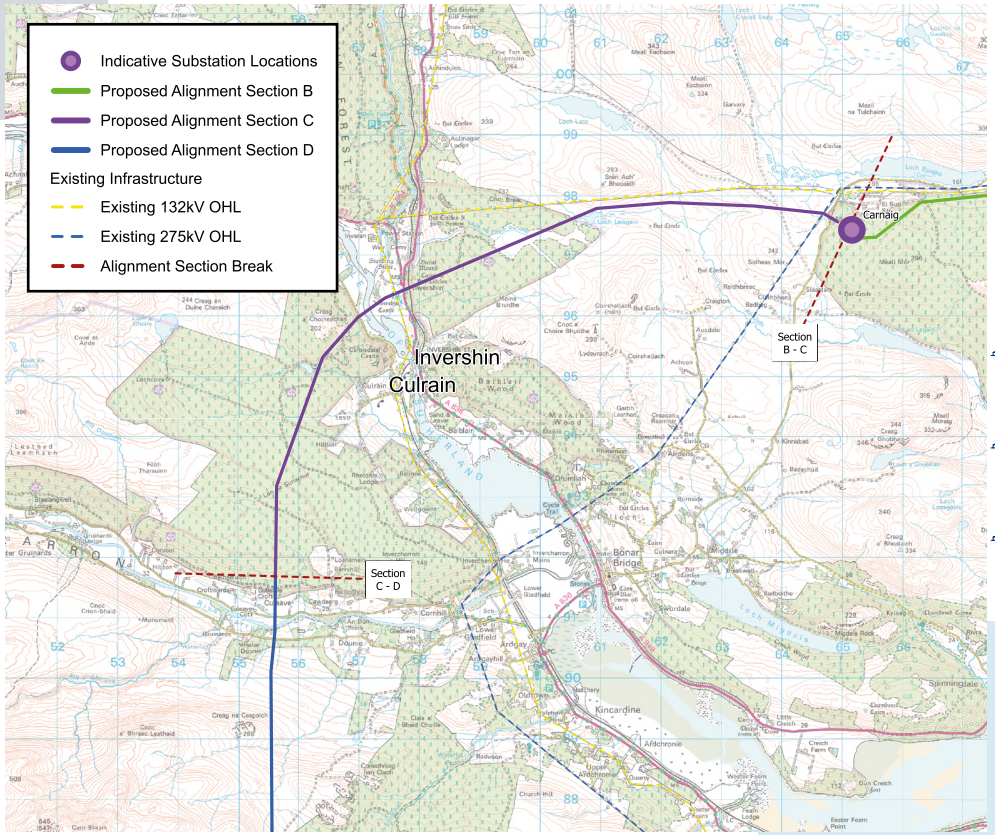
Proposed Alignment





Section B – Brora to Loch Buidhe

Proposed Alignment



Section C – Loch Buidhe to Dounie

What we presented

Refined Route
Refined Route C1

Alignment
Potential Alignments C1.1 and C1.2
Alternative Alignments C1.1 and C1.2

Feedback received

Concerns were received from the local community regarding visualisations presented during the consultation, visual amenity, impact on tourism, wildlife and habitat, cultural heritage, access tracks and flood risk.

Response to feedback

From our studies and based on feedback, the Refined Route and Potential Alignment continue to provide the best balance between environmental protection and engineering requirements for construction and operation.

We recognise key environmental considerations in this section include proximity to local dispersed properties, natural heritage designations such as the Strath Carnaig and Strath Fleet Moors SPA and SSSI, the River Oykel SAC and Kyle of Sutherland Marshes SSSI, scheduled monuments, the Battle of Carbisdale Registered Battlefied and areas of peatland. The key engineering constraints in the area included crossings of the Kyle of Sutherland, existing 275kV and 132kV overhead line infrastructure, A836 road and a railway crossing. The terrain throughout this section together with the location of the Balblair Windfarm Development limit options.

A full suite of ecology, landscape and cultural heritage surveys and assessments is being undertaken and will be provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) accompanying the s37 consent application.

Explanation of decision

Refined Route
Refined Route C1 (comprising sub-options C1.1 and C1.2) was the only option presented and was therefore taken forward to alignment development.

Alignment
Section C was split into 2 sub-sections for the purpose of alignment development and consultation (C1.1 and C1.2).

Potential Alignment C1.1 and C1.2 is preferred over Alternative Alignment C1.1 and C1.2 when considering both environmental (impacts on Scheduled Monument and forestry) and engineering constraints (sits at a lower altitude, avoids steep climbs and reduces constructing on steep cross slopes).

The Potential Alignment in both sub-sections will be taken forward to consent application with minor modifications as Proposed Alignment Section C.

Alternative Alignments C1.1 and C1.2 have been discounted from further consideration.

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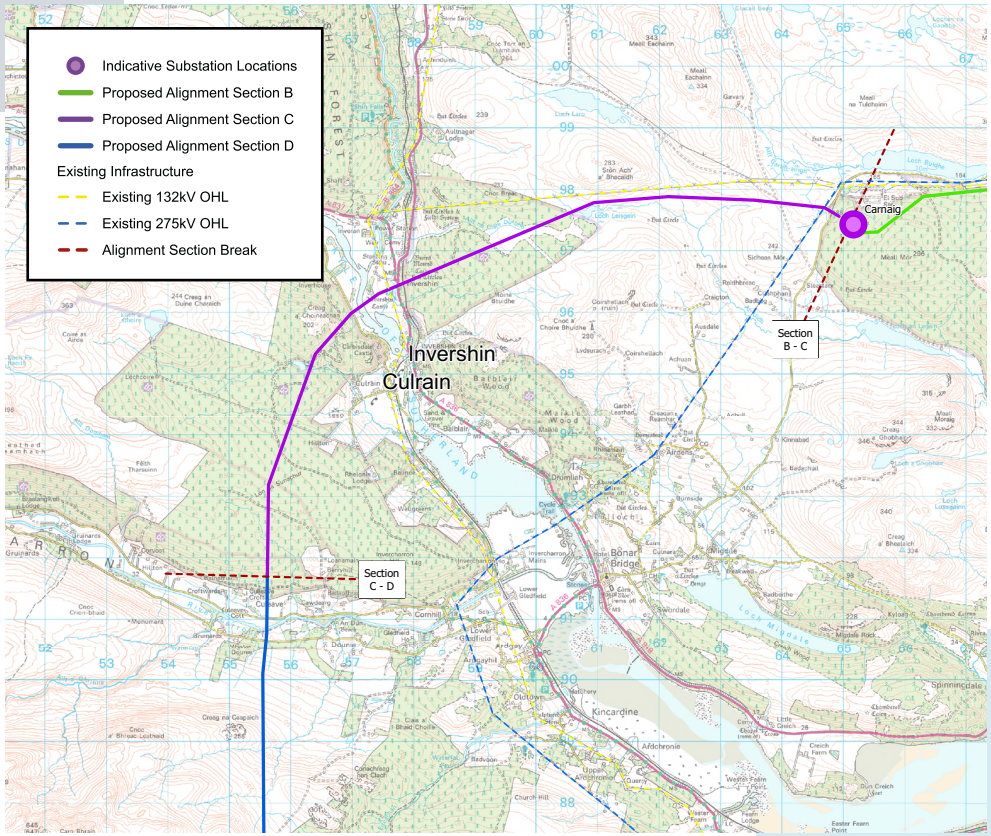
Section C – Loch Buidhe to Dounie

Proposed Alignment



Section D – Dounie to near Strathpeffer

What we presented

Refined Route
Refined Route D1

Alignment
Potential Alignments D1.1 and D1.2
Alternative Alignments D1.1 and D1.2

Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Overhead Line

Feedback received

Concerns were received from the local community regarding visualisations presented during the consultation, visual amenity, wildlife and habitat, cultural heritage, access tracks and private water supplies.

Response to feedback

From our studies and based on feedback, the Refined Route and Potential Alignment continue to provide the best balance between environmental protection and engineering requirements for construction and operation.

We recognise key environmental considerations in this section include potential for the alignment to be visible from residential properties in and around Dounie and Strathrusdale, Ancient Woodland, peatland, a Drinking Water Protected Area, Schedule Monuments, proximity to the Rhiddoroch - Beinn Dearg - Ben Wyvis Wild Land Area and the Allt nan Caorach SSSI.

The key engineering constraints in the area include peat, steep slopes and complexity of the construction due to the Cairns designations to the scheduled monument located at the Heights of Brae and areas of non- designated and unrecorded heritage assets.

A full suite of ecology, landscape and cultural heritage surveys and assessments is being undertaken and will be provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) accompanying the s37 consent application.

Explanation of decision

Refined Route
Refined Route D1 was the only option presented and was therefore taken forward to alignment development.

Alignment
Section D was split into 2 sub-sections for the purpose of alignment development and consultation (D1.1 and D1.2).

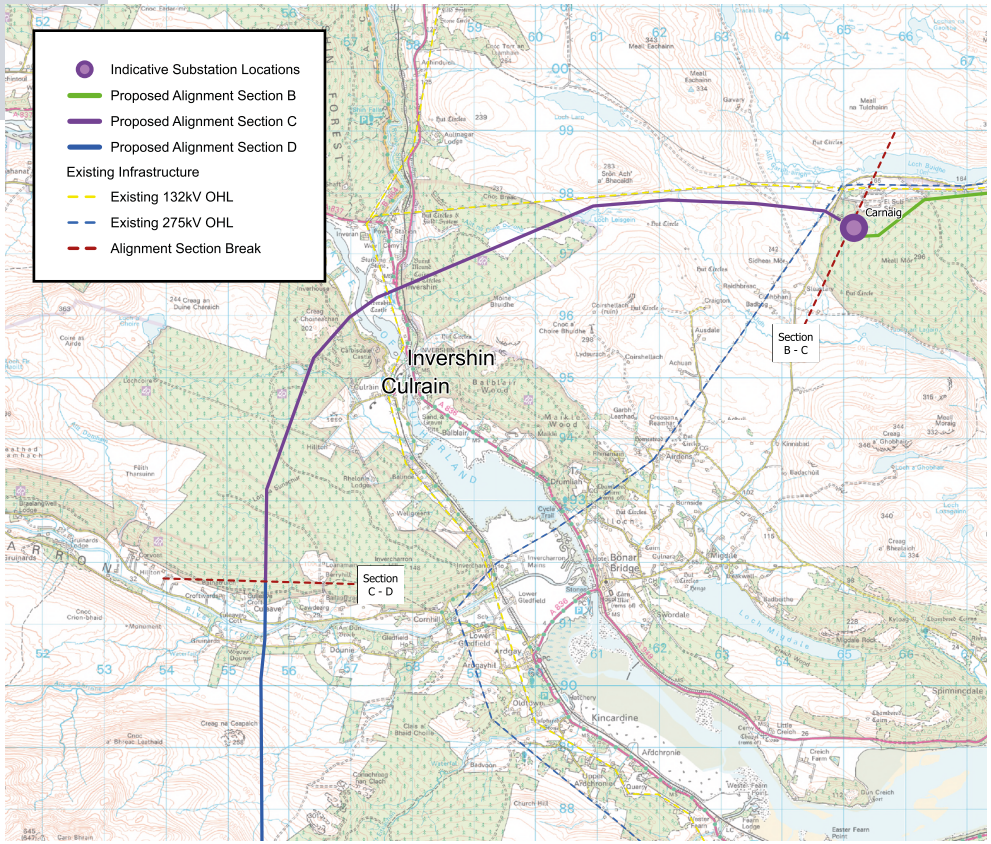
Potential Alignment D1.1 and D1.2 is preferred over Alternative Alignment D1.1 and D1.2 when considering both environmental and engineering constraints. Changes to the Refined Route and Alignment Options D1.1 were made in this area based on feedback received during the Route Options consultation and implemented in the Potential Alignment. The Potential Alignment D1.2 option was suggested in community feedback during public information events in March 2024. Following investigation by the project Design Development team, this option was presented during the consultation events in June as an opportunity to minimise impact on cultural heritage assets in this area.

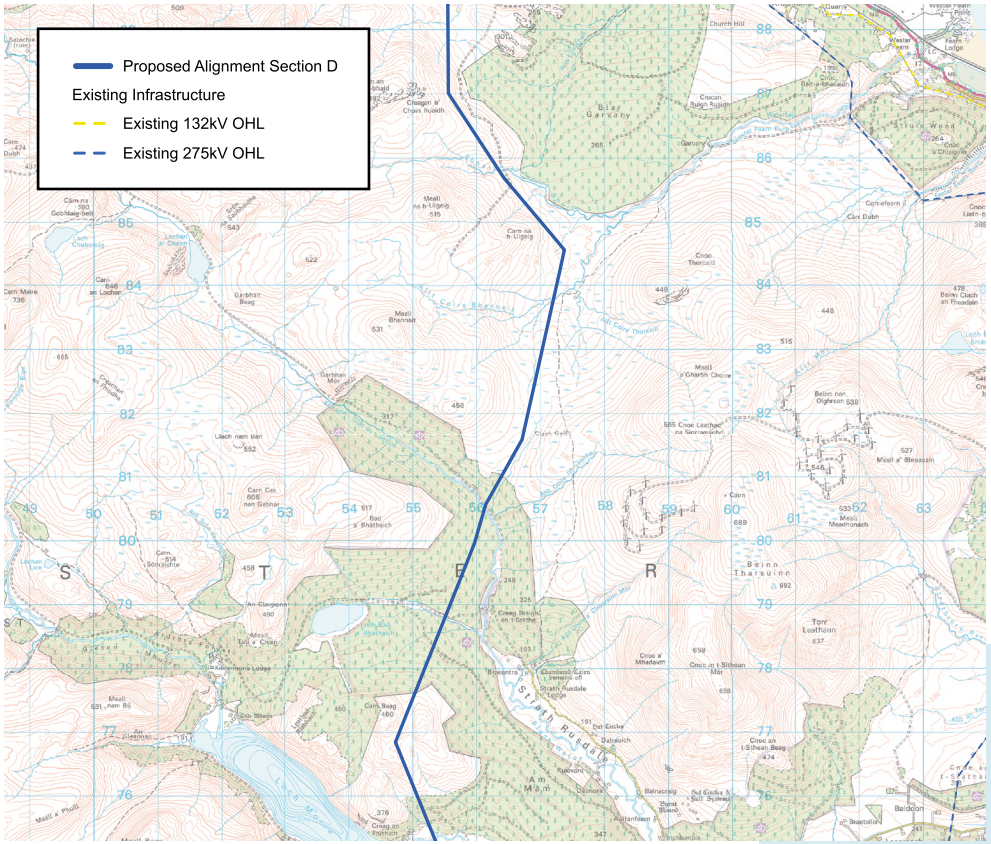
The Potential Alignment in all sub-sections will be taken forward to consent application as Proposed Alignment Section D.

Alternative Alignments D1.1 and D1.2 have been discounted from further consideration.

Section D – Dounie to near Strathpeffer

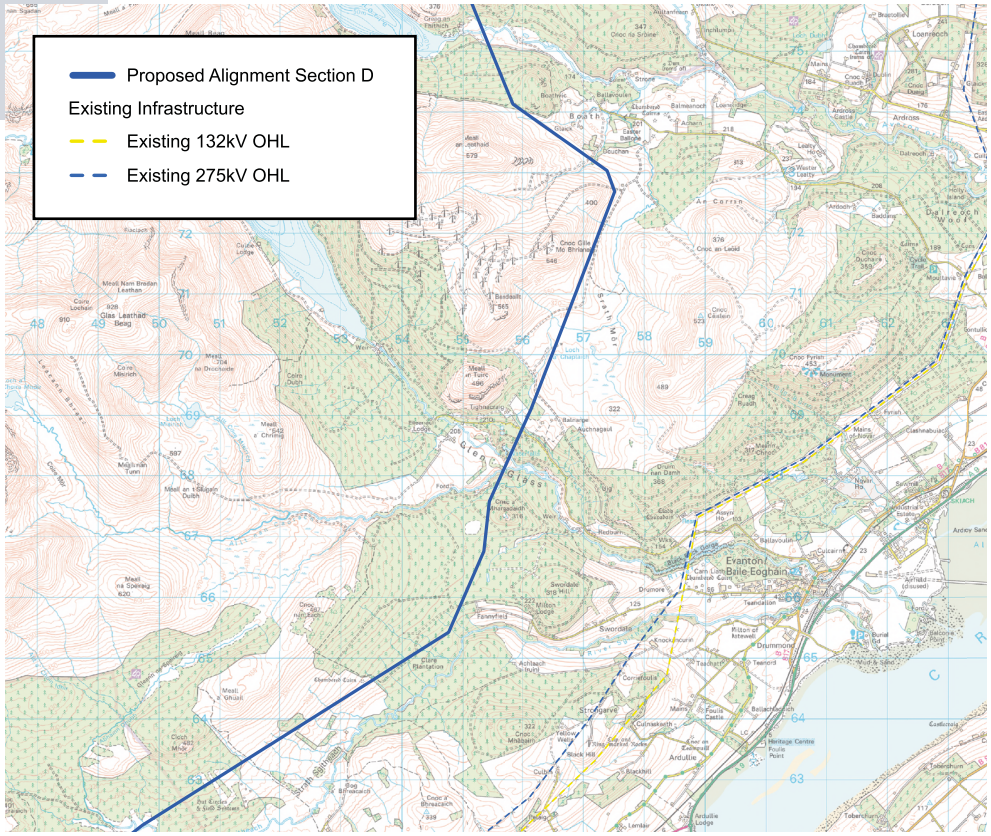
Proposed Alignment

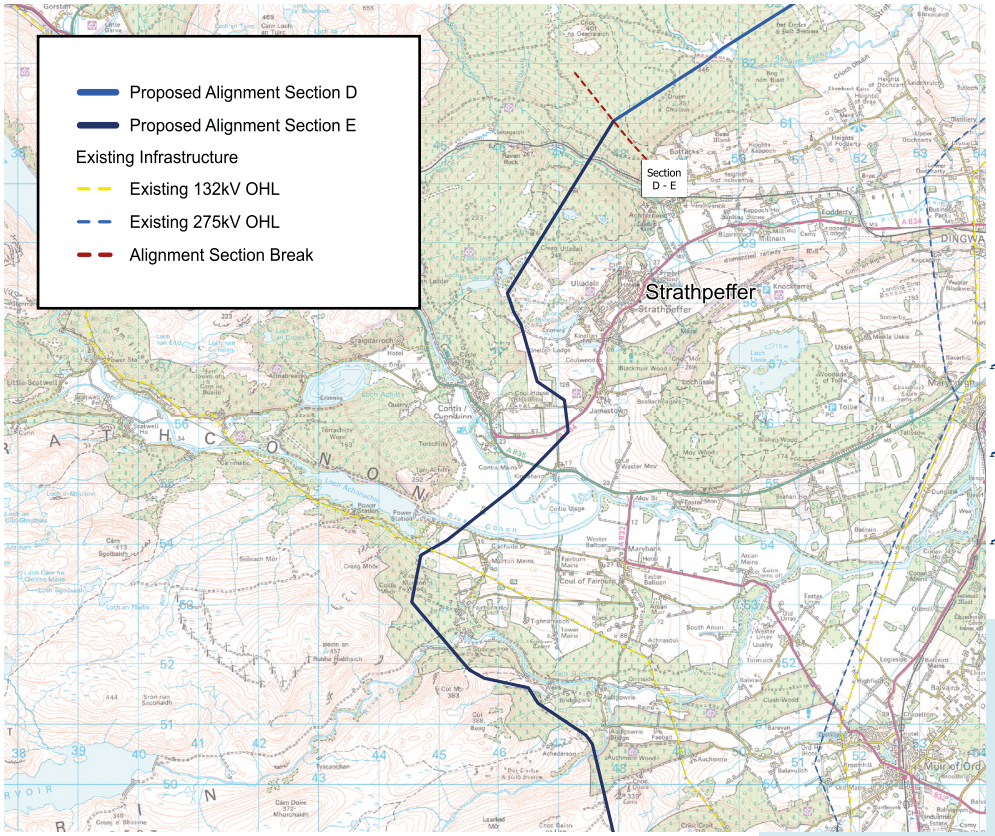




Section D – Dounie to near Strathpeffer

Proposed Alignment





Section E – near Strathpeffer to Beauly

What we presented

Refined Route
Refined Route E1
Alternative sub-option E1.1
Alternative Route D1.3

Alignment
Potential Alignments E1.1 (including two sub-options – Potential 1 and Potential 2), E1.2 and E1.3

Alternative Alignments E1.1 (including two sub-options – Alternative 1 and Alternative 2), E1.2 and E1.3

Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beauly 400kV Overhead Line

Feedback received

Concerns were received from the local community regarding visualisation presented during the consultation, visual amenity, wildlife and habitat, cultural heritage, woodland, recreation and tourism, access tracks, private water supplies and proximity of properties.

Response to feedback

From our studies and based on feedback, the Refined Route and Potential Alignment options continue to provide the best balance between environmental protection and engineering requirements for construction and operation.

We recognise key environmental considerations in this section include areas of Ancient Woodland, peatland, a Drinking Water Protected Area, the Fairburn Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL), the Grade A-listed Fairburn Tower and Coul House, Schedule Monuments and potential visual impacts to properties and core paths in Beauly and along a section of the A831. The proximity to communities at Strathpeffer, Contin, Marybank and Tarvie are also a key consideration.

The key engineering constraints include a number of crossings including rivers, railway and an existing 132kV overhead line. Flood zones, areas of large cross slopes, challenging topography and potential impact on residential properties also limit options in this area.

A full suite of ecology, landscape and cultural heritage surveys and assessments is being undertaken and will be provided in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) accompanying the s37 consent application.

Explanation of decision

Refined Route
All Route Options were taken forward to alignment development.

Alignment
Section E was split into 3 sub-sections for the purpose of alignment development and consultation (E1.1, E1.2, E1.3).

Potential Alignment E1.1, E1.2 and E1.3 is preferred over Alternative Alignment E1.1, E1.2 and E1.3 when considering both environmental and engineering constraints.

Following the options assessment and consultation, Potential Alignment E1.1 including the Potential 2 option is now preferred over the Potential 1 option (both options were presented for the purposes of consultation). This decision was based on reducing impacts on properties at Marybank and Fairburn Tower, as well as alleviating engineering constraints.

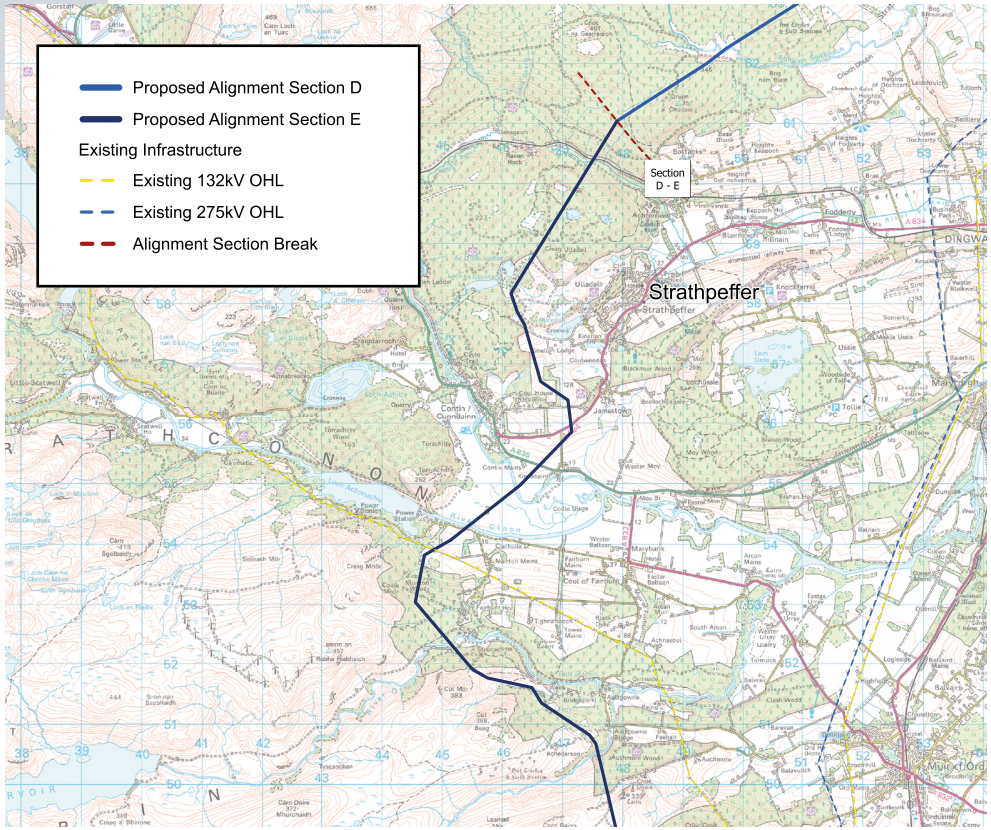
All Potential Alignment options continued to provide a better balance of requirements than Alternative Alignment E1.1 (with either sub-option 1 or 2), including feedback received from the local communities on both.

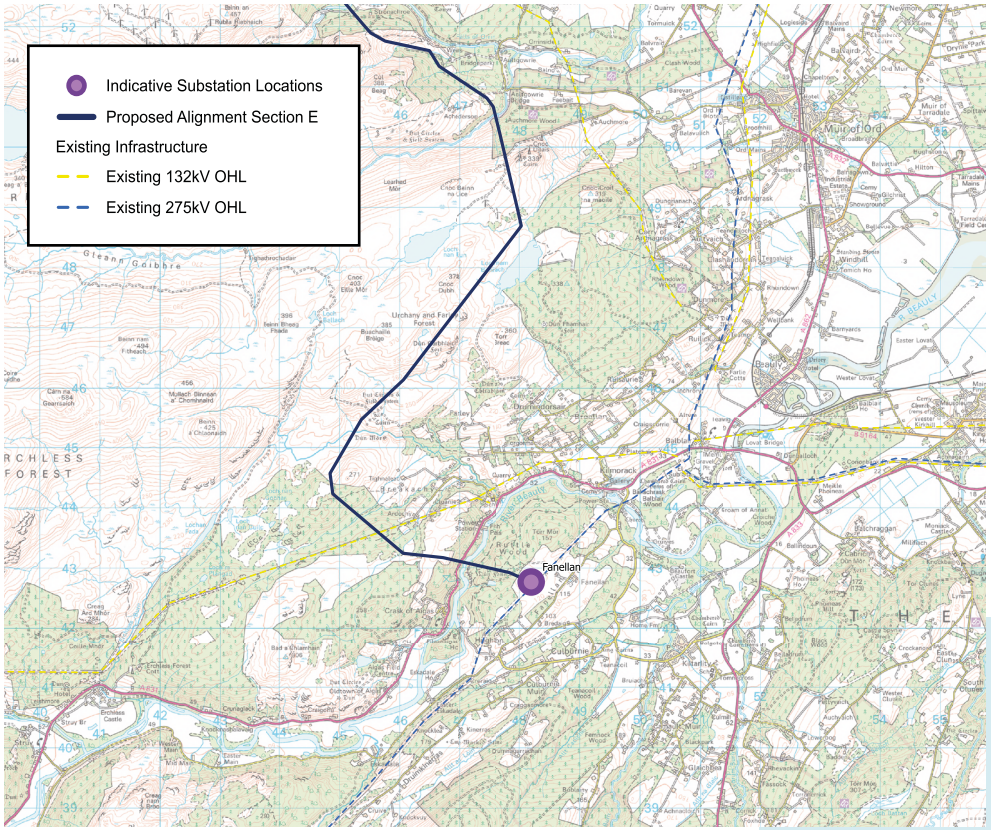
The Potential Alignment in all sub-sections (including E1.1 Potential 2) will be taken forward to consent application as Proposed Alignment Section E.

Alternative Alignments E1.1, E1.2 and E1.3 have been discounted from further consideration.

Section E – near Strathpeffer to Beauly

Proposed Alignment





Alignment Options forming the Proposed Alignment

Section A:

- **Potential Alignment A1.1**
- **Potential Alignment A1.2**
- **Potential Alignment A1.3**
- **Potential Alignment A1.4**
- **Potential Alignment A1.5**

Section B:

- **Potential Alignment B1.1**
- **Potential Alignment B1.2**

Section C:

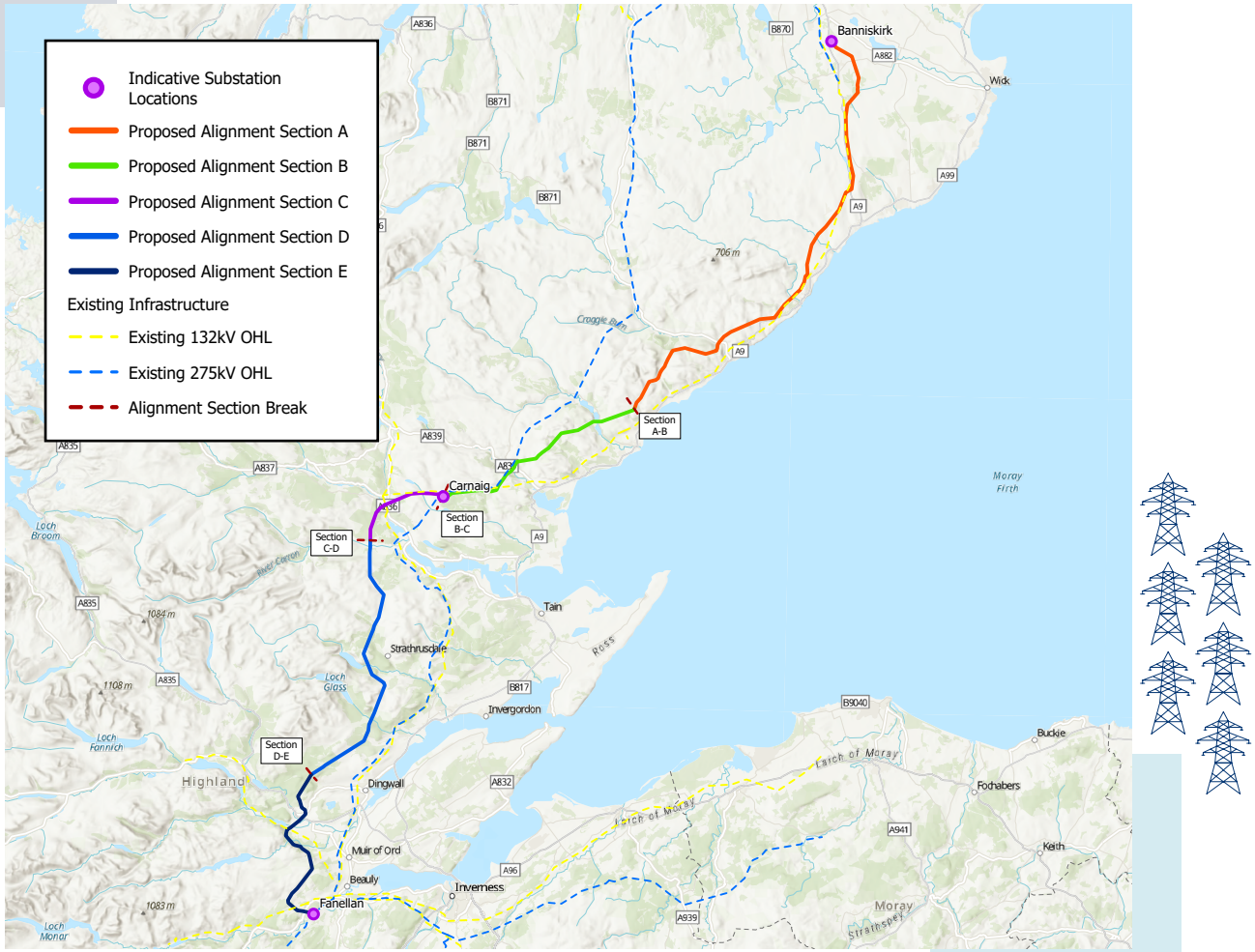
- **Potential Alignment C1.1**
- **Potential Alignment C1.2**

Section D:

- **Potential Alignment D1.1**
- **Potential Alignment D1.2**

Section E:

- **Potential Alignment E1.1 (including the Potential 2 Option)**
- **Potential Alignment E1.2**
- **Potential Alignment E1.3**



Next Steps

Engagement with communities and other stakeholders is essential in planning the delivery of this critical national infrastructure. Following the publication of the Report on Consultation, we, alongside our specialist consultants and contractors, will further develop the design to finalise the Proposed Alignment and tower positions. We will continue to consult with local communities and stakeholders in early 2025, where we will present the Proposed Alignment alongside indicative locations for access tracks which we plan to take forward to the Section 37 consent application that will be submitted to the Energy Consents Unit in 2025.