

## **VOLUME 2: CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

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### **Figures (Volume 3 of this EIA Report)**

Figure 1.1: Overview of the Proposed Development

### **Appendices (Volume 5 of this EIA Report)**

There are no appendices associated with this chapter.

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Overview

- 1.1.1 An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken for the Proposed Development in accordance with the *Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017*<sup>1</sup> ("the EIA Regulations") to assess the potential significant effects of the Proposed Development and identify measures to be taken to prevent, reduce and, where possible, offset predicted significant adverse effects.
- 1.1.2 The findings of the EIA are presented in this Environmental Impact Assessment Report ("EIA Report"), which has been prepared by Environmental Resources Management (ERM) Limited on behalf of Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc ("the Applicant") who, operating and known as Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks Transmission ("SEN Transmission"), own, operate, develop and maintain the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and islands. In this EIA Report "the Applicant" and "SEN Transmission" are used interchangeably unless the context requires otherwise.
- 1.1.3 This EIA Report has been prepared to accompany an application for consent under Section 37 of *The Electricity Act 1989*<sup>2</sup> (as amended) ("the 1989 Act") to construct and operate a new double circuit steel structure 400 kilovolt (kV) overhead line (OHL) to connect into new substation sites at Spittal, Loch Buidhe and Beaully. This is referred to as the Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beaully 400 kV OHL Connection (the "Proposed Development").
- 1.1.4 The location of the Proposed Development and related substation proposals is shown on **Volume 3, Figure 1.1: Overview of the Proposed Development**. A description of the Proposed Development is provided in **Chapter 3: Description of the Proposed Development**.
- 1.1.5 The Applicant is also seeking deemed planning permission under Section 57(2) of *the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)*<sup>3</sup> for the construction and operation of the OHL and carrying out ancillary works. These ancillary works will include installation of temporary and permanent access tracks, tree and vegetation clearance and rationalisation and crossings of the existing transmission network.
- 1.1.6 Other related works include the need to build new substations at Spittal (Banniskirk 400 kV and High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Converter Substation), Loch Buidhe (Carnraig 400 kV Substation) and Beaully (Fanellan 400 kV and HVDC Converter Substation). The substation developments are being progressed separately and will be subject to the appropriate consenting processes as set out in the *Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 (as amended)*. They are, however, considered in this EIA Report as part of the cumulative assessment.

## 1.2 Background

- 1.2.1 The Applicant owns, operates, develops and maintains the high voltage electricity transmission network in the north of Scotland and islands and holds a transmission licence under the 1989 Act. In terms of Section 9(2) of the 1989 Act, the Applicant has a statutory duty to develop and maintain an efficient, coordinated and economical system of electricity transmission, and a separate duty to facilitate competition between current and new generators of electricity.
- 1.2.2 Extensive studies completed to inform the Electricity System Operator's (ESO's) 'Pathway to 2030' Holistic Network Design (HND) study have identified the need to reinforce the onshore electricity transmission network between Spittal and Beaully. Providing a new 400 kV OHL connection between these locations enables the significant power transfer needed to transmit power from future large scale onshore and offshore sources of low carbon renewable energy generation. Further detail on the need for the Proposed Development is provided in **Chapter 2: Established Need for the**

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<sup>1</sup> UK Government (2017) *The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017*.

<sup>2</sup> UK Government (1989) *The Electricity Act 1989*.

<sup>3</sup> UK Government (1997). *Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997*.

**Proposed Development.** The Proposed Development has been identified as a key corridor for onshore electricity network reinforcement.

- 1.2.3 SSEN Transmission has undertaken studies during the various stages of identifying the corridor and route options (routeing) and the proposed alignment for the Proposed Development that involved consideration of environmental, technical and cost factors. Consultation has been undertaken during routeing and alignment selection stages to seek comments from stakeholders, including members of the public, on the options put forward prior to finalising the design of the Proposed Development as described in this EIA Report. Further detail on the corridor, routeing and alignment selection stages of the Proposed Development is contained within **Chapter 4: The Routeing Process and Alternatives**.

### 1.3 Legislative and Statutory Context

- 1.3.1 Consent for the Proposed Development is sought from Scottish Ministers under Section 37 of the 1989 Act. The 1989 Act (as amended) is the primary legislation governing the electricity supply industry in Great Britain and places statutory and licence obligations upon a licence holder. The requirement to undertake an EIA for qualifying developments as set out in the EIA Regulations. This is discussed further in **Section 1.4** of this chapter.
- 1.3.2 The Applicant, as a transmission licence holder under the 1989 Act, has a statutory duty, under paragraph 3 of Schedule 9 to the 1989 Act when formulating relevant proposals:
- *‘to have regard to the desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and of protecting sites, buildings and objects of architectural, historic or archaeological interest’; and*
  - *‘do what [it] reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or objects’.*
- 1.3.3 Construction of the Proposed Development and ancillary works constitutes development in terms of Section 26 of the *Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997* (“the Planning Act”). Accordingly, these works require planning permission. However, Section 57(2) of the Planning Act provides that on the granting of a consent under Section 37 of the 1989 Act, for OHL and ancillary development, the Scottish Ministers may direct that planning permission for that development shall be deemed to be granted. Deemed planning permission under Section 57 of the Planning Act is therefore being sought from the Scottish Ministers.
- 1.3.4 Following the UK’s exit from the European Union (EU), domestic legislation was amended to ensure that the obligations imposed under the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC<sup>4</sup> continue to apply in Scotland. The Proposed Development passes over, or is within the zone of influence (Zoi) of, a number of European sites, formerly known in Scotland as Natura 2000 sites. The Proposed Development is not directly connected with or necessary to any European site’s management for nature conservation. Therefore, under the Conservation Habitats and Species Regulations 2017<sup>5</sup> (‘the Habitats Regulations’) the Proposed Development has been required to undergo a screening for likely significant effects on the European sites. This screening is the first stage of a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) that is required to be carried out by the Competent Authority (NatureScot)<sup>6</sup> upon submission of a consent application. To inform the Competent Authority’s HRA, a Report to Inform HRA has been provided within this EIA Report (**Volume 5, Appendix 8.7: Report to Inform Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA)**). The shadow HRA has considered and applied relevant guidance from both NatureScot<sup>7</sup> and European

<sup>4</sup> EC (2019) Managing Natura Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the ‘Habitats’ Directive 92/43/EEC. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/11e4ee91-2a8a-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>5</sup> The UK Government (1994). Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1994/2716/contents/made>

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of these Regulations, “competent authority” includes—(a)any Minister of the Crown (as defined in the Ministers of the Crown Act 1975 M1), government department, statutory undertaker, public body of any description or person holding a public office; (b)the Welsh Ministers; and (c)any person exercising any function of a person mentioned in sub-paragraph (a) or (b).

<sup>7</sup> NatureScot. Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA). Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development/environmental-assessment/habitats-regulations-appraisal-hra>

Commission (EC) on Managing Natura 2000 sites<sup>8</sup>, together with EC Methodological Guidance on Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC<sup>9</sup> which sets out the HRA procedure.

## 1.4 The Need for EIA

- 1.4.1 The Proposed Development is classified as a Schedule 1 development under the EIA Regulations since it falls within Schedule 1 category (3) “...construction of overhead electrical power lines with a voltage of 220 kilovolts or more and a length of more than 15 km”. EIA is mandatory for Schedule 1 development.
- 1.4.2 A request for a Scoping Opinion was made to the Scottish Ministers under Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations in October 2024. A Scoping Report was submitted to support the request, which sought input from statutory and non-statutory consultees regarding the information to be provided within this EIA Report.
- 1.4.3 The Scoping Opinion of the Scottish Ministers was issued in February 2025 confirming the scope of the EIA Report. Further details are contained in **Chapter 6: Scope and Consultation**, and associated appendices.

## 1.5 EIA Report Structure

- 1.5.1 This EIA Report contains the environmental information required by the EIA Regulations and comprises the following volumes:
- **Volume 1: Non-Technical Summary;**
  - **Volume 2: Main Report;**
    - 1: Introduction and Background;
    - 2: Established Need for the Proposed Development;
    - 3: Description of the Proposed Development;
    - 4: The Routeing Process and Alternatives;
    - 5: EIA Process and Methodology;
    - 6: Scope and Consultation;
    - 7: Landscape and Visual;
    - 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation;
    - 9: Ornithology;
    - 10: Water Environment;
    - 11: Geological Environment;
    - 12: Cultural Heritage;
    - 13: Forestry;
    - 14: Traffic and Transport;
    - 15: Noise and Vibration;
    - 16: Tourism and Recreation;
    - 17: Cumulative Assessment;
    - 18: Summary of Effects; and
    - 19: Schedule of Mitigation.
  - **Volume 3: Figures** - contains the EIA Report figures;

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<sup>8</sup> EC (European Commission). Managing and Protecting Natura 2000 sites. Available at: [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/natura-2000/managing-and-protecting-natura-2000-sites\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/natura-2000/managing-and-protecting-natura-2000-sites_en)

<sup>9</sup> EC (2019) Managing Natura Sites: The provisions of Article 6 of the ‘Habitats’ Directive 92/43/EEC. Available at: (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2b6c4b16-e867-42da-b604-f67ee6fe60c3/language-en>)

- **Volume 4: Visualisations** - contains the landscape and visual visualisations; and
- **Volume 5: Appendices** - contains supporting information for the chapters in **Volume 2: Main Report**.

## 1.6 Supporting Documents

1.6.1 The Section 37 application includes the following supporting documents:

- Aviation Report;
- Electric and Magnetic Fields (EMF) Report;
- Planning Statement;
- Pre-Application Consultation Report (PAC Report); and
- Socio-Economic Report.

## 1.7 Notifications

1.7.1 In accordance with the *Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990*, and Regulation 14 of the EIA Regulations, the application and this EIA Report will be advertised in the following newspapers:

- Press & Journal (West);
- John O’Groats Journal; and
- Ross-shire Journal.

1.7.2 An advert will also be placed in the Edinburgh Gazette.

1.7.3 Notice of the Section 37 application, including this EIA Report and associated documents and figures, will be available for viewing at the public locations listed in **Table 1.1** during normal opening hours:

**Table 1.1: Public Locations for Viewing this EIA Report**

Location	Opening Hours	Address
The Highland Council	Monday: 9:30am to 12:30pm Tuesday: 1.30pm to 4.30pm Wednesday: 9:30am to 12:30pm Thursday: 1.30pm to 4.30pm Friday: 9:30am to 12:30pm	The Highland Council Rotterdam Street Thurso KW14 8AB
The Highland Council	Monday: 9:30am to 12:30pm Tuesday: 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4pm Wednesday: 9:30am to 12:30pm Thursday: 9:30am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4pm Friday: 9:30am to 12:30pm	County Buildings 84 High Street Dingwall IV15 9QN
The Highland Council	Monday: 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4:30pm Tuesday: 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4:30pm Wednesday: 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4:30pm Thursday: 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4:30pm Friday: 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4:30pm	The Highland Council Headquarters Glenurquhart Road Inverness IV3 5NX
Helmsdale Community Centre	Monday: 10am to 12pm, 3pm to 5pm and 6pm to 8pm Tuesday: 10am to 12:30pm Wednesday: 10am to 12:30pm Thursday: 10am to 12:30pm Friday: 10am to 12pm and 3pm to 5pm	Dunrobin St Helmsdale KW8 6JX

Location	Opening Hours	Address
Strathpeffer Community Centre	Monday - Wednesday: 9am to 4pm	School Road Strathpeffer IV14 9AG

1.7.4 The Non-Technical Summary (NTS) will also be available for viewing at the public locations listed in **Table 1.2:**

**Table 1.2: Public Locations for Viewing the NTS**

Location	Opening Hours	Address
Alness Library	Monday - Thursday: 8am to 10pm Friday: 8am to 9pm Saturday: 9am to 2pm	Averon Leisure Centre and Library High St Alness IV17 0QB
Beaully Library	Monday: 5pm to 8pm Tuesday: 10am to 12:30pm Wednesday: 12pm to 2:30pm Thursday: 2pm to 5pm Saturday: 10am to 1pm	Station Rd Beaully IV4 7EH
Brora Library & Cultural Centre	Monday: 12pm to 6pm Tuesday: 10am to 12:30pm and 2pm to 5pm Thursday: 2pm to 5pm and 6pm to 8pm Friday: 10am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 4:30pm	Gower St Brora KW9 6PD
Dunbeath Post Office	Monday - Wednesday: 9am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 3pm Thursday: 9am to 1pm Friday: 9am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm to 3pm Saturday: 9am to 12:30pm	Dunbeath KW6 6EA
Kyle of Sutherland Hub	Monday - Friday: 9am to 7pm Saturday: 9am to 4pm Sunday: 10am – 3pm	Industrial Estate Bonar Bridge South IV24 3AQ
The Muir Hub and Café	Monday - Thursday: 9am to 4:30 pm Friday: 9am to 9pm Saturday: 10am to 9pm Sunday: 10am to 9pm	Great North Road Muir of Ord IV6 7SU
Rogart Village Hall	Monday to Friday: 10am to 5pm	Rogart IV28 3XJ
Spittal Village Hall	Wednesday: 9am to 9pm Thursday: 7pm to 9pm	Spittal KW1 5XR

1.7.5 This EIA Report can also be viewed via the Energy Consents Unit's (ECU) website: [www.energyconsents.scot](http://www.energyconsents.scot).

1.7.6 Electronic versions of the application, including this EIA Report, are available to download from SSEN Transmission's website at: <https://www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/projects/project-map/spittal-loch-buidhe-beaully-400kv-connection/>.

The Proposed Development is shown on the Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beaully OHL Connection Story Map website at:  
<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/364d4f42d26f408c85530363cb9bf53b>

- 1.7.7 This EIA Report is available in other formats if required. For details, including costs, contact:

Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beaully Community Liaison Manager

SSEN Transmission

10 Henderson Road

Inverness, IV1 1SN

Email: [slbb@sse.com](mailto:slbb@sse.com)