

VOLUME 2: CHAPTER 16 – TOURISM AND RECREATION

16.	TOURISM AND RECREATION	16-1
16.1	Executive Summary	16-1
16.2	Introduction	16-2
16.3	Legislation, Policy and Guidance	16-3
16.4	Scope of Assessment and Methodology	16-6
16.5	Baseline Conditions	16-15
16.6	Future Baseline	16-27
16.7	Assessment of Effects	16-27
16.8	Cumulative Effects	16-40
16.9	Mitigation	16-42
16.10	Residual Effects	16-43
16.11	Summary and Conclusions	16-43

Figures (Volume 3 of this EIA Report)

Figure 16.1: Study Area

Figure 16.2: Recreation and Tourism Receptors

Appendices (Volume 5 of this EIA Report)

Appendix 16.1: Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan

16. TOURISM AND RECREATION

16.1 Executive Summary

16.1.1 This chapter considers any likely significant effects of the construction and operation of the Proposed Development on tourism and recreation. Effects on the tourism economy are not within the scope of this assessment and are assessed in a separate Socio-Economic Report that will accompany the Application.

16.1.2 The scope of the assessment includes:

- Temporary or permanent changes in the availability, accessibility and amenity of tourist attractions, including recreational assets and routes, as a result of the loss or partial loss of a resource, temporary or permanent diversions to recreational routes, or temporary or permanent land-take required for the Proposed Development (construction and operation);
- Temporary changes in access to tourist attractions and recreation assets during the construction of the Proposed Development, as a result of increased traffic movements on the local road network as well as vehicular, pedestrian and cyclist diversions that could be implemented (construction only); and
- Temporary changes in the availability of tourist accommodation due to additional demand from construction workers (construction only).

16.1.3 For the purposes of this assessment, amenity is considered to be a combination of the visual amenity, air quality, disruption and noise levels experienced by users of tourist attractions, recreational assets and routes. The assessment of combined effects on amenity is therefore informed by the Landscape and Visual, Noise, and Traffic and Transport assessments. Air Quality was scoped out of this Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIA Report).

16.1.4 The study area for effects arising from impacts such as loss of land or assets or diversion of recreational routes is the land within the Proposed Development Limits of Deviation (LoD) for the proposed OHL and associated access tracks. The LoD extends 100 m either side of the proposed OHL. A map of the study area is provided in **Volume 3, Figure 16.1: Recreation and Tourism Study Area**, and further information can be found in **Chapter 3: Description of the Proposed Development**.

16.1.5 For combined effects on amenity and effects on access, the study area is 5 km from the Proposed Alignment LoD. The Highland Council (THC) area is defined as the study area for the assessment of effects on tourist accommodation arising from a change in demand from construction workers. The focus is on settlements in the study area where an incoming workforce is considered likely to reside, taking into account average commuting times for construction workers.

16.1.6 The methodology focusses on assessing the likely significant effects on tourism and recreation activity and behaviour in key locations within the study area where relevant receptors are clustered, taking into account the types of receptors located in those locations and the likely impacts on them. The baseline provides a description of key tourism and recreation assets, including core paths, within the 5 km study area for each section of the proposed OHL. It is supported by **Volume 3, Figure 16.2: Recreation and Tourism Receptors** which maps the following categories of assets and helps to identify locations where tourism and recreation receptors are clustered:

- Serviced and non-serviced accommodation;
- Castles and forts;
- Country parks and gardens;
- Historic houses, palaces and stately homes;

- Museums and art galleries;
- Outdoor activities and recreation providers;
- Sports grounds and play facilities;
- Visitor or heritage centres;
- Distilleries and breweries;
- Long-distance trails; and
- Core paths.

16.1.7 The assessment of the effect on the availability, accessibility and amenity of tourist and recreational assets during construction is presented by section of the Proposed Development. In Sections A, B, C and D, the effect is assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**. Effects on the North Coast 500 (NC500) route during construction and operation are assessed on a Proposed Development-wide basis and are also assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**.

16.1.8 In Section E, the effect during construction for the study area as a whole is assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**. However, in the Strathpeffer and Contin area where there is a concentration of tourist and recreational receptors, the effect on this cluster is assessed as **moderate adverse** and **significant**. Mitigation including measures to be set out in an agreed construction method, and continued engagement with THC and other relevant stakeholders, would reduce the magnitude of the impact, resulting in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

16.1.9 The assessment of changes in demand for tourism accommodation assumes, based on information provided by the OHL Contractors, that the majority of construction workers will be housed in camp-style accommodation, at Port of Nigg and at Golspie. While there may be some temporary increase in demand for tourist accommodation, this will be reduced by the use of camp-style housing. There could also be some benefits for tourist accommodation providers and other hospitality businesses as a result of any additional demand outside of the peak tourist season. Overall, the effect is assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**.

16.1.10 It is not expected that there will be any significant effects on tourism and recreation once the Proposed Development is in operation. While significant adverse visual effects (reported in **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**) associated with OHL towers could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific receptors close to the Proposed Development during the operational phase, this would be restricted to certain locations and limited by the transitory, short-term nature of most tourist visits. There would be no significant noise or transport effects during operation, and therefore no combined effects on amenity.

16.2 Introduction

16.2.1 This chapter assesses the likely significant effects of the construction and operation of the Proposed Development on tourism and recreation. Effects on the wider tourism economy in the Highlands are not within the scope of this assessment and are assessed in a separate Socio-Economic Report that will accompany the Application.

16.2.2 The assessment is supported by the following figures:

- **Volume 3, Figure 16.1: Study Area; and**
- **Volume 3, Figure 16.2: Recreation and Tourism Receptors.**

16.3 Legislation, Policy and Guidance

16.3.1 This section summarises the legislation, national and local policy and guidance relevant to the assessment of tourism and recreation effects.

Legislation

16.3.2 Legislation relevant to the tourism and recreation assessment includes:

- Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003; and
- Countryside (Scotland) Act, 1967.

16.3.3 The Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003, introduced the right of responsible non-motorised access for recreational and other purposes to land and inland water throughout Scotland, with a few exceptions (including fields of crops and private gardens)¹. The Act also places a duty on local authorities to manage access in their areas, including planning for a system of core paths that cater for everyone, including people with disabilities.

16.3.4 The Countryside (Scotland) Act, 1967, established a duty for local authorities and National Park authorities to protect and manage public rights of way in Scotland². To be classed as a public right of way, a route must join two public places; follow a more or less defined route; be in use by the general public as a matter of right and not just with the permission of the landowner; and have been in use without substantial interruption for at least 20 years.

National Policy

16.3.5 National policy and strategic vision relevant to the tourism and recreation assessment includes:

- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), 2023; and
- Scotland Outlook 2030.

16.3.6 NPF4 sets out the national spatial strategy for Scotland to 2045. Policy 20 of NPF4 relates to green³ and blue⁴ infrastructure, and states that *'development proposals that result in fragmentation or net loss of existing blue and green infrastructure will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would not result in or exacerbate a deficit in blue or green infrastructure provision, and the overall integrity of the network will be maintained'*⁵. A key policy principle is that local development plans should safeguard access rights and core paths, including active travel routes, and encourage new and enhanced opportunities for access linked to wider networks.

16.3.7 Policy 30 of the NPF4 relates to tourism and focuses on encouraging sustainable tourism development that benefits local people, is consistent with net zero and nature commitments, and inspires people to visit Scotland.

¹ Scottish Government, Public Access to Land. Available online at: [Public access to land - Landscape and outdoor access - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/public-access-to-land/pages/2.aspx)

² THC, Public rights of way. Available online at: [Public rights of way | Outdoor access | The Highland Council](https://www.thc.org.uk/public-rights-of-way/)

³ Green infrastructure is defined in NPF4 as 'Features or spaces within the natural and built environments that provide a range of ecosystem services'.

⁴ Blue infrastructure is defined in NPF4 as 'Water environment features within the natural and built environments that provide a range of ecosystem services'.

⁵ Scottish Government (2023), National Planning Framework 4. Available online at: [National Planning Framework 4](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/pages/2.aspx)

NPF4 also recognises that tourism is particularly important in the north of Scotland, as a sector supported by the area's environmental quality, culture, language, landscape and wildlife⁶.

16.3.8 Scotland Outlook 2030 is the national tourism strategy for Scotland, published in 2020 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic⁷. The strategy recognises the economic importance of tourism to all areas of Scotland, and the need to encourage sustainable models of tourism development that reflect the changing nature of the global tourism market in the 21st Century. The framework set out in the strategy is based around four key priorities: 'Our passionate people'; 'Our thriving places'; 'Our memorable experiences'; and 'Our diverse businesses'.

Local and Regional Policy

16.3.9 Local and regional policy relevant to the tourism and recreation assessment includes:

- The Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP), 2012;
- Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan), 2018;
- Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (IMFLDP2), 2024; and
- The Highland Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2024-2030.

16.3.10 The HwLDP recognises that tourism makes a significant contribution to the Highland Economy. Policy 43 of the HwLDP relates to tourism and sets out the conditions under which further tourist development will be approved.

16.3.11 Access to the outdoors is recognised as important for recreation, tourism, and healthy lifestyles. Policy 77 of the HwLDP states that:

'When a proposal affects a route included in a Core Paths Plan or an access point for water, or significantly affects wider access rights, then The Council will require it to either:

- *Retain the existing path or water access point while maintaining or enhancing its amenity value; or*
- *Ensure alternative access provision that is no less attractive, is safe and convenient for public use, and does not damage or disturb species or habitats.'*

16.3.12 For a proposal classified as a Major Development, the Council will require the developer to submit an Access Plan showing existing public, non-motorised public access footpaths, bridleways and cycleways on the site, together with proposed public access provision, both during construction and after completion of the development. A draft Outdoor Access Management Plan (OAMP) is included as an appendix to this chapter.

16.3.13 Policy 78 of the HwLDP relates to long distance routes and states that the Council, with its partners, will safeguard and seek to enhance long distance routes and their settings. This includes giving consideration to *'developing/improving further strategic multi user routes both inland and along the coast with due regard to the impact on the Natural Heritage features along these routes.'*

16.3.14 Tourism is recognised as increasingly important to the local economies of Caithness and Sutherland, in the CaSPlan, and the Inner Moray Firth area, in the IMFLDP2. The CaSPlan identifies promoting and supporting

⁶ Scottish Government (2023), National Planning Framework 4. Available online at: [National Planning Framework 4](#)

⁷ Scottish Tourism Alliance (2020), Scotland Outlook 2030. Available online at: [Scotland-Outlook-2030.pdf](#)

tourism as a key element of the spatial strategy, particularly along the route of the North Coast 500. There is also a focus on promoting tourism with a historic environment focus.

16.3.15 In Spring 2025, THC consulted on a new Highland Local Development Plan (HLDP)⁸. Evidence papers produced to support the new HLDP include a Sustainable Tourism Strategy which aligns with the Scotland Outlook 2030 and sets out the vision and strategic priorities for tourism in the Highlands over the period to 2030⁹. The five focus areas that will shape THC's approach over this period are: '*Effective visitor management – infrastructure and services*'; '*Protecting our environment*'; '*Unlocking tourism benefits for our communities*'; '*Celebrating our culture and heritage*'; and '*Business growth and skilled workforce*'.

Guidance

16.3.16 Appendix 6 of NatureScot's Environmental Impact Assessment Handbook provides guidance on assessing impacts on outdoor access, focusing on issues that arise when developments physically affect people's ability to engage in outdoor recreation, and on wider effects on the settings where recreation takes place¹⁰. The guidance identifies '*power lines, masts and other pylons*' as a type of project that has the potential to impact on outdoor access and recreation. Potential effects associated with these projects are identified as '*effects on valued landscapes especially in remote areas*'.

16.3.17 Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) LA 112: Population and Human Health is guidance developed in the highways sector that is broadly transferable to other major linear infrastructure, including OHLs. LA 112 provides guidance on appropriate study areas and significance criteria for receptors including walking, cycling and horse riding provision such as footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths¹¹. Where relevant to the Proposed Development, the methodology has drawn on this guidance.

16.3.18 In relation to tourism, the assessment has taken account of research into the impact of onshore renewables infrastructure on tourism in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, including:

- BiGGAR Economics (2021), Wind Farms and Tourism Trends in Scotland: Evidence from 44 Wind Farms¹²;
- Welsh Government (2014), Study into the Potential Economic Impact of Wind Farms and Associated Grid Infrastructure on the Welsh Tourism Sector¹³; and
- Moffat Centre and Glasgow Caledonian University (2008), The Economic Impact of Windfarms on Scottish Tourism: A report for the Scottish Government¹⁴.

⁸ The Highland Council (2024), Highland Local Development Plan. Available online at: [Highland Local Development Plan | Highland Local Development Plan | The Highland Council](#)

⁹ The Highland Council (2024), The Highland Sustainable Tourism Strategy, 2024-2030. Available online at: [Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2024-2030 | Sustainable Tourism Strategy 2024 to 2030](#)

¹⁰ NatureScot (2018), Environmental Impact Assessment Handbook. Available online at: [Wayback Machine](#)

¹¹ Standards for Highways, DMRB LA 112 – Population and human health. Available online at: [LA 112 - Population and human health](#)

¹² BiGGAR Economics (2021), Wind Farms and Tourism Trends in Scotland: Evidence from 44 Wind Farms. Available online at: [Microsoft Word - BiGGAR Economics Wind Farms and Tourism 2021.docx](#)

¹³ Welsh Government (2014), Study into the Potential Economic Impact of Wind Farms and Associated Grid Infrastructure on the Welsh Tourism Sector. Available online at: [Study into the Potential Economic Impact of Wind Farms and Associated Grid Infrastructure on the Welsh Tourism Sector](#)

¹⁴ Moffat Centre and Glasgow Caledonian University (2008), The Economic Impact of Windfarms on Scottish Tourism: A report for the Scottish Government. Available online at: [Economic impacts of wind farms on Scottish tourism: research findings - gov.scot](#)

16.3.19A summary of the key findings from this research relevant to the assessment is presented in the baseline in **Section 16.5** of this report.

16.4 Scope of Assessment and Methodology

16.4.1 This section describes the scope of the assessment and the methodology, including data sources, survey methods and a description of the study area. Relevant consultation responses are summarised along with details of how these have been addressed.

Data sources

16.4.2 The data sources that have been used in the assessment are listed in **Table 16.1**.

Table 16.1: Tourism and recreation data sources

Data	Source
Tourism employment	Office for National Statistics (ONS), Business Register and Employment Survey
Tourism volume and spending	Visit Scotland, Research and insights on tourism in the Highlands
Tourism businesses	Scottish Government, Industry Statistics
Tourism accommodation	Visit Scotland, Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Survey Data Map Scotland, Airbnb Scotland Survey
Core paths and other rights of way	Highland Council Core Paths Sustrans National Cycle Network Scotways Heritage Paths
Tourism and recreation receptors	Relevant sub-categories of OS AddressBase Web-based searches within the study area using search terms including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accommodation; - Bed and breakfast; - Hotel; and - Visitor centre.

Surveys

In line with standard industry practice, the assessment is desk-based, using published and publicly available data, and has not involved any surveys.

Study Area The study area for effects arising from impacts such as loss of land or assets or diversion of recreational routes is the land within the Proposed Development Limits of Deviation (LoD) for the proposed OHL and associated access tracks. For combined effects on amenity or effects on access, the study area is 5 km from the Proposed Alignment LoD¹⁵. As guidance on assessing impacts on outdoor access does not specify the study area that should be used to assess the amenity effects of overhead lines (OHLs)¹⁶, this has been defined based on professional judgement and established industry best practice for comparable projects in

¹⁵ This study area is based on the LoD for the OHL only as any likely significant effects within 5 km are likely to arise from visual impacts associated with the OHL, rather than the access tracks. Significant effects associated with access tracks are likely to arise within a smaller area. The access track LoDs are contained within the 5 km study area and so any significant effects associated with the access tracks will be captured within the 5 km study area.

¹⁶ Appendix 6 of NatureScot's Environmental Impact Assessment Handbook does not specify the study area that should be used to assess wider, indirect impacts.

Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, including other 400 kV OHL schemes¹⁷. Where appropriate, the assessment has also considered the potential for effects to arise outside of this study area, for example where there is the potential for access to a receptor to be severely disrupted.

16.4.3 THC area is defined as the study area for the assessment of effects on tourist accommodation arising from any change in demand resulting from construction workers. The focus is on settlements where an incoming workforce is considered likely to reside, taking into account average commuting times for construction workers.

Scope of Assessment

16.4.4 The following aspects have been studied as part of the **tourism** assessment¹⁸:

- Temporary or permanent changes in the availability, accessibility and amenity of tourist attractions, including recreational assets and routes, as a result of the loss or partial loss of a resource (construction and operation);
- Temporary changes in access to tourist attractions during the construction of the Proposed Development, as a result of increased traffic movements on the local road network as well as vehicular, pedestrian and cyclist diversions that could be implemented (construction only); and
- Temporary changes in the availability of tourist accommodation due to additional demand from construction workers (construction only).

16.4.5 The following aspects have been studied as part of the **recreation** assessment¹⁹:

- Temporary or permanent changes in the availability, accessibility and amenity of recreational assets, including recreational routes, or temporary or permanent diversions to recreational routes, as a result of land-take required for the Proposed Development (construction and operation); and
- Temporary changes in access to recreational assets during the construction of the Proposed Development, as a result of increased traffic movements on the local road network as well as vehicular, pedestrian and cyclist diversions that could be implemented (construction only).

16.4.6 The following aspects were, in terms of the Scoping Opinion adopted by the Scottish Ministers, scoped out of the assessment²⁰:

- During operation, land associated with recreational assets and/or recreational routes may be restricted around the towers or access roads for maintenance activities. However, this would be for a small area around the infrastructure and for a limited time and is not anticipated to lead to significant or permanent effects; and
- During operation, there would be minimal traffic movements on the local road network as a result of maintenance activities. It is unlikely there would be vehicular, pedestrian and cyclist diversions associated with the maintenance activities. Therefore, significant effects are not anticipated.

16.4.7 The methodology focusses on assessing the potential significant effects on tourism and recreation activity and behaviour in key locations within the study area where relevant receptors are clustered, taking into account the

¹⁷ For example, the Scoping Report for the Beaulay to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400 kV OHL proposed a study area of 500 m from the LoD and associated tracks for the assessment of tourism and recreation. The Highland Council's scoping opinion stated that this should be increased to at least 5km, in line with the study area for the LVIA. Other recent 400 kV projects, including the Grimsby to Walpole 400 kV transmission project have proposed a 5 km study area for tourism and recreation effects.

¹⁸ See Section 15.6 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.1: EIA Scoping Report** and Paragraph 3.5 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.2: Scoping Opinion**.

¹⁹ See Section 15.6 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.1: EIA Scoping Report** and Paragraph 3.5 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.2: Scoping Opinion**.

²⁰ See Section 15.6 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.1: EIA Scoping Report** and Paragraph 3.5 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.2: Scoping Opinion**.

types of receptors located in those locations and the likely impacts on them. The approach to identifying clusters of receptors is described in paragraph 16.4.12 below. In a small number of cases where it is likely that there would be specific effects for users of particular receptors that would be different from those identified within a cluster, these are assessed on an individual basis.

- 16.4.8 Effects on the tourism economy are not within the scope of this assessment and are assessed qualitatively in a separate Socio-Economic Report that will accompany the Application.

Methodology

- 16.4.9 The assessment of tourism and recreation effects is a qualitative assessment. Tourist attractions and activities, recreational assets and routes, and tourist accommodation within the study area have been identified using publicly available sources and web searches (see **Table 16.1**). Given the degree of flux in the market, the assessment has not sought to quantify the precise number of tourist attractions, activities and accommodation providers. Instead, receptors are mapped on a series of baseline figures (**Volume 3, Figure 16.2**) which show where receptors and clusters of receptors are located within the study area, and which therefore assist the study of behaviour within key areas.
- 16.4.10 Changes in availability or access to tourism or recreation receptors, and diversion of recreational routes, are assessed based on the LoD for the OHL and associated access tracks, and the findings of other relevant assessments such as the Traffic and Transport assessment. Permanent effects arising from the construction of the Proposed Development, such as permanent loss of land or an asset or permanent diversion of a recreational route that will continue into the operational phase, are assessed as permanent, long term construction effects.
- 16.4.11 For the purposes of this assessment, amenity is considered to be a combination of the visual amenity, air quality, disruption and noise levels experienced by users of tourist attractions, recreational assets and routes. The assessment of combined effects on amenity is informed by the Landscape and Visual, Noise, and Traffic and Transport assessments, and considers where there is the potential for significant effects identified by these assessments during construction and operation to result in combined effects on amenity for the users of tourism and recreation receptors. The assessment takes into account the sensitivity of receptors to changes in their operating environment. No significant air quality effects are expected from the Proposed Development and so air quality was scoped out of assessment in this EIA Report²¹.
- 16.4.12 Tourist accommodation within the study area has also been identified using publicly available sources and web searches (as outlined in **Table 16.1**). The assessment of effects on the availability of tourist accommodation compares the existing availability of accommodation within the study area at the peak of the tourist season with the expected demand for accommodation from construction workers at the peak of the construction programme. The assessment takes into account information supplied by the OHL Contractors regarding the expected approach to accommodating the construction workforce.
- 16.4.13 The significance of tourism and recreation effects is assessed based on the environmental value/sensitivity of a receptor or cluster of receptors and the magnitude of the change from baseline conditions. Tourism and recreation receptors or clusters of receptors are assigned a sensitivity value based on the criteria set out in **Table 16.2**. The criteria have drawn on guidance including Appendix 6 of NatureScot's EIA Handbook and DMRB LA 112 Population and Human Health, and have been tailored to the tourism and recreation

²¹ See Section 16.3 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.1: EIA Scoping Report** and Paragraph 3.5 of **Volume 5, Appendix 6.2: Scoping Opinion**.

assessment, taking account of professional judgement and comparable projects in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK, including the criteria used or proposed for other 400 kV OHL schemes²².

Table 16.2: Sensitivity of receptor

Sensitivity	Criteria
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, land associated with assets, or clusters of assets that are of national or international status and/or have high visitor numbers; Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, or clusters of assets, that have a high scarcity value, with no comparable alternatives available locally or nationally; Areas in which there are recreational routes that are frequently used by walkers and cyclists for recreational and leisure purposes (e.g. national trails); and Tourist accommodation where no alternative is available within the relevant study area.
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, land associated with assets, or clusters of assets that are of regional status and/or have medium visitor numbers; Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, or clusters of assets, that have a medium scarcity value, with few comparable alternatives locally or nationally; Areas in which there are recreational routes moderately used by walkers and cyclists for recreational and leisure purposes (e.g. regional trails); and Tourist accommodation where limited alternatives are available within the relevant study area.
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, land associated with assets, or clusters of assets that are of local status and/or low visitor numbers; Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, or clusters of assets that have a low scarcity value, with some comparable alternatives locally; Areas in which there are locally designated recreational routes for which alternative routes can be taken; and Tourist accommodation where alternatives are available within the relevant study area.
Negligible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, land associated with assets, or clusters of assets that are of very low status and/or have very low visitor numbers; Areas in which there are recreational and tourist assets, or clusters of assets that have a very low scarcity value, with alternatives available locally; Areas in which there are recreational routes not/infrequently used by walkers and cyclists for recreational purposes; and Tourist accommodation where numerous alternatives are available within the relevant study area.

16.4.14 The magnitude of change is assessed using the criteria outlined in **Table 16.3** below, which are again based on NatureScot and DMRB guidance and tailored to the tourism and recreation assessment using professional judgement and experience. Magnitude of change for tourism and recreation receptors is determined by the nature, intensity, frequency of occurrence or timing of the effect. For tourist accommodation, the magnitude of

²² See, for example, the Scoping Report for the Beaulieu to Blackhilllock to New Deer to Peterhead 400 kV OHL scheme, and the Scoping Report for the Grimsby to Walpole Grid Upgrade scheme.

change is determined taking into account the surrounding baseline context, anticipated duration of the impact, and professional judgement.

Table 16.3: Magnitude of change

Magnitude	Criteria
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recreation and tourism: Loss of asset and/or quality and integrity of asset; severe damage to key characteristics, features or elements, e.g. direct acquisition and demolition of buildings and direct development of land to accommodate the Proposed Development; and Loss of use of 100% of tourist accommodation premises (due to leasing of tourist accommodation being required for construction workers). Recreational routes: Permanent loss/severance of an existing recreational route used by walkers and cyclists.
Medium	<p>Recreation and tourism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partial loss of/damage to key characteristics, features or elements, e.g. partial removal or substantial amendment to access or acquisition of land compromising viability of recreation asset; and Loss of use of 50% of tourist accommodation premises (due to leasing of tourist accommodation being required for construction workers). <p>Recreational routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disruption of a recreational route used by walkers and cyclists with large increase/decrease in journey length/time and/or large changes to amenity for recreational users.
Low	<p>Recreation and tourism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A discernible change in attributes, quality or vulnerability; minor loss of, or alteration to, one (maybe more) key characteristics, features or elements, e.g. amendment to access or acquisition of land resulting in changes to operating conditions that do not compromise overall viability of recreation asset; and Loss of use of 25% of tourist accommodation premises (due to leasing of tourist accommodation being required for construction workers). <p>Recreational routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alteration of a recreational route used by walkers and cyclists but with minor increase in journey length/time and/or minor changes to amenity for recreational user.
Negligible	<p>Recreation and tourism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very minor loss or detrimental alteration to one or more characteristics, features or elements, e.g. acquisition of non-operational land or buildings not directly affecting the viability of recreation asset. Loss of use of less than 10% of tourist accommodation premises (due to leasing of tourist accommodation being required for construction workers). <p>Recreational routes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very minor change to recreational route used by walkers and cyclists.

16.4.15 The overall significance of effects is determined based on the matrix shown in **Table 16.4**. Effects that are classified as moderate or above are considered to be significant and are highlighted in bold. Effects classified as minor or neutral are considered to be not significant.

Table 16.4: Recreation and Tourism Matrix of Significance

	Sensitivity of Receptor/Receiving Environment to Change/Effect
--	--

Magnitude of Change/Impact		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
	High	Major	Major	Moderate	Negligible
	Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

Consultation

16.4.16 **Table 16.5** summarises consultation responses received at EIA Scoping stage and how these have been addressed within the assessment. Further information regarding the consultation process and responses received at earlier stages of the project is provided in **Chapter 6: Scope and Consultation**.

Table 16.5 Summary of scoping consultation responses

Stakeholder organisation	Comment	Response
THC	THC stated that a development of this scale and duration may result in potential significant effects (positive and/or negative). THC consider that Socio-Economic, Tourism and Recreational impacts should have its own chapter in the EIAR to ensure that these matters are appropriately addressed and do not agree that part of this should be presented out with the EIA. THC stated that this assessment should be provided within the EIAR, irrespective if the project is an identified national development in NPF4 or otherwise. The EIAR should estimate who may be affected by the development, in all or in part, which may require individual households to be identified, local communities or a wider socio-economic grouping such as tourists and tourist related businesses, recreational groups, attractions and events. The application should include relevant economic information connected with the project, including the potential number of jobs, and economic activity associated with the procurement, construction, operation and decommissioning of the development. This should set out the impact on the regional and local economy, not just the national economy. Any mitigation proposed should also address impacts on the regional and local economy.	Effects on tourism and recreation receptors are assessed in this chapter. Effects on the local economy more widely are assessed as a separate topic in the Socio-economic Report which accompanies the application, which includes consideration of the jobs and economic activity associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Development.
THC	THC stated with regard to statements on potential impacts refer to temporarily or permanently diverting core paths and public rights of way, the applicant should be aware that diverting those paths are likely to require the successful making of orders for which the applicant will be required to pay for, whether or not they are successful. THC stated that the processes can be long and the outcomes far from assured. It would be more efficient to consider the impacts of the project on public access, minimise any negative impacts and maximise positive impacts from the outset.	Noted. The draft OAMP outlines the approach to minimising negative impacts on public access and maximising positive impacts.

Stakeholder organisation	Comment	Response
THC	<p>THC stated that the site is on land with access rights provided by the Land Reform Scotland Act. The potential impact on and mitigation for public access should be assessed incorporating core paths, public rights of way, long distance routes, other paths, and wider access rights across the site. While the Scoping Report and an eventual EIA may include impacts on elements of outdoor access assessed under other headings, THC's Access Officer considers that all the impacts on outdoor access should be brought together in a comprehensive assessment of the proposals visual and physical impacts on outdoor access during the preparatory, construction, operational and post-operational phases. THC's Access Officer considers that Scoping Report Chapter 15.5 contains two incorrect statements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Para 15.5.1 states that there is no established guidance for conducting a recreation (and tourism assessment) as part of an EIA process. NatureScot's Handbook on EIA has however carried out such guidance in its 5th edition published in 2018. THC stated that following the aforementioned guidance will ensure that a comprehensive baseline is assessed from which an accurate picture of impact can be gained, and mitigation measures planned. That will inform the access management plan that the Planning Authority will request under HwLDP Policy 77 Public Access, and which is promised in EIA Scoping Report Para 15.4.3 and should reference HwLDP Policy 78 Long Distance Routes for maintaining these routes and protecting their setting. Para 15.5.2 goes on to reference the DMRB as an example of guidance that might be used to inform the assessment. This should instead have referenced the aforementioned guidance which should be applied. 	<p>This chapter provides an assessment of impacts on access within the study area. There is a cumulative assessment that draws on the findings of other relevant assessments including Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual. The draft OAMP provides information on the approach to minimising negative impacts on public access and maximising positive impacts.</p> <p>The guidance set out in the NatureScot Handbook on EIA has been used to inform the assessment alongside relevant aspects of the DMRB.</p>
Ardgay and District Community Council (A&DCC)	A&DCC note that both Ardgay and Culrain have been omitted from the list of settlements recorded as within the vicinity of the Proposed Development and stated that though they are smaller settlements they are nevertheless settlements within the vicinity of the Proposed Development and should not be overlooked in any EIA.	Ardgay and Culrain are within the study area for tourism and recreation (in Sections C and D respectively), and receptors in these areas have been included in the baseline and considered as part of the assessment.
A&DCC	A&DCC question how the significance of the noted likely impacts on tourism economy have been assessed.	Impacts on the tourism economy are assessed qualitatively as part of the Socio-economic Report prepared for the Proposed Development.
A&DCC	A&DCC note that at paragraph 15.3.2 "these effects will be highlighted within a separate socio economic	Socio-economic effects are outside the scope of this chapter of the EIA Report and are instead

Stakeholder organisation	Comment	Response
	report that will accompany the application" this contradicts the fact that socio economics are outwith scope.	assessed in the Socio-Economic Report prepared separately.
A&DCC	A&DCC question where the baseline data for any socio economic report will come from at a later date if socio economic are out of scope.	The Socio-Economic Report that accompanies the application provides a full socio-economic baseline.
The Contin, Strathpeffer, and Marybank, Scatwell and Strathconon Community Councils	<p>The council raised a number of concerns around the proposed methodology for the tourism and recreation assessment, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disagreement with the proposal to scope out effects during operation; Queries around the OAMP, how recreational use is quantified, and other mitigation measures proposed, including in relation to cultural heritage receptors; Concerns around the use of professional judgement and the impartiality of the assessment; Concerns around the study area proposed; Queries around the data sources used to inform the assessment, and the evidence of the long-term impact of OHLs on tourist behaviour; Request for visitor monitoring for Contin Forest and Loch Kinellan, and query around data to inform assessment of visitors to cultural heritage sites. 	<p>Other than the specific types of operational effects identified in Section 15.6 of Volume 5, Appendix 6.1: EIA Scoping Report, potential effects during operation have been included in the assessment. The assessment has not found any potential significant effects on tourism and recreation during operation.</p> <p>Further information regarding the draft OAMP and its approach to reducing impacts on recreational users can be found in Volume 5, Appendix 16.1: Outline Outdoor Access Management Plan. The assessment is qualitative and does not seek to quantify the change in recreational use of particular routes. Mitigation measures for cultural heritage receptors are outlined in Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage.</p> <p>As discussed in Section 16.3 and Section 16.4, there is limited guidance available for the assessment of tourism and recreation effects. The assessment has drawn on the relevant guidance and published literature that is available, together with the professional judgement of its authors. The authors of the report are professional consultants with experience of working on comparable projects, including grid connections, onshore renewables, and major linear infrastructure.</p> <p>The study area used for the assessment is described in detail in Section 16.4. The assessment is presented by section of the route, and the baseline provides information on tourism and recreation resources in each section, including identification of clusters of tourism and recreation receptors.</p> <p>Data sources used to inform the assessment are set out in Table 16.1. No visitor monitoring has been conducted as part of the assessment. The assessment has considered the potential impacts on recreation in the Strathpeffer and Contin area, including the use of core paths around Loch Kinellan and Torrachilty Woods, and has considered where core paths may be used to access certain cultural heritage receptors.</p>

Stakeholder organisation	Comment	Response
The British Horse Society Scotland (BHSS)	BHSS welcomes that the applicant intends to include an OAMP as part of the application, and notes that equestrian users should be considered and accommodated alongside other non-motorised users when planning access arrangements.	The draft OAMP (which can be found in Volume 5, Appendix 16.1: Outline Outdoor Access Management Plan) includes consideration of equestrian users.

Embedded Mitigation

16.4.17 An Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) has been prepared as part of the Application (see **Volume 5, Appendix 3.6: Outline Construction Environmental Management Plan**). The outline CEMP provides a framework from which a CEMP will be developed by the appointed Principal Contractors. The outline CEMP includes the need for public notices to be issued before construction works commence to inform recreational users of dates and durations of the works.

16.4.18 A draft OAMP is included as an appendix to this chapter and demonstrates how continued access for recreational users along core paths and other recreational routes in the area will be managed in a way that least affects their recreational users.

16.4.19 The tourism and recreation assessment considers the findings of other environmental topics including landscape and visual amenity, noise, and traffic and transport. Therefore, the mitigation measures outlined in those chapters, including the outline Construction Traffic Management Plan (CTMP) (see **Volume 5, Appendix 14.5: Outline Construction Traffic Management Plan**), are also relevant for tourism and recreation. A Construction Noise Management Plan (CNMP) will be produced prior to construction commencing.

Limitations and Assumptions

16.4.20 The baseline has identified tourism and recreation receptors and tourist accommodation within the study area, using published data sources and web searches (as outlined in **Table 16.1**). However, given the scale of the Proposed Development and the study area and the absence of a single source of data on tourism attractions, there may be a small number of receptors that have not been captured, or receptors that have opened or closed for business since the baseline was compiled.

16.4.21 The assessment draws on the findings of other relevant chapters of this EIA Report, including Landscape and Visual, Noise and Vibration, and Traffic and Transport, each of which uses a different study area and methodology appropriate to that topic. In relation to noise, the assessment set out in **Chapter 15: Noise and Vibration** assesses the potential significant effects of the Proposed Development for 77 Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSRs) within 500 m of the OHL, most of which are residential properties. It does not assess effects for the core path network. Professional judgement has therefore been used to interpret the findings of these chapters for the purposes of the tourism and recreation assessment.

16.4.22 The assessment of effects on tourist accommodation assumes, based on information provided by the OHL Contractors, that the majority of construction workers will be accommodated in camp-style accommodation provided by the Principal Contractors at appropriate locations along the route of the Proposed Development.

16.5 Baseline Conditions

16.5.1 This section presents a summary of baseline conditions, for the tourism sector in the Highlands and for each section of the Proposed Development. It is supported by **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** which maps tourism and recreation receptors.

The Tourism Sector in the Highlands

16.5.2 The Scottish Highlands attract a significant number of visitors annually, contributing substantially to the region's economy. According to data from Visit Scotland, tourism is a key sector for the Highlands and attracted around 2.29²³ million overnight visits by international visitors and GB residents in 2023, resulting in 7.64 million nights spent in accommodation and £762m being spent by international and domestic visitors²⁴. This means that there was an average of 21,000 visitors in the Highlands each day over the course of the year. Overnight visitors comprised 47% domestic visitors and 53% international visitors. Over half (63%) were repeat visitors to the area²⁵.

16.5.3 The Highlands tourism sector²⁶ employs around 20,605 people (2023)²⁷. Over the period 2018 – 2023, the sector's total employment in the Highlands increased by 7.1%, however tourism in the Highlands was heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic with employment dropping by 23% from 2019 – 2020, a greater decrease than seen nationally (-16%). Despite this, the sector had a strong bounce back from 2021 – 2022 increasing by 18%, 8 percentage points greater than that seen at the national level.

16.5.4 Data from Scottish Government and the ONS Inter-departmental Business Register (DBR)²⁸ shows that there were 1,455 tourism related businesses in the Highlands in 2023, which was a 16.4% increase over a 5-year period from 2018 and a greater uplift than seen nationally (+8.9%). The most recent data shows that total turnover for sustainable tourism-related businesses in the Highlands in 2022 was £587.2m, the fourth highest in Scotland behind Edinburgh, Glasgow and Fife.

Tourism Accommodation in the Highlands

16.5.5 Occupancy rates for tourist accommodation in the Highlands vary depending on the season and type of accommodation, but are generally higher than the Scottish average. The average occupancy for hotels in the Highlands in 2023 was 72.1% (compared with 65.4% for Scotland as a whole), and for guesthouses and B&Bs it was 87.8% (compared with 77.1% for Scotland). Self-catering accommodation in the Highlands recorded average occupancy of 47.8% in 2023 (compared with 43.1% for Scotland)²⁹.

16.5.6 Occupancy rates vary significantly throughout the year. Across Scotland as a whole, room occupancy in hotels, for example, varied from 44.3% in December, to a peak of 84.5% in September. Self-catering occupancy varied from 29.5% in January to 58.4% in August³⁰. The Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Survey provides data

²³ VisitScotland (2023) Research and insight on tourism in the Highlands. Online available at < [Highlands - Tourism Statistics & Visitor Numbers | VisitScotland.org](https://www.visitScotland.org) >

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Using ONS SIC definition of tourism industries available at - [Workers in the tourism sector - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

²⁷ ONS (2023) BRES

²⁸ Scottish Government (2024) Industry Statistics. Online available at < [Industry statistics - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot) >

²⁹ VisitScotland (2023), Scottish Accommodation Occupancy Survey 2023. Available online at: [Accommodation - Occupancy Statistics | VisitScotland.org](https://www.visitScotland.org)

³⁰ Ibid.

on occupancy by month for Scotland as a whole only, and so this information is not available at local authority level.

- 16.5.7 Independent analysis of Airbnb survey data³¹, set out in **Table 16.6**, shows that in the Highlands there were approximately 3,567 short term lets (STLs) which was the highest number out of all local authorities in Scotland and accounted for almost 20% (19.6%) of the national total. This data relates only to properties that were formerly or are suitable for permanent residence as homes, and does not therefore include bed and breakfast rooms, hotel rooms, log cabins or glamping sites. There was a slight reduction in STL properties recorded across the Highlands from 2022-2023 decreasing by 234 (-6.2%), which was a smaller reduction than seen nationally (-11.4%).

Table 16.6: Airbnb survey of short term lets³²

	Highlands	Scotland
Properties	3,567	18,225
Properties per km ²	0.14	-
Properties per 1,000 pop	14.98	-
Change from 2022	+35	-2,352

Source: Airbnb Scotland Survey (2023)

Evidence of the Impact of Renewable Energy Infrastructure on Tourism and Recreation Activity

- 16.5.8 Most studies of the impact of renewable energy infrastructure on tourism and recreation have focused primarily on onshore windfarm developments. A 2008 report produced by the Moffat Centre and Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU)³³, for example, looked at the economic impacts of windfarms on tourism in Scotland. The report concluded that, while new windfarms may deter a small percentage of tourists, the overall effect on the tourism industry is very small and can be further minimised by undertaking Tourism Impact Statements as part of the planning process. More recent research by BIGGAR Economics³⁴ examined the relationship between wind farm development and tourism employment in Scotland. The report states that, despite rapid expansion in onshore windfarms between 2009 and 2019, tourism related employment increased by 20% over the same decade. The analysis finds that there is no evidence that wind farm development has discouraged tourism activity in Scotland, or had a detrimental effect on tourism employment.
- 16.5.9 Outside of Scotland, the Welsh Government³⁵ assessed the most common messages that exist around the impact of onshore windfarms and associated grid infrastructure, and tourism. One of the key messages of this study is that responses to windfarms are subjective and there is therefore significant variability in individual tourists' reactions. The report concludes that the majority of tourists were neutral about windfarms and would not expect their future visiting behaviour to be affected by their presence. It recognises that the evidence base for tourism impacts of associated infrastructure is far less developed than that for wind farms. The few studies

³¹ Data Map Scotland, Airbnb Scotland Survey 2023. Available online at: [Airbnb Scotland Survey 2023 - Scotland's data on a map \(datamap-scotland.co.uk\)](https://airbnb-scotland.co.uk)

³² Data Map Scotland, Airbnb Scotland Survey 2023.

³³ Moffat Centre and Glasgow Caledonian University (2008), The Economic Impact of Windfarms on Scottish Tourism: A report for the Scottish Government

³⁴ BIGGAR Economics (2021), Wind Farms and Tourism Trends in Scotland: Evidence from 44 Wind Farms.

³⁵ Welsh Government (2014), Study into the Potential Economic Impact of Wind Farms and Associated Grid Infrastructure on the Welsh Tourism Sector.

which have addressed the subject have focused on visitors' opinions of pylons³⁶, which consistently find that reactions are more negative than toward wind turbines. This reflects surveys conducted as part of the Moffat Centre and GCU research, which found that pylons attracted a more negative response than wind turbines.

16.5.10 The Welsh Government study reports survey findings that showed that a greater proportion of tourists in both Wales and Scotland highlighted pylons over wind turbines from a list of factors which could detract from their tourism experience (51% for pylons compared with 29% for wind turbines in Scotland, and 48% and 23% in Wales). When asked to spontaneously identify aspects that could enhance or decrease from their experience of the countryside, however, only a very small proportion of survey respondents mentioned either pylons or wind turbines. The report concludes that *'this suggests that although pylons are ranked as more visually intrusive than wind turbines, they do not feature as a high profile concern amongst tourists overall'*³⁷. The report notes that there is no evidence that existing National Grid infrastructure, which is concentrated in North and South Wales, often in popular scenic areas, discourages visitors.

16.5.11 A 2006 study by Roger Tym and Partners on behalf of SSE assessed the effects of the Scotland-Northern Ireland Electricity Interconnector overhead transmission line and associated infrastructure on tourism businesses in Ayrshire and Arran, and provides evidence of the impact of OHLs on tourism activity in Scotland³⁸. While the study identified concerns regarding the visual impact of overhead transmission lines, the overall effect on the tourism industry was found to be *'inconsequential'*. Some businesses reported minor impacts, but these were not substantial enough to deter tourists. Additionally, the development of transmission infrastructure was noted to bring economic benefits to local communities, including job creation, increased economic activity, and increased business for some accommodation providers from construction workers building the interconnector³⁹.

Tourism and Recreation Receptors

16.5.12 **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows the locations of tourism and recreation receptors within 5 km of the LoD for the Proposed Development, including the following:

- Serviced and non-serviced accommodation;
- Castles and forts;
- Country parks and gardens;
- Historic houses, palaces and stately homes;
- Museums and art galleries;
- Outdoor activities and recreation providers;
- Sports grounds and play facilities;
- Visitor or heritage centres;
- Distilleries and breweries;
- Long-distance trails; and
- Core paths.

³⁶ 'Pylon' is used here rather than tower as this is the terminology used in the original report.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Scottish and Southern Energy Plc (2006), Scotland/Northern Ireland Interconnector Ex Post Tourism Impact Assessment. Available online at: [Microsoft Word - Scotland NIreland InterconnectorExPost Evaluation FR-nov06](#).

³⁹

16.5.13 As noted above, the history and culture of the Highlands is one of the key attractions for visitors to the area.

Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage provides information on cultural heritage receptors, such as Scheduled Monuments, Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Battlefields, and listed buildings, which may act as a draw for tourists to the Highlands. Many of these receptors are in private ownership, are not open to the public, or provide very limited facilities for visitors. Historical sites, including castles, forts and historic houses, that have been identified that do provide visitor facilities or infrastructure are included in the baseline for tourism and recreation.

16.5.14 The study area is largely rural in nature, with most tourist or recreational receptors located along or accessed from the A9 road, which forms part of the route of the North Coast 500 (NC500). The NC500 is a recreational driving and cycling route, launched in 2015, which has contributed to an increase in visitor numbers to the North and West Highlands. Research published in 2019 (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic) found that the NC500 was associated with a 19.9% increase in visitors to free attractions and a 41.7% increase in visitors to paid attractions in the area⁴⁰. Local press reporting shows that the route recorded a significant increase in visitors during the pandemic due to overseas travel restrictions, before a fall of 35% in 2021/22. In 2023, visitor numbers returned to above pre-pandemic levels⁴¹.

16.5.15 Visitor attractions in the study area include castles, historic houses and other historic sites, local visitor centres and museums, distilleries and breweries. Parts of the study area are popular for outdoor activities and recreation, including hillwalking, mountaineering, cycling, mountain biking, angling, horse riding, and golf. There are a number of outdoor activity providers located within the study area. Accommodation is generally characterised as small-scale private hotels, bed and breakfasts and self-catering providers aimed at passing tourist trade, although there are some larger hotels and holiday parks.

16.5.16 The following sub-sections provide more detailed baseline information for each section of the Proposed Development. These sub-sections do not seek to identify all tourism and recreation receptors within the study area; rather, they provide an overview of tourism and recreation infrastructure and activity within each section, and identify key locations where receptors are clustered.

Section A: Spittal to Brora

16.5.17 **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows tourism and recreation receptors within the study area for Section A of the Proposed Development (Spittal to Brora). The northernmost section of the proposed OHL, Section A runs from Spittal to Kintradwell, to the north of Brora. The Proposed Development in this section in part follows the route of the A9 road along the coast, turning inland and crossing more remote terrain at Rumster and again at Ousdale. Section A is largely rural in nature, with larger settlements including Halkirk, Dunbeath and Helmsdale.

16.5.18 Helmsdale is a coastal town on the A9, which forms part of the route of the NC500, and has a number of attractions including the Timespan Heritage and Art Centre, which hosts a local history museum and contemporary art program. Tourist accommodation in Section A is generally clustered in Helmsdale and along the route of the NC500. Outside Helmsdale, visitor attractions include Laidhay Croft Museum and Café, Clan Gunn Museum and Heritage Centre, Dunbeath Heritage Museum, Berriedale Braes Viewpoint, and Badbea Historic Clearance Village, which is accessed by footpath from a car park on the A9. Dunbeath Castle is a

⁴⁰ BBC News (2017), North Coast 500 route has increased tourist numbers. Available online at: [North Coast 500 'boosted Highland economy by £22m' - BBC News](#)

⁴¹ Press and Journal (2024), North Coast 500: Organisers on 2024 preparations, 'staycations' and expectations. Available online at: [North Coast 500 organisers on expectations for 2024](#)

privately owned house, however the gardens are open by appointment and there are also lodges on the estate that are let out and advertised for sports including stalking and fishing.

16.5.19 Walking, angling and golf are available in the area, with fishing at a number of lochs including Toftingall, Watten and Rangag, and salmon fishing on the River Helmsdale. Achnaharras Quarry Nature Reserve and Rumster Forest are located in the north of Section A and provide woodland walks. Creag Thoraraidh, above Helmsdale, is a popular hill walking destination. Core paths in Section A are listed in **Table 16.7**. There is also one Heritage Path in the area, at Berriesdale Fishing Station⁴².

Table 16.7: Core paths in the Section A Study Area

Number	Name
CA10.11	Achnavanich and Munsary
CA10.03	Rumster Mast Loop
CA10.16	Achavanich Stone Setting
CA04.01	Dunbeath Strath
CA04.02	Coopers Path
CA04.03	Badbea
CA04.04	Achnaclyth track by Toutnagoul
CA04.06	Footbridge link
CA04.07	Post Office path
CA04.08	Balcladich and the sandy pools
CA04.09	Back path
CA04.10	Milton track
CA04.11	A9 roadside link
CA04.12	Old road link
CA04.13	Old road by the driveway to Dunbeath Castle
CA04.14	Berriedale Pier
CA04.15	Langwell Woodland
CA04.16	Clashvalley track
CA04.17	Portormin beach
CA04.18	Camel humps
CA04.19	Balintrawood
CA04.20	Dunbeath Broch
CA06.01	Brawl Castle and pond
CA06.02	Halkirk Riverside
CA06.04	Causeymire Wind Farm

⁴² Scotways, Heritage Paths. Available online at: [Heritage Path | ScotWays](#)

Number	Name
CA06.05	Lane along east edge of village
CA06.07	Achanarras Quarry
CA06.08	The old quarry
CA06.09	Footway B874
CA06.10	Halkirk railside to river link
CA06.11	Brawl Castle riverside link
CA06.12	Dirlot Gorge egress
CA06.14	Sibster Trails
CA10.03	Rumster Mast Loop
CA10.04	Rumster
CA10.05	Latheronwheel Strath
CA10.07	Rumster to A99
CA10.08	Latheronwheel to Latheron roadside link
CA10.10	Forse Coast
CA10.11	Achavanich and Munsary
CA10.17	Latheron Cliff (Brahead Walk)
CA14.01	Watten Roadside Link to Loch Watten
CA14.03	Sports Pitch Path
SU13.01	Lobster Ponds - Navidale
SU13.02	St Johns Well
SU13.03	Helmsdale River Bank
SU13.04	Simpson Crescent
SU13.05	Old Helmsdale - Old Caithness Road – Navidale Cycle Path
SU13.06	Old Helmsdale – East Helmsdale
SU13.07	Playing Fields – West Helmsdale
SU13.08	Portgower Inn Road – Gartymore
SU13.09	Navidale farm track / Seaweed Road
Heritage Path	Path to Berriedale Fishing Station

16.5.20 Parts of the study area in Section A are within the boundary of The Flow Country World Heritage Site (WHS)⁴³. The Flow Country covers 4,000 square kilometres of blanket bog habitat across Caithness and Sutherland and was designated by UNESCO in 2024 as the world's first peatland WHS. While the Flow Country was inscribed as a WHS because of the importance of its natural ecosystems, it is being promoted as a visitor destination and

⁴³ Further information on the WHS is provided in **Volume 5, Appendix 8.10: World Heritage Site Assessment**.

there are aspirations that its WHS status will bring benefits for the north of Scotland including green jobs⁴⁴. The impact of WHS status on visitor numbers is debated. Research undertaken to support the designation of the Lake District WHS found that the impact on tourist footfall from WHS designation can be around 0-3%, and that the magnitude of the tourism impact is highly site-specific, depending on factors including the existing visitor profile and the way in which a site is marketed⁴⁵.

Section B: Brora to Loch Buidhe

16.5.21 **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows tourism and recreation receptors within the study area for Section B of the Proposed Development (Brora to Loch Buidhe). Section B runs south-west from Kintradwell, inland from Brora, and moves further inland, away from the route of the A9 / NC500, heading south-west towards Loch Buidhe. Section B is again mostly rural, with the majority of tourism and recreation receptors in this section of the line clustered in and around the towns of Brora and Golspie.

16.5.22 Receptors in Brora include Brora Golf Club, Clynelish Distillery, and Brora beach. In and around Golspie, attractions include Dunrobin Castle and Gardens, Golspie Golf Club, and Golspie Beach. Tourist accommodation in this section is also concentrated in Brora and Golspie, with some more scattered receptors in other areas including around Strathfleet, where the proposed OHL crosses the River Fleet and the A839 road.

16.5.23 The area is again popular for outdoor activities. Ben Bhraggie, above Golspie, is popular for hillwalking with paths leading to the Duke of Sutherland Monument and viewpoint and to Golspie Burn Waterfall and Gorge. There are also a number of privately-operated graded trails (including Highland Wild Cat Trails, see **Table 16.8**) for mountain biking. The core path network links Brora to the relatively isolated Loch Brora and Carroll Rock. Trout fishing is available on lochs in the study area for Section B, including Loch Brora and Loch Horn⁴⁶. Core paths in Section B are listed below in **Table 16.8**.

Table 16.8: Core paths in the Section B Study Area

Number	Name
SU06.01	Brora - Carn Liath Coastal Route
SU06.02	Loch Brora – West Track
SU06.03	The Drove Road
SU06.04	Brora – Golspie, via Uppat
SU06.05	Jubilee Walk (West)
SU06.07	Brora Links, Shore Route
SU06.08	Brora Links, East Brora Muir Link
SU06.09	Brora Links, Dalchalm
SU06.10	Brora Links, Dalchalm Footbridge
SU06.11	North Brora River

⁴⁴ The Flow Country (2024), Scotland's Flow Country secures World Heritage status. Available online at: [Scotland's Flow Country secures World Heritage status - The Flow Country The Flow Country](#)

⁴⁵ Lake District World Heritage Project (2017), World Heritage Status: Is there opportunity for economic growth? Available online at: [WHS-Lake-District-Economic-Gain-Doct..pdf](#)

⁴⁶ Golspie Angling Club, available online at: [Club venues | Golspie Angling Club](#)

Number	Name
SU06.12	The Doll Bridge
SU06.14	Doll Bridge – Loch Brora
SU06.15	Uppat Drive
SU06.16	Sciberscross Cemetery
SU09.19	Achvaich – Loch Buidhe
SU12.02	Balblair Wood (Loch Fleet)
SU12.04	Big Burn
SU12.05	Ben Bhraggie
SU12.10	Brora – Golspie, via Queen's Drive
SU12.11	Brora – Golspie, via Dunrobin Farm
SU12.12	Queen's Drive, Drummie – Rhives Farm
SU12.13	Queen's Drive, Rhives Farm – Golspie Tower
SU12.14	Golspie Tower – Ben Bhraggie
SU12.15	Highland Wildcat Trails, Car Park – Big Burn Cottage
SU12.16	Highland Wildcat Trails, Golspie Tower – Rhives Farm
SU12.17	Highland Wildcat Trails, Picts Path
SU12.19	Windfarm Track
SU12.21	Drummie – Ben Bhraggie Forest
SU12.23	Backies Road – Big Burn
SU12.24	Loch Lunndaidh
SU12.25	Sportsmans Walk – A9
SU12.26	West Drummie – Beinn Bhraggie Forest
SU20.01	Meall Mor Fire Trach
SU20.02	Eiden – Creag A'Bhlair
SU20.03	Pittentrail – Rhemusaig Bridge via curling pond
SU20.04	Free Church - Pitfure
SU20.05	Free Church - Ardichoncherr - Tressady
SU20.06	Morness - Mill - Little Rogart
SU20.07	Little Rogart - Morness
SU20.08	Little Rogart Brae - Milnafua
SU20.09	Creag a'Bhata Circuit
SU20.10	Torboll – Eiden
SU20.11	Little Rogart - Balchlaggan
SU20.12	Rovie

Number	Name
SU20.13	Rovie – Davochbeg

Section C: Loch Buidhe to Dounie

16.5.24 **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows tourism and recreation receptors within the study area for Section C of the Proposed Development (Loch Buidhe to Dounie). Section C (Loch Buidhe to Dounie) is the shortest section of the Proposed Development. The route in this section crosses over the Kyle of Sutherland inland from the villages of Invershin and Culrain. Receptors in the study area for Section C mostly comprise self-catering, and bed and breakfast accommodation. Carbisdale Castle, located close to the route of the proposed OHL, is a private residence and is currently open to the public by appointment for tours and afternoon teas. The castle is also available for use as a conference venue, and has accommodation available for members of its private members' club.

16.5.25 Balblair Wood, managed by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS), is located within the study area and offers walking routes and graded mountain bike trails. The Falls of Shin and Shin Forest also provide walking trails, as well as a café and visitor centre, car parking and a picnic area. Salmon fishing is available on the River Shin, the River Carron, and the Kyle of Sutherland, and trout fishing at Loch Laro.

16.5.26 The Far North Way cycle route runs between Inverness and John O'Groats and previously formed part of National Cycle Network (NCN) Route 1 from Dover to John O'Groats (now Dover to Tain). The route follows the A836 along the Dornoch Firth and Kyle of Sutherland, as far as Invershin where it diverts along the B864. A branch of the route runs along local roads including the Inveroykel Culrain road between Ardgay and Invershin, crossing the Kyle of Sutherland between Culrain and Invershin.

16.5.27 Core paths in Section C are listed in **Table 16.9**. A number of these paths are within woodland adjacent to Carbisdale Castle, and within the site of the Battle of Carbisdale (for further information on the battlefield site see **Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage**). There is also one Heritage Path (Rogart Drove Road) in the area, which runs through Balblair Wood.

Table 16.9: Core paths in the Section C Study Area

Number	Name
SU03.01	Cornhill – Culrain, via Invercharron Hill/Carbisdale
SU03.06	River Carron
SU03.11	River Carron (lower section)
SU03.14	Cornhill Curling Pond Circuit
SU05.04	Balblair Forest Walk (Bonar Bridge)
SU05.06	Balblair Wood – Invershin track
SU08.01	Culrain – Invershin
SU08.02	Carbisdale
SU08.03	Loch a'Choire
SU16.08	Braemore – Achany
SU16.09	Gruids Wood
SU21.11	Shin Falls Forest Walk

Number	Name
SU21.12	Shin Falls Circular
SU21.13	Shin Falls
Heritage Path	Rogart Drove Road

Section D: Dounie to Near Strathpeffer

16.5.28 **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows tourism and recreation receptors within the study area for Section D of the Proposed Development (Dounie to near Strathpeffer). Section D of the proposed OHL passes through remote upland areas to the south of Ardgay and Dounie. Attractions located in the study area for this section of the proposed OHL include Ardross Distillery and Glen Wyvis Distillery, to the north of Dingwall. Ardross Castle is a privately owned events venue and filming location, and not currently open to the public. The NC500 is within the Study Area where it follows the route of the A862 between Cromarty Bridge and Dingwall.

16.5.29 Section D is largely remote with few settlements or clusters of tourism receptors. The town of Dingwall, in the south east of the study area, is the largest settlement in the area, and provides some tourism infrastructure. The wider area is popular for hillwalking and mountaineering. The summit of Ben Wyvis is outside the study area, however parts of the Ben Wyvis National Nature Reserve are within the study area. The Fyrish Monument and the hills above Alness and Evanton are popular walking locations. Core paths in Section D are listed in **Table 16.10**. There is also one Heritage Path in the area.

Table 16.10: Core paths in the Section D Study Area

Number	Name
SU03.02	Badvoon Forest, Entrance Track
SU03.03	Badvoon Forest, Forest Road
SU03.04	Badvoon Forest, Link Path
SU03.05	Badvoon Forest, Allt Eiteachan Path
SU03.06	River Carron
SU03.06	Gearchoille Woods
SU03.07	Oldtown – Badvoon
SU03.09	Carron Bridge - Gledfield
SU03.10	Ardgayhill
SU03.12	Oakwood Chalet - Oldtown
SU03.13	Oak Wood Place - Ardgayhill
SU03.14	Cornhill Curling Pond Circuit
SU03.15	Gledfield – Cona Creag
RC05.01	Fyrish Path
RC05.02	Tollie to Lealty Path
RC05.03	Dam Wood
RC05.04	Dublin to Ardross Mains
RC13.01	Maggies Wood

Number	Name
RC13.02	Tulloch Lane
RC13.03	Craig Wood
RC13.05	Knockfarrel to Fodderty
RC13.06	Knockfarrel
RC13.09	Business Park path
RC16.01	Swordale Hill
RC16.04	Novar Green Road
RC16.05	Black Rock Gorge
RC16.06	Evanton Woods
RC16.07	Novar Quarry
Heritage Path	Glen Calvie Lodge to Braeantra Track

Section E: Near Strathpeffer to Beauly

16.5.30 **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows tourism and recreation receptors within the study area for Section E of the Proposed Development (Strathpeffer to Beauly). Section E is the most southerly section of the Proposed Development. From Strathpeffer, the route of the proposed OHL passes south, crossing over the River Conon and River Beauly before finishing at Fanellan, near Aigas.

16.5.31 The majority of tourism and recreation receptors in the study area for this section of the Proposed Development are clustered in and around Strathpeffer, which is a Victorian spa town providing a range of facilities for visitors, the neighbouring hamlet of Contin, and around the towns of Muir of Ord and Beauly. There are also some receptors along the route of the A862 road which forms part of the NC500 between Conon Bridge, Muir of Ord and Beauly.

16.5.32 Receptors in Strathpeffer include a number of larger hotels, as well as self-catering, and bed and breakfast accommodation. Attractions include the Strathpeffer Spa Pavilion (also used as an events venue) and the Highland Museum of Childhood. Sports facilities in Strathpeffer include a golf club, bowling club, cricket club and shinty club. There are walking and mountain bike trails available to the public at Torrachilty Woods in Contin. The Strathpuffer 24-hour mountain bike race is held annually at this location in winter and attracts hundreds of competitors⁴⁷.

16.5.33 Outside Strathpeffer and Contin, tourism and recreation receptors in this section include self-catering and bed and breakfast accommodation, as well as a number of larger hotels. Attractions include the Singleton Distillery in Muir of Ord. The Belladrum Tartan Heart music festival is held on the Belladrum Estate, located at the southern point of the study area for Section E. The festival attracts up to 20,000 attendees and is held annually

⁴⁷ Strathpuffer 24, available online at: [Strathpuffer 24 Mountain Bike Endurance Event in Strathpeffer](#)

in July/August⁴⁸. The Black Isle Agricultural Show is held annually at Muir of Ord on the first Thursday in August and attracts around 20,000 visitors⁴⁹.

16.5.34 Fairburn Activity and Conference Centre is located south of Contin, close to the route of the proposed OHL, and provides outdoor activities and accommodation, including for school residential trips. Activities available at the centre include canoeing, bush craft and archery. Other sports and outdoor activity receptors in Section E include golf clubs and a shinty club. Aigas Gorge is used for canoeing and kayaking, and there is salmon and trout fishing on the Rivers Beauly⁵⁰, Conon and Blackwater⁵¹. Core paths in Section E are listed in **Table 16.11**.

Table 16.11: Core paths in the Section E Study Area

Number	Name
RC10.01	View Rock
RC10.02	Rogie Falls
RC10.03	Mains of Coul
RC10.04	Torrachilty Woods
RC10.05	Contin Island
RC10.06	Contin to Strathgarve
RC10.07	Kinellan link path
RC13.05	Knockfarrel to Fodderty
RC20.03	Kinellan to Strathgarve
RC30.01	Orrin Dam track
RC30.02	Orrin circular – Fairburn
RC30.03	Coul Wood
RC31.02	Brahan east drive
RC31.03	Brahan -Loch Ussie track
RC31.04	Brahan North Lodge to Balnain
RC32.01	School Loch
RC32.03	Clash Wood
RC32.05	Distillery to Highfield
RC32.06	Village Hall vennel
RC32.07	Ord Hill
RC32.10	Railway Footbridge
RC44.01	Scatwell circular

⁴⁸ Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival, available online at: [Belladrum Festival - Tartan Heart Festival](#)

⁴⁹ Press and Journal (2018), Black Isle Show hailed a success with attendance up nearly 15% on previous years. Available online at: [Black Isle Show hailed a success with attendance up nearly 15% on previous years](#)

⁵⁰ Beauly Angling Club, available online at: [Beauly Angling Club – Fishing on River Beauly and Beauly Firth](#)

⁵¹ Loch Achonachie Angling Club, available online at: [Highland fishing - Loch Achonachie Angling Club](#)

Number	Name
RC45.01	Loch Kinellan circuit
RC45.02	Knockfarrel (maze to hill)
RC45.03	Ord Wood west - Kinellan
RC45.04	Blackmuir Woods - maze circular
RC45.05	Strathpeffer - Jamestown (Blackmuir Woods)
RC45.06	Ord Terrace - Hall
RC45.07	Golf course - Ord Wood east
RC45.08	Kinnettas vennel
RC45.09	Ardival - Catsback - Loch Ussie
RC45.10	Eagle Stone Path
IN03.02	Cnoc na Rath path
IN03.03	War Memorial to Black Bridge by Balblair Wood
IN03.04	Lovat Bridge to Black Bridge
IN20.01	Eskadale to Drumkinneas
IN20.02	Belladrum Kennels to Belladrum Farm
IN20.03	Belladrum Kennels to Belladrum by Black Wood
IN20.04	Belladrum Kennels to Belladrum by Phoinneas Hill
IN20.05	East Lodge to West Lodge, Beaufort Castle
IN20.05	East Lodge to West Lodge, Beaufort Castle
IN20.06	Bruaich Burn to Dounie Burn
IN20.07	Balgate track
IN20.08	Old Mill track
IN20.09	Farm Walk to school
IN20.11	Home Farm to Hughton by Lonbuie

16.6 Future Baseline

16.6.1 Given the recent growth in visitor numbers and tourism businesses reported in the baseline, and the strength of the recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic, it is anticipated that tourism in the Highlands and its importance to the local economy will continue to increase. The NC500 route has been a particular driver of growth over the last decade and is also be expected to see a continued increase in visitor numbers.

16.7 Assessment of Effects

16.7.1 The following section provides the assessment of potential significant effects during the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development. Effects are presented as project-wide where they could

affect receptors across multiple sections of the Proposed Development, and by section where they affect specific receptors or clusters of receptors in those sections. The structure is summarised in **Table 16.12**.

Table 16.12: Structure of Assessment

	Project-wide	By Section
Temporary impacts on the availability of tourism accommodation	✓	
Temporary changes in access to tourism and recreation receptors	✓	
Temporary or permanent changes in access or amenity for users of the NC500	✓	
Temporary or permanent changes in the availability, accessibility and amenity of tourism and recreation assets		✓
Temporary or permanent changes in access or amenity for users of specific tourism receptors (including for example The Flow Country WHS and Strathpuffer mountain bike event and trails)		✓

Construction

Project-wide Effects

Tourism Accommodation

- 16.7.2 During the construction phase, there could be an increase in demand for tourist accommodation in the Highlands due to construction workers moving into the area temporarily. Data supplied by the OHL Contractors suggests that, at the peak of construction, there could be an average of up to 1,000 workers required on site each day. While some of these workers would live locally and travel to site each day, others would be from outside the area and would require temporary accommodation. At this stage, it is expected that there would be a number of separate teams working at the same time at different locations along the Proposed Development.
- 16.7.3 The baseline shows that the occupancy rates in both serviced and unserviced accommodation are higher in the Highlands than the national averages. Demand for tourist accommodation is highly seasonal, with data presented in the baseline showing that hotel and self-catering occupancy in Scotland varies substantially over the year with the peak in August and September. Occupancy rates by month are not available at local authority level, however it is likely that there is some spare capacity even at the peak of the tourist season, particularly in the unserviced sector where average occupancy across the year in the Highlands is 47.8%.
- 16.7.4 During initial mobilisation and early construction phases of the Proposed Development, it is expected that workers will use local accommodation including B&Bs and rentals. During the peak of construction, however, the Principal Contractors appointed to construct the Proposed Development will accommodate much of the construction workforce in worker villages, which will reduce demand for tourist accommodation. For Sections A and B of the Proposed Development, it is expected that there will be several temporary worker villages which will accommodate the majority of the workforce, with an ongoing, reduced requirement for short-term accommodation for specific remote or transient workforce needs throughout the lifecycle of the Proposed Development. For Sections C, D and E of the Proposed Development, it is expected that the majority of the workforce will be accommodated in a temporary worker village at Port of Nigg on the Cromarty Firth, with the

potential for some workers to use their own mobile accommodation and for some smaller numbers to use serviced accommodation.

16.7.5 Any increase in demand for tourist accommodation could, at the peak of the tourist season, potentially lead to displacement of other visitors. Outside of the peak tourist season there could be benefits for local accommodation providers and other hospitality businesses. However, it is expected that the majority of the workforce across the Proposed Development will be accommodated in temporary worker villages which will reduce the additional demand for tourist accommodation, including hotels, B&Bs, and self-catering.

16.7.6 The sensitivity of the tourism accommodation market in the Highlands is assessed as medium, reflecting the volume of visitors to the area and higher than average rates of occupancy across the year. As the majority of the construction workforce will be accommodated in temporary worker villages, the magnitude of the impact is considered to be low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

Temporary Changes in Access to Tourism and Recreation Receptors

16.7.7 The assessment has considered the potential for construction traffic on local roads to impact on access to tourism and recreation receptors, including events such as the Sutherland County Show, Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival and the Black Isle Agricultural Show.

16.7.8 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that the short-term increase in construction traffic associated with the whole of the Proposed Development will result in a negligible or minor (not significant) effect on road vehicle and passenger delay. There will be significant adverse effects on severance, non-motorised user amenity, and non-motorised user delay on some local roads which could affect pedestrian access to tourism and recreation receptors. Mitigation measures set out in the outline CTMP will reduce the magnitude of these impacts, however, and **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** concludes that there will be no residual significant adverse effects.

16.7.9 The sensitivity of tourism and recreation receptors is assessed as medium. As the assessment in **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** has concluded that there will be no significant residual effects, the magnitude of the impact in terms of delay, severance and amenity is assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

NC500

16.7.10 The route of the NC500 passes through the Study Area in Sections A and B and is on the periphery of the Study Area in Sections C, D and E of the Proposed Development. There is the potential for effects for motorists or cyclists using the NC500 as a result of any traffic disruption or changes in road safety associated with construction activity. Cyclists could also experience changes in non-motorised user amenity due to increased traffic flow.

16.7.11 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that the short-term increase in construction traffic associated with the Proposed Development will result in a negligible or minor (not significant) effect on road vehicle and passenger delay. The effect on road safety is also assessed as minor and therefore not significant. **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that there could be significant adverse effects on non-motorised user amenity on roads that form part of the NC500 route, including the A9 around Achavanich, Helmsdale, Brora and Golspie,

and the A832 east of Marybank. Mitigation measures set out in the outline CTMP will reduce the magnitude of these impacts, however, and there will be no residual significant adverse effects.

16.7.12 Given the importance of the NC500 to tourism in the Highlands, the sensitivity of the receptor is assessed as medium. As the assessment in **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** has concluded that there will be no significant residual effects, the magnitude of the impact in terms of delay, road safety and amenity is assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

16.7.13 Changes in amenity for users of the NC500 associated with visual impacts and the presence of OHL towers are assessed as operational effects.

Section A: Spittal to Brora

Temporary or Permanent Changes in the Availability, Accessibility and Amenity of Tourism and Recreation Assets

16.7.14 The Proposed Alignment crosses Core Path CA04.04 (Achnaclyth track by Toutnagoul) where it runs alongside Dunbeath Water, inland from the coastal village of Dunbeath. There is a proposed tower location (Tower N83) in this area that is within 100 m of the core path.

16.7.15 While the design of the Proposed Development has sought to avoid locating infrastructure such as towers on the core path network, during construction there could be direct impacts on path users due to short-term, temporary closures and disruption to paths while construction work is carried out. It is proposed to upgrade a stretch of Core Path CA04.04 for use as a temporary construction access route, and so it is likely that users of this path will experience some disruption during construction, although there could be permanent improvements in the condition of the path. The draft OAMP sets out measures to manage interactions with access routes which would reduce the potential impact on recreational users during construction.

16.7.16 CA04.04 tracks into the upper portion of the Dunbeath Water river valley, on the north side, passing through a landscape in which prehistoric monumentality and settlement is present alongside medieval and post-medieval occupation, settlement and agricultural activity. It is likely that the path is used by some tourists to visit scheduled monuments within this landscape. Effects on scheduled monuments are assessed in **Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage**. There is the potential for some minor, short-term disruption to tourists in the area as a result of any temporary impacts on Core Path CA04.04. Alternative paths are available in the Dunbeath area, including CA04.01 (Dunbeath Strath) which follows a similar route along Dunbeath Water from the village.

16.7.17 There is also the potential for combined effects on amenity for users of core paths, tourism and recreation receptors, as a result of noise, visual and traffic effects arising from construction activity. **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports significant adverse visual effects during construction for users of some sections of the following recreational routes:

- CA06.08: The Old Quarry;
- CA10.11: Achavanich and Munsary;
- Collection of paths at Dunbeath (CA04.01 Dunbeath Strath, CA04.02 Coopers Path, CA04.04 Achnaclyth Track by Toutnagoul, CA04.06 Footbridge Link, CA04.07 Post Office Path, CA04.08 Balcladich and the Sandy Pools, CA04.09 Back Path, CA04.10 Milton Track, CA04.11 A9 Roadside Link, CA04.12 Old Road Link, CA04.13 Old Road by the Driveway to Dunbeath Castle, CA04.16 Clashvalley Track, CA04.17 Portormin Beach, CA04.18 Camel Humps, and CA04.19 Balintra Wood); and
- CA04.03: Badbea.

- 16.7.18 Significant adverse visual effects are also expected during construction for the Berriedale Braes Viewpoint, the hill walking route at Creag Thoraraidh, and for properties in villages and smaller settlements close to the Proposed Development (see **Volume 5, Appendix 7.5: LVIA of Section A, Annex 2 Visual Receptor Assessment** for further detail). While some tourist accommodation providers may be present in these locations there are no significant adverse visual effects predicted for residential properties in Helmsdale where **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows the majority of tourist accommodation in Section A is located.
- 16.7.19 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that there will be significant adverse effects on severance, non-motorised user amenity, and non-motorised user delay on some roads which could affect pedestrian access to tourism and recreation receptors in some specific areas. In Section A, non-motorised users could experience severance, delay or changes in amenity on the A9 at Achavanich, north of Helmsdale, and south of Helmsdale. Mitigation measures set out in the outline CTMP will reduce the magnitude of these impacts, however, and **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** concludes that there will be no residual significant adverse effects.
- 16.7.20 The noise assessment concludes that, with the implementation of a CNMP, there will be no significant effects on NSRs during construction. As noted in **Section 16.4**, the noise methodology does not assess receptors such as core paths. However, any construction noise impact in these areas would be temporary and short-term, and recreational users of core paths and other outdoor attractions are transitory, reducing their sensitivity to noise impacts.
- 16.7.21 There are numerous core paths within the Dunbeath area that would not be impacted directly by construction activity, however CA04.04 provides the main access to the scheduled monuments at Loedebest and Achnaclyth. Many of the core paths within the Dunbeath area are expected to experience significant adverse visual effects. The Berriedale Braes Viewpoint also has medium scarcity value as there are few comparable alternative viewpoints in the immediate area. The sensitivity of receptors is therefore assessed as medium.
- 16.7.22 Measures set out in the draft OAMP will reduce potential direct impacts on users of paths, while measures set out in the CEMP and the CTMP will reduce the environmental impacts of construction activity in relation to traffic. A CNMP will be produced prior to construction which will contain measures to reduce noise impacts. Construction of the Proposed Development will follow an agreed Construction Method Statement which will aim to reduce landscape and visual impacts during construction, however some significant adverse effects are likely to remain.
- 16.7.23 Significant adverse visual effects and potential disruption to core paths during construction could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific routes particularly around Dunbeath. However, the impact on visitors to Helmsdale, where the majority of visitor infrastructure in Section A is located, would be small. The magnitude of the impact on tourism and recreation activity across Section A as a whole is therefore assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.
- The Flow Country WHS
- 16.7.24 The Proposed Development is within the boundary of The Flow Country WHS at four points at two locations in Section A: at Achavanich (Towers N24 - N28 and N33 - N37), and at Helmsdale (Towers N126 - N138 and N147 - N148). While there is the potential for a direct impact on the WHS, and for effects on amenity for visitors to the WHS, as a result of changes in the landscape and construction noise, the areas affected are small and

provide very limited tourism infrastructure. The Flow Country WHS covers an area of approximately 190,000 ha⁵², and so the areas affected comprise a very small proportion of the total area of the WHS.

16.7.25 The sensitivity of The Flow Country WHS is assessed as high due to its international importance as a WHS.

Given the scale of the impact and the small proportion of the WHS that would be affected, the magnitude of the impact is assessed as negligible. This results in a **negligible** effect that is **not significant**.

Section B: Brora to Loch Buidhe

Temporary or Permanent Changes in the Availability, Accessibility and Amenity of Tourism and Recreation Assets

16.7.26 The Proposed Alignment crosses Core Path SU06.02 (Loch Brora – West Track) and SU06.03 (the Drove Road) which run inland from Brora towards Loch Brora, and SU20.10 (Torboll – Eiden) at Strathfleet. The route is also within 100 m of Core Path SU20.02 (Eiden – Creag A'Bhlair) at Strathfleet. There are proposed tower locations (Tower N217, N221, and N266) in these areas that are within 100 m of these core paths.

16.7.27 While the design of the Proposed Development has sought to avoid locating infrastructure such as towers on the core path network, during construction there could be direct impacts on path users due to short-term, temporary closures and disruption to paths while construction work is carried out. It is proposed to upgrade stretches of Core Paths SU06.02 (Loch Brora – West Track), SU20.10 (Torboll – Eiden) and SU20.13 Rovie - Davochbeg for use as temporary construction access routes. SU12.19 (Windfarm Track) is located approximately 1.5 km east of the OHL and will be used as an access track. It is likely that users of these paths will experience some disruption during construction, although there could be permanent improvements in the condition of those paths that will be upgraded. The draft OAMP sets out measures to manage interactions with access routes which would reduce the potential impact on recreational users during construction.

16.7.28 There is also the potential for in-combination effects on amenity for users of core paths, tourism and recreation receptors, as a result of noise, visual and traffic effects arising from construction activity. **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports significant adverse visual effects during construction for users of some sections of the following recreational routes:

- SU06.03: The Drove Road (at higher elevations);
- SU06.14: Doll Bridge – Loch Brora;
- SU06.02: Loch Brora West Track;
- SU09.19: Achvaich – Loch Buidhe;
- Core path network west of Backies and Golspie (SU12.14: Golspie Tower; SU12.13: Ben Bhraggie; SU12.19: Ben Bhraggie);
- SU12.24: Loch Lunndaigh;
- SU20.01: Meall Mor Fire Trach;
- SU20.02: Eiden – Creag A'Bhlair; and
- SU20.10: Torboll-Eiden.

16.7.29 Significant adverse visual effects are also expected during construction for the Duke of Sutherland Monument and for residential properties in villages and smaller settlements close to the Proposed Development (see

⁵² Historic Environment Scotland, The Flow Country. Available online at: [Flow Country | World Heritage Site | Historic Environment Scotland](#)

Volume 5, Appendix 7.6: LVIA of Section B, Annex 2 Visual Receptor Assessment for further detail). While some tourist accommodation providers may be present in these locations, there are no significant adverse visual effects predicted in Brora or Golspie where **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows the majority of tourist accommodation in Section B is located.

16.7.30 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that there will be significant adverse effects on severance, non-motorised user amenity, and non-motorised user delay on some roads, which could affect pedestrian access to tourism and recreation receptors in some specific areas. In Section B, non-motorised users could experience severance, delay or changes in amenity on the A9 at Brora. Additionally, there could be changes in amenity for non-motorised users of the A9 south of Golspie. Mitigation measures set out in the outline CTMP will reduce the magnitude of these impacts, however, and **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** concludes that there will be no residual significant adverse effects.

16.7.31 The noise assessment concludes that, with the implementation of a CNMP, there will be no significant effects on NSRs during construction. As noted in **Section 16.4**, the noise methodology does not assess receptors such as core paths. However, any construction noise impact in these areas would be temporary and short-term, and recreational users of core paths and other outdoor attractions are transitory, reducing their sensitivity to noise impacts.

16.7.32 There are numerous other core paths within the Brora, Golspie and Strathfleet / Rogart areas that would not be impacted by construction activity or by significant adverse visual effects. However, Core Paths SU06.02 and SU06.03 provide a route from Brora towards Loch Brora for which no alternatives are available. The Duke of Sutherland Monument also has medium scarcity value as there are few comparable alternative viewpoints in the immediate area. The sensitivity of receptors is therefore assessed as medium.

16.7.33 Measures set out in the draft OAMP will reduce potential direct impacts on users of paths, however there is likely to be some temporary disruption particularly for users of SU20.10 while it is in use as a construction access route. Upgrades to this route are likely to result in permanent improvements to its condition. Measures set out in the CEMP, and CTMP will reduce the environmental impacts of construction activity in relation to traffic. A CNMP will be produced prior to construction that will contain measures to reduce noise impacts. Construction of the Proposed Development will follow an agreed Construction Method Statement which will aim to reduce landscape and visual impacts during construction, however some significant adverse effects are likely to remain.

16.7.34 Significant adverse visual effects and potential disruption to core paths during construction could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific routes inland from Brora. However, the impact on visitors to Brora and Golspie, where the majority of visitor infrastructure in Section B is located, would be small. The magnitude of the impact on tourism and recreation activity across Section B as a whole is therefore assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

Section C: Loch Buidhe to Dounie

Temporary or Permanent Changes in the Availability, Accessibility and Amenity of Tourism and Recreation Assets

16.7.35 The Proposed Alignment crosses Core Paths SU08.02 (Carbisdale), SU08.03 (Lochcoire), and SU03.01 (Cornhill – Culrain). There are proposed tower locations (Towers S28, S30 and S31) in the area that are within

100 m of these paths. The Proposed Alignment also crosses Rogart Drove Road heritage path, and Towers S6 and S7 are in close proximity.

16.7.36 While the design of the Proposed Development has sought to avoid locating infrastructure such as towers on the core path network, during construction there could be direct impacts on path users due to short-term, temporary closures and disruption to paths while construction work is carried out. Tree felling required to construct the OHL, and additional management felling in the area, could also impact on paths SU03.01 and SU08.02⁵³. It is proposed to upgrade stretches of Core Paths SU03.01 and SU08.03 for use as temporary construction access routes, as well as SU3.14 Cornhill Curling Pond Circuit, which is located approximately 1 km from the OHL at the southern end of Section C. It is likely that users of these paths will experience some disruption during construction, although there could be permanent improvements in the condition of the paths. The draft OAMP sets out measures to manage interactions with access routes which would reduce the potential impact on recreational users during construction.

16.7.37 There is also the potential for in-combination effects on amenity for users of core paths, tourism and recreation receptors, as a result of noise, visual, and traffic effects arising from construction activity. **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports significant adverse visual effects during construction for users of some sections of the following recreational routes:

- Inverness to John O’Groats National Cycle Trail;
- SU08.02: Carbisdale;
- SU03.01: Cornhill – Culrain;
- SU08.03: Lochcoire;
- SU03.06: River Carron;
- SU08.01: Culrain to Invershin; and
- SU03.14: Cornhill Curling Pond.

16.7.38 Significant adverse visual effects are also expected during construction for outdoor locations including Carbisdale Castle, Dounie Estate, and angling locations on the Kyle of Sutherland, and for the settlement of Culrain where **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows a number of tourism accommodation providers are located.

16.7.39 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that there will be significant adverse effects on severance, non-motorised user amenity, and non-motorised user delay on some roads, which could affect pedestrian access to tourism and recreation receptors in some specific areas. In Section C, non-motorised users could experience changes in amenity on the A836 at Bonar Bridge. Mitigation measures set out in the outline CTMP will reduce the magnitude of these impacts, however, and **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** concludes that there will be no residual significant adverse effects.

16.7.40 The noise assessment concludes that, with the implementation of a CNMP, there will be no significant effects on NSRs during construction. As noted in **Section 16.4**, the noise methodology does not assess receptors such as core paths. However, any construction noise impact in these areas would be temporary and short-term, and

⁵³ This refers to management felling, reported in **Chapter 13: Forestry** as a temporary indirect effect, that would be required to reduce the risk of windblow. Further information can be found in **Chapter 13: Forestry**.

recreational users of core paths and other outdoor attractions are transitory, reducing their sensitivity to noise impacts.

16.7.41 There are alternative walking routes available locally, including at Balblair Woods and the Falls of Shin, where it is not expected that there will be any direct impacts or any significant adverse visual effects, as well as alternative angling locations. Alternative tourism accommodation is also available in the wider area, in locations that are not expected to experience significant effects. This reduces the sensitivity of tourism and recreation receptors in Section C, which is assessed overall as low.

16.7.42 Measures set out in the draft OAMP will reduce potential direct impacts on users of core paths, while measures set out in the CEMP and CTMP will reduce the environmental impacts of construction activity in relation to traffic. A CNMP will be produced prior to construction that will contain measures to reduce noise impacts. Construction of the Proposed Development will follow an agreed Construction Method Statement which will aim to reduce landscape and visual impacts during construction, however some significant adverse effects are likely to remain.

16.7.43 Significant adverse visual effects and potential disruption to core paths during construction could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific receptors in and around Culrain. Construction effects would, however, be temporary and relatively short-term, and tourists and recreational users of core paths and other outdoor attractions are typically transitory. This reduces the magnitude of the impact on tourism and recreation activity which, across Section C as a whole, is assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

Section D: Dounie to Near Strathpeffer

Temporary or Permanent Changes in the Availability, Accessibility and Amenity of Tourism and Recreation Assets

16.7.44 The Proposed Alignment crosses Core Path SU03.06 (River Carron) at Cornhill. There is a proposed tower location (Tower S39) in this area that is within 100 m of the core path. The route also crosses the Glen Calvie Lodge to Braeantra Track heritage path, and Tower S79 is within 100 m of the path. Core Path SU03.03 (Badvoon Forest, Forest Road) is approximately 2 km east of the Proposed Development. It is proposed to upgrade this path for use as a temporary construction access route. It is likely that users of the path will experience some disruption during construction, although there could be permanent improvements in the condition of the path.

16.7.45 While the design of the Proposed Development has sought to avoid locating infrastructure such as towers on the core path network, during construction there could be direct impacts on path users due to short-term, temporary closures and disruption to paths while construction work is carried out. There could also be impacts on users of the Glen Calvie Lodge to Braeantra Track heritage path. The draft OAMP sets out measures to manage interactions with access routes which would reduce the potential impact on recreational users during construction.

16.7.46 There is also the potential for in-combination effects on amenity for users of core paths, tourism and recreation receptors, as a result of noise, visual and traffic effects arising from construction activity. **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports significant adverse visual effects during construction for users of some sections of the following recreational routes:

- SU03.06: River Carron;
- SU03.14: Cornhill Curling Pond Circuit;

- RC16.01: Swordale Hill.

16.7.47 Significant adverse visual effects are also expected at Dounie Estate. **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** does not report any significant adverse visual effects for settlements in Section D, although it does report significant adverse visual effects for individual residential properties at certain locations (see **Volume 5, Appendix 7.8: LVIA of Section D, Annex 2 Visual Receptor Assessment** for further detail).

16.7.48 The noise assessment concludes that, with the implementation of a CNMP, there will be no significant effects on NSRs during construction. As noted in **Section 16.4**, the noise methodology does not assess receptors such as core paths. However, any construction noise impact in these areas would be temporary and short-term, and recreational users of core paths and other outdoor attractions are transitory, reducing their sensitivity to noise impacts.

16.7.49 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that there will be significant adverse effects on severance, non-motorised user amenity, and non-motorised user delay on some roads, which could affect pedestrian access to tourism and recreation receptors in some specific areas. In Section D, non-motorised users could experience severance, delay or changes in amenity on the A836 near Edderton and the C1140 Church Street in Ardgay. Additionally, there could be changes in amenity for non-motorised users of the A836 at Ardgay. Mitigation measures set out in the outline CTMP will reduce the magnitude of these impacts, however, and **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** concludes that there will be no residual significant adverse effects.

16.7.50 There are numerous core paths within the Cornhill, Ardgayhill and Carbisdale areas which provide alternatives for users of SU03.06, although users of some of these paths could experience significant adverse visual effects (see paragraph 16.7.46 above). There are also alternative paths available in the south of Section D, around Swordale and Fyrish, although again users of some of these paths could experience significant adverse visual effects. Given the availability of alternative resources, the sensitivity of receptors is assessed as low.

16.7.51 Measures set out in the draft OAMP will reduce potential direct impacts on users of paths during construction, however there is likely to be some temporary disruption. Measures set out in the CEMP and CTMP will reduce the environmental impacts of construction activity in relation to traffic. A CNMP will be produced prior to construction that will contain measures to reduce noise impacts. Construction of the Proposed Development will follow an agreed Construction Method Statement which will aim to reduce landscape and visual impacts during construction, however some significant adverse effects are likely to remain.

16.7.52 Significant adverse visual effects and potential disruption to core paths during construction could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific core paths and outdoor locations during the construction phase. Construction effects would, however, be temporary and relatively short-term. As tourists and recreational users of core paths and other outdoor attractions are typically transitory, this reduces the magnitude of the impact, which is assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

Section E: Near Strathpeffer to Beaully

Temporary or Permanent Changes in the Availability, Accessibility and Amenity of Tourism and Recreation Assets

16.7.53 The Proposed Alignment crosses Core Paths RC10.07 (Kinellan link path) west of Strathpeffer, RC10.03 (Mains of Coul) east of Contin, and RC30.01 (Orrin Dam track) to the west of Marybank. There are proposed

tower locations (Towers S39, S163, S168 and S187) in these areas that are within 100 m of these core paths. The route is also within 100 m of Core Path RC45.01 (Loch Kinellan circuit) west of Strathpeffer.

16.7.54 While the design of the Proposed Development has sought to avoid locating infrastructure such as towers on the core path network, during construction there could be direct impacts on path users due to short-term, temporary closures and disruption to paths while construction work is carried out. Tree felling required to construct the OHL, and additional management felling in the area, could also impact on RC10.07. The draft OAMP sets out measures to manage interactions with access routes which would reduce the potential impact on recreational users during construction.

16.7.55 It is proposed to upgrade short stretches of Core Path RC45.01 (Loch Kinellan circuit), RC10.03 (Mains of Coul) and RC30.01 (Orrin Dam track), and a longer (approximately 3 km) stretch of Core Path RC30.02 (Orrin circular – Fairburn) for use as temporary construction access routes. RC10.06 (Contin to Strathgarve) is approximately 1 km west of the Proposed Development. It is proposed to upgrade approximately 4 km of this path for use as a temporary construction access route. It is likely that users of these paths will experience some disruption during construction, although there could be permanent improvements in the condition of the paths.

16.7.56 There is also the potential for combined effects on amenity for users of core paths, tourism and recreation receptors, as a result of noise, visual, and traffic effects arising from construction activity. **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports significant adverse visual effects during construction for users of some sections of the following recreational routes:

- RC10.01: View Rock;
- RC10.03: Mains of Coul;
- RC10.05: Contin Island;
- RC10.07: Kinellan link path;
- RC30.01: Orrin Dam track;
- RC30.02: Orrin circular – Fairburn;
- RC32.07: Ord Hill;
- RC45.01: Loch Kinellan circuit;
- RC45.03: Ord Wood west – Kinellan;
- RC45.04: Blackmuir Woods – maze circular;
- RC45.05: Strathpeffer – Jamestown (Blackmuir Woods);
- RC45.07: Golf course – Ord Wood east;
- RC45.09: Ardival – Catsback – Loch Ussie; and
- Strathpeffer walking and cycling routes (Torrachilty Forest, and north of Strathpeffer Golf Course).

16.7.57 Significant adverse visual effects are also expected during construction for residential properties and the settlements of Strathpeffer, Contin, Marybank, and Jamestown, and for outdoor locations including Coul House Hotel, the Falls of Orrin, Strathpeffer Golf Course, and Fairburn Activity Centre (see **Volume 5, Appendix 7.9: LVIA of Section E, Annex 2 Visual Receptor Assessment** for further detail). **Volume 3, Figure 16.2** shows that there are numerous tourism receptors, including accommodation providers, located in these areas, and particularly around Strathpeffer and Contin.

16.7.58 The noise assessment concludes that, with the implementation of a CNMP, there will be no significant effects on NSRs during construction. As noted in **Section 16.4**, the noise methodology does not assess receptors such as core paths. However, any construction noise impact in these areas would be temporary and short-term, and

recreational users of core paths and other outdoor attractions are transitory, reducing their sensitivity to noise impacts.

16.7.59 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that there will be significant adverse effects on severance, non-motorised user amenity, and non-motorised user delay on some roads, which could affect pedestrian access to tourism and recreation receptors in some specific areas. In Section E, non-motorised users could experience severance, delay or changes in amenity on the C1104 at Togormack. Additionally, there could be changes in amenity for non-motorised users of the A834 north of Strathpeffer and the A832 east of Marybank. Mitigation measures set out in the outline CTMP will reduce the magnitude of these impacts, however, and **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** concludes that there will be no residual significant adverse effects.

16.7.60 RC30.01 and RC30.02 are located in a relatively remote area with little tourism infrastructure and few alternative routes nearby. RC45.01 forms part of the Loch Kinellan circuit which is a circular walking route from the centre of Strathpeffer, however the majority of this route will not be directly impacted by construction activity. There are also alternative core paths within the Strathpeffer and Contin areas that would not be directly impacted, although users of some of these may experience significant adverse visual effects. The sensitivity of receptors is therefore assessed as medium.

16.7.61 Measures set out in the draft OAMP will reduce potential direct impacts on users of paths during construction, however there is likely to be some temporary disruption while these paths are in use as construction access routes. Upgrades to these routes are likely to result in permanent improvements to their condition. Measures set out in the CEMP and CTMP will reduce the environmental impacts of construction activity in relation to traffic. A CNMP will be produced prior to construction that will contain measures to reduce noise impacts. Construction of the Proposed Development will follow an agreed Construction Method Statement which will aim to reduce landscape and visual impacts during construction, however some significant adverse effects are likely to remain.

16.7.62 Significant adverse visual effects, in combination with potential disruption to popular walking routes in the Strathpeffer and Contin area during construction, could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of the area and of some specific tourism and recreation receptors. Given the scale of direct and indirect impacts on the core path network in this area, the magnitude of the impact on tourism and recreation activity in Strathpeffer and Contin is assessed as medium. This results in a **moderate adverse** effect that is **significant**.

16.7.63 Across Section E as a whole, the magnitude of the impact on tourism and recreation activity is assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

Strathpeffer Mountain Bike Trials

16.7.64 Strathpeffer is an annual 24-hour mountain bike endurance event, held each winter in Contin Forest. The event uses core paths including RC10.07: Kinellan Link Path. Camping and car parking for participants is available on site at Torrachilty Woods. In 2023, the event attracted 620 participants⁵⁴.

16.7.65 RC10.07 will be crossed by the Proposed Development. Tower S163 would be approximately 30 m from RC10.07 and it is proposed to upgrade stretches of the path for use as temporary construction access routes. Tree felling to construct the OHL, and additional management felling in the area, could also impact on RC10.07.

⁵⁴ BBC, Cyclists tackle first Strathpeffer race since Covid, 16th January 2023. Available online at: [Strathpeffer: The first annual mountain bike race since Covid-19 - BBC News](#)

The draft OAMP sets out measures to manage interactions with access routes which would reduce the potential impact on recreational users of core paths during construction. There is, however, the potential for some disruption to the route of the Strathpuffer event due to construction activity in the area.

16.7.66 In 2025, the event was held over the weekend of Friday 10th – Sunday 12th January. It is assumed, therefore, that it will be possible to manage construction activity in the area to minimise disruption to the event. The Applicant will continue to engage with the organisers of the event to discuss any concerns, understand the potential for impacts on the event, and identify any further mitigation measures that may be required.

16.7.67 As the event is well-established in its current location and attracts large numbers of participants, the sensitivity of the receptor is assessed as medium. As it is assumed that it will be possible to manage construction activity to minimise disruption, the magnitude of the impact is assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

Operation

Project-wide Effects

NC500

16.7.68 The route of the NC500 passes through the study area in Section A, Section B and Section C, and is on the periphery of the study area in Section D and Section E of the Proposed Development. There is the potential for changes in amenity for users of the route associated with visual impacts.

16.7.69 **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports minor adverse visual effects during operation in Section A, Section B, Section D, and Section E. As discussed in **Section 16.5**, there is no strong evidence that the visual impact of transmission infrastructure significantly affects tourism behaviour. Users of the NC500 are transitory, which reduces their sensitivity to visual impacts. Given the importance of the NC500 to the tourism sector in the Highlands, the sensitivity of the resource is assessed as medium. The magnitude of the impact is assessed as low. This results in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

Permanent changes in the Availability, Accessibility and Amenity of Tourism and Recreation Assets

16.7.70 There are not expected to be any changes in the availability or accessibility of tourism and recreation assets during operation. **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that, once operational, the Proposed Development will only generate occasional maintenance traffic and therefore the impact of operational traffic is scoped out of the assessment.

16.7.71 There is the potential for combined effects on amenity for users of core paths, tourism and recreation assets, as a result of noise and visual effects. **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports significant adverse visual effects during operation for users of core paths within the study area for all sections of the Proposed Development, and for residential properties and outdoor locations in some settlements close to the route including areas where tourism and recreation assets are located.

16.7.72 Research presented in the baseline shows that, although pylons are viewed by tourists as more visually intrusive than other forms of infrastructure such as wind turbines, overall they do not represent a major concern to visitors. While significant adverse visual effects associated with OHL towers could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific receptors close to the Proposed Development during the operational phase, this would be restricted to certain locations and limited by the transitory, short-term nature of most tourist visits.

16.7.73 **Chapter 15: Noise and Vibration** concludes that the operational noise impact on Noise Sensitive Receptors would be negligible and not significant. It is therefore not expected that there would be any combined effects on

amenity for users of core paths, tourism and recreation receptors once the Proposed Development is in operation.

16.8 Cumulative Effects

16.8.1 The Tourism and Recreation assessment has considered the cumulative effects on tourism and recreation activity within the study area from the interaction of effects identified in **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual**, **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** and **Chapter 15: Noise and Vibration**.

16.8.2 This section provides an assessment of the cumulative effects of the Proposed Development in combination with other SSEN Transmission Accelerated Strategic Transmission Investment (ASTI) associated developments required to connect the Proposed Development to the network (i.e. intra-project effects, as listed in **Table 5.2 of Chapter 5: EIA Process and Methodology**, comprising Banniskirk 400 kV Substation and High-Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) Converter Station, Fanellan 400 kV Substation and Converter Station, and Carnaig 400 kV Substation), and unrelated third-party projects (i.e. inter-project effects, as listed in **Table 5.3 of Chapter 5: EIA Process and Methodology**).

Tourism Accommodation

16.8.3 There is the potential for a cumulative effect as a result of increased demand for tourist accommodation in the Highlands from construction workers associated with the Proposed Development in combination with both related and unrelated development proposals moving temporarily into the area. As discussed in paragraph 16.7.4, information provided by the OHL Contractors indicate that the majority of the construction workforce for the Proposed Development will be housed in camp-style accommodation, reducing any additional demand for tourist accommodation. The assessment for the Proposed Development therefore concluded that there would be a **minor adverse** effect on tourism accommodation.

16.8.4 In relation to intra-project effects, it is anticipated that there will be some overlap in the construction programmes for the Proposed Development, the proposed Banniskirk 400 kV Substation and HVDC Converter Station, the proposed Fanellan 400 kV Substation and Converter Station, and the proposed Carnaig 400 kV Substation. Information provided by the Applicant suggests that, at the peak of construction, the total number of construction workers required for all three projects could be up to an average of approximately 1,300 per month, of which up to approximately 1,000 would be working on the Proposed Development. The EIA Report for the Banniskirk project concludes that there is likely to be capacity within the local tourist accommodation sector to accommodate the incoming construction workforce, which is estimated to be up to 290 workers at the peak of construction⁵⁵. The EIA Report for the Fanellan project also concludes that there is likely to be capacity within the vicinity of the Proposed Development and that cumulative impacts on tourist accommodations are therefore not expected⁵⁶. The EIA Report for the Carnaig project does not consider effects on tourist accommodation.

16.8.5 In relation to inter-project effects, it is assumed that cumulative projects will have measures in place, such as a commitment to using camp-style housing or a Workforce Accommodation Strategy, to manage any additional

⁵⁵ Proposed Banniskirk Substation EIA Report, Volume 2 – Chapter 14: Land Use, Amenity and Socio-Economics, section 14.6

⁵⁶ Proposed Fanellan Hub 400kV Substation and Converter Station EIA Report, Volume 2 – Chapter 16: Socio-economics, Tourism and Recreation, section 16.16.

demand for tourist accommodation or market housing. It is considered unlikely that all cumulative projects would come forward simultaneously and that the peak worker requirement for each project would coincide.

- 16.8.6 While there is the potential for an intra-project cumulative effect from the Proposed Development in combination with the Banniskirk and Carnaig projects, the magnitude of the effect is reduced by the use of worker villages to house the majority of the construction workforce for the Proposed Development. The potential demand from the Banniskirk and Carnaig workforces would be comparatively small, and it is considered that there is likely to be capacity within the local tourism accommodation market. Therefore, this assessment concludes that it is unlikely that there would be any significant cumulative effects on the availability of tourism accommodation in the Highlands. However, the Applicant will continue to manage the construction of the intra-related projects to consider the need for any further measures that may be required in future to minimise the impact of the Proposed Development, in combination with the other projects assessed as part of the cumulative assessment, on tourist accommodation in the Highlands.

NC500

- 16.8.7 There is the potential for cumulative effects for users of the NC500 route as a result of traffic disruption associated with the construction of the Proposed Development in combination with other related development proposals, and other unrelated development proposals. During operation, there could also be cumulative effects resulting from changes in visual amenity.
- 16.8.8 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that the cumulative effect of the Proposed Development and other identified developments in the area would not lead to any changes in the significance of effects in the context of the EIA Regulations. Therefore, this assessment concludes that it is not likely that there would be any significant cumulative effect on users of the NC500 as a result of traffic disruption associated with construction activity.
- 16.8.9 **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports that there would not be any significant adverse cumulative effect for users of the NC500 as a result of the Proposed Development in combination with other related and unrelated development proposals. Therefore, this assessment concludes that it is not likely that there would be any significant cumulative effect on users of the NC500 as a result of changes in visual amenity during construction or operation.

Temporary and permanent changes in the availability, accessibility and amenity of tourism and recreation assets

- 16.8.10 There is the potential for cumulative effects on the availability and amenity of core paths, tourism and recreation receptors as a result of the construction and operation of the Proposed Development and other cumulative projects. Impacts on the core path network from other related or unrelated projects are likely to be limited within the study area for the Proposed Development. However, there is the potential for effects on amenity for users of core paths as a result of cumulative visual and noise effects.
- 16.8.11 **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** reports a significant adverse effect for angling locations on Loch Laro (Section C) as a result of the Proposed Development in combination with the proposed Carnaig 400 kV Substation, and in combination with the consented Lairg II Wind Farm Redesign, proposed Acheilidh Wind Farm (Lairg III), and proposed Garvary Wind Farm. There are no other significant adverse cumulative effects

reported for visual receptors as a result of the Proposed Development in combination with related or unrelated development proposals.

16.8.12 **Chapter 15: Noise and Vibration** reports no significant adverse cumulative effects during construction or operation. Therefore, there would not be any cumulative combined effects on amenity for users of tourism and recreation resources.

16.8.13 While cumulative adverse visual effects could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific receptors, this would be restricted to certain locations and limited by the transitory, short-term nature of most tourist visits. As shown in **Section 16.5**, there is no strong evidence that the visual impact of transmission infrastructure significantly affects tourism behaviour, and so it is not anticipated that there would be an overall negative effect on tourism and recreation activity.

Temporary changes in access to tourism and recreation receptors

16.8.14 **Chapter 14: Traffic and Transport** reports that the cumulative effect of the Proposed Development and other identified developments in the area would not lead to any changes in the significance of effects in the context of the EIA Regulations. Therefore, this assessment concludes that it is not likely that there would be any significant cumulative effect on access to tourism and recreation receptors as a result of traffic disruption associated with construction activity.

16.9 Mitigation

16.9.1 Embedded mitigation including the draft OAMP and outline CEMP is outlined in **Section 16.4** of this chapter.

16.9.2 The assessment has identified a moderate adverse effect on tourism and recreation activity in the Strathpeffer and Contin area due to direct and indirect impacts on core paths in the area and adverse visual effects for residential properties and outdoor locations around Strathpeffer and Contin, where the baseline shows a concentration of tourism and recreation receptors.

16.9.3 **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual** identifies specific mitigation measures that would be set out in an agreed construction method to mitigate local adverse landscape and visual impacts during construction (to be agreed with THC and other statutory agencies). These include:

- Minimising land clearance / vegetation removal as far as possible;
- Protection of existing features such as field boundaries;
- Maintaining the Proposed Development Site in a tidy and contained condition;
- Controlling construction lighting (construction works would be focused within daytime periods only);
- Use of existing tracks where possible;
- Utilise temporary access tracks where conditions allow; and
- Removal of the construction compound and all temporary construction materials as soon as construction work is completed.

16.9.4 The applicant will continue to engage with THC and with stakeholders representing the tourism and recreation industry including community councils, local fisheries and Mountaineering Scotland to communicate the likely impacts of construction, including the timings of construction activity. This will include engaging with the organisers of the Strathpuffer mountain bike trials to identify any further mitigation that may be required to

reduce potential impacts on the event. The assessment has assumed that it will be possible to manage construction activity to avoid significant disruption to the event.

16.10 Residual Effects

16.10.1 The mitigation measures outlined above would reduce the magnitude of the impact on tourism and recreation activity in the Strathpeffer and Contin area during construction. While there would still be significant adverse visual effects which could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific receptors in the area, this would be restricted to certain locations and limited by the transitory, short-term nature of most tourist visits. The overall impact on tourism and recreation activity in the Strathpeffer and Contin area during construction is therefore assessed as minor. This would result in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**. As shown in **Section 16.5**, there is no strong evidence that the visual impact of transmission infrastructure significantly affects tourism behaviour, and so it is not anticipated that there would be an overall negative effect on tourism and recreation activity in the area once the Proposed Development is operational.

16.10.2 The assessment therefore concludes that there would not be any significant adverse residual effects on tourism and recreation during construction or operation.

16.11 Summary and Conclusions

16.11.1 This chapter has considered any potential significant effects of the construction and operation of the Proposed Development on tourism and recreation. The scope of the assessment includes:

- Temporary or permanent changes in the availability, accessibility and amenity of tourist attractions, including recreational assets and routes, as a result of the loss or partial loss of a resource, temporary or permanent diversions to recreational routes, or temporary or permanent land-take required for the Proposed Development (construction and operation).
- Temporary changes in access to tourist attractions and recreation assets during the construction of the Proposed Development, as a result of increased traffic movements on the local road network as well as vehicular, pedestrian and cyclist diversions that could be implemented (construction only).
- Temporary changes in the availability of tourist accommodation due to the influx of construction workers (construction only).

16.11.2 In Sections A, B, C and D of the Proposed Development, the effect on the availability, accessibility and amenity of tourist and recreational assets during construction is assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**. Effects on the NC500 route during construction and operation are assessed on a Proposed Development-wide basis and are also assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**.

16.11.3 In Section E, the effect during construction for the study area as a whole is assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**. However, in the Strathpeffer and Contin area where there is a concentration of tourist and recreational receptors, the effect on this cluster is assessed as **moderate adverse** and **significant**. Mitigation including measures to be set out in an agreed construction method, and continued engagement with THC and other relevant stakeholders, would reduce the magnitude of the impact, resulting in a **minor adverse** effect that is **not significant**.

16.11.4 The assessment of changes in demand for tourism accommodation assumes, based on information provided by the OHL Contractors, that the majority of construction workers will be housed in camp-style accommodation, at Port of Nigg and at Golspie. While there may be some temporary increase in demand for tourist accommodation, this will be reduced by the use of camp-style housing. There could also be some benefits for

tourist accommodation providers and other hospitality businesses as a result of any additional demand outside of the peak tourist season. Overall, the effect is assessed as **minor adverse** and **not significant**.

16.11.5 It is not expected that there will be any significant effects on tourism and recreation once the Proposed Development is in operation. While significant adverse visual effects (reported in **Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment**) associated with OHL towers could reduce the attractiveness to tourists of some specific receptors close to the Proposed Development during the operational phase, this would be restricted to certain locations and limited by the transitory, short-term nature of most tourist visits. There would be no significant noise or transport effects during operation, and therefore no combined effects on amenity.