

**Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400
kV OHL Connection
Environmental Impact Assessment
Volume 5, Appendix 13.1 – I:
Woodland Reports
Gordonbush Estate**

July 2025



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) Transmission, hereafter referred to as ‘the Applicant’, owns, operates, develops and maintains the high voltage electricity transmission system in the north of Scotland and the Scottish islands. Due to the growth in renewable electricity generation in the north and north-east of Scotland, upgrade of the transmission network is required to provide the necessary increase in transmission capacity. The Applicant is applying for consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to construct and operate a new double circuit 400 (kilovolt) kV overhead line (OHL).
- 1.2 This report provides an assessment of woodland impact related to the Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beaully 400 kV OHL Connection project (the ‘Proposed Development’). The report details the woodland area affected by the Operational Corridor (OC), new access tracks (permanent), and additional felling required due to windblow risk within individual ownerships. It also includes mitigation considerations and compensatory planting recommendations.

2. Purpose of this Woodland Report

- 2.1 As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, it was identified that construction of the OHL and associated access tracks would cross a number of woodland areas within both public and private landholdings. The landholding property boundaries are identified in **Figure 1: Woodland Impacted by the Proposed Development**.
- 2.2 This document provides an assessment of the woodland areas that are affected by the Proposed Development, including the requirement for woodland removal and management recommendations to mitigate the impact of the woodland removal.
- 2.3 Field surveys of the woodland areas have been undertaken and have been used to determine the various woodland characteristics to identify the woodland removal required and recommended. This document also sets out the area, in hectares (ha), of compensatory planting required to ensure no net loss of woodland is achieved.

3. Woodland Property

- 3.1 Gordonbush Estate is a privately owned estate located approximately 7 km west of Brora village. The nearest public road is the Brora to Balnacoil c-class road, which runs east of Loch Brora and provides access to the area affected by the Proposed Development. Refer to **Figure 1: Woodland Impacted by the Proposed Development**.
- 3.2 The property is centred at grid reference NC 85762 07248, approximately 200 m northeast of Killin Farmhouse. The Gordonbush Estate’s woodlands affected by the Proposed Development consist of broadleaved woodland situated on a gentle slope east of Loch Brora.

3.3 The local public road crosses the OC near the loch. There are no existing access tracks within the property leading to the woodland affected by the Proposed Development.

4. Development Requirements

4.1 400 kV Operational Corridor

- 4.1.1 With reference to **Figure 1: Woodland Impacted by the Proposed Development**, the sections of Overhead Line (OHL) applicable to the Gordonbush Estate are 60 m northeast of Tower N207 to over 120 m southwest of Tower N220.
- 4.1.2 The Study Area for this assessment is based around an operational corridor of 90 m. The Applicant defines the OC as the area in which it has rights to remove woodland for the purposes of creation of new OHL, resilience and maintenance of OHLs, or protection of electrical plant as required by the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations (ESQCR) 2002 regulations and The Electricity Act 1989. The OC is defined as to the distance at which a tree could fall and cause damage to the OHL, resulting in a supply outage. As a result, the final OC width would be based on the safety distance required from the OHL centreline to allow for a mature tree falling towards the OHL, taking account of topography and tree height at maturity.
- 4.1.3 The OC width that has been assessed and identified for the safe build and energisation of the new OHL through areas of conifer woodland is 90 m (45 m either side of the OHL centreline). Further details can be found in **Section 13.3 of Volume 2, Chapter 13: Forestry** which outlines the extent of the study area.
- 4.1.4 The OC width that has been assessed and identified for the safe build and energisation of the OHL through the areas of broadleaves is also 90 m (45 m either side of the OHL centreline). This has been assessed as a maximum OC width required at these woodland locations, with the potential of further narrowing of the OC prior to construction to allow greater tree retention depending on factors such as tree height, topography, crown reduction or other mitigation strategies¹.

4.2 Access Track Route Design

- 4.2.1 The nearest public road is the c-class Brora to Balnacoil road, which reaches the southwestern side of Gordonbush estate's woodland and is intersected by the OC. Both permanent and temporary new road sections will be constructed within and outside the OC, with most of these new roads located outside woodland areas. These roads will serve as the

¹As specified by the 'Red Zone' set out in paragraph 41 of the Forest Industry Safety Accord. (2020) Safety Guide 804 Electricity at Work: Forestry. [pdf] Available at: FISA 804 (ukfisa.com).

primary vehicle access route for the Proposed Development and will be subject to maintenance and upgrade works as part of the construction work scope.

- 4.2.2 Sections of new access track seen in **Figure 1: Woodland Impacted by the Proposed Development**, are required to be built as part of the construction work scope, to service the Towers N207 to N220.
- 4.2.3 The access track corridor width required for clearing through the woodland is 20 m (10 m on either side of the centreline), but this will be evaluated in situ to determine the suitability for further tree retention.
- 4.2.4 The construction of these new access tracks will not impact woodland removal along routes located outside the OC. Refer to **Table 9.1** below.
- 4.2.5 Tree felling, stump removal and residue mulching will be required for the installation of new access tracks and at each tower location for the formation of temporary construction working areas.
- 4.2.6 These roads can serve as the main arterial construction route. Tree felling and timber extraction would be able to utilise existing tracks, prior to any construction activity.
- 4.2.7 Where existing tracks require maintenance or upgrading, this may involve the removal of trees and scrub to facilitate the works, particularly to accommodate the creation of additional passing places. While much of the upgrade activity would fall within standard forest access maintenance, which typically involves the removal of scrub, regeneration, and crown management, some sections may require additional tree clearance within a corridor of up to 12 m in width.

5 Woodland Characteristics

- 5.1 A desk-based study of the woodland areas was conducted, to identify current woodland environmental designations and classifications.
- 5.2 The web-based data provided by Scottish Forestry and referencing the Scottish Government's Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI), and

- The Scottish Forestry Map Viewer provides spatial data on the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) and classifies the woodland types into four categories^{2 3}:

1. Native woodland
2. Nearly-native woodland
3. Open land habitat
4. Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)

5.3 The woodlands within the Proposed Development at Gordonbush consist primarily of broadleaved trees.

5.4 These woodlands comprise semi-mature to mature broadleaved trees. The terrain gently slopes, ranging in elevation from 40 m to 80 m above sea level, with a predominantly west-facing aspect.

5.5 There is no classified woodland within this ownership, as the woodland affected by the Proposed Development lies outside designated woodland areas in the vicinity. However, an area of Ancient Woodland is located approximately 40 m north of the OC, between Towers N219 and N220.

5.6 Within the woodland area affected by the Proposed Development, some individual trees exhibit features indicative of biological maturity, including broken limbs and fallen deadwood. These mature birch trees are generally widely spaced along the slope, and more predominantly in the woodlands outside the OC. Refer to **Plate 1**.

² Scottish Forestry Map Viewer URL

<https://scottishforestry.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=0d6125cfe892439ab0e5d0b74d9acc18>

³ Scottish Forestry Native Woodland Survey of Scotland: Glossary of Terms; URL: Main Title (forestry.gov.scot)

Native Woodland – woods where the canopy cover is composed mainly of native species (i.e., over 50%).

Nearly Native Woodland - where native species make up between 40% and 50% of the canopy. These are woods that could have potential to be converted into native woodlands by altering their species mix.

Open Land Habitat – areas with <20% canopy cover of trees and shrubs adjoining a native woodland.

PAWS - Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites. These are surveyed in the NWSS where they are recorded in the Scottish ancient woodland inventory (SAWI). These woodlands appear to have originated through natural regeneration sometime before the mid-19th century, but were later converted to planted wood.



Plate 1- A few biologically mature birch trees are present within the woodland area intersected by the OC. Grid reference: NC 85759 07256.

5.7 The woodlands within Gordonbush have a slightly younger character than the neighbouring woodland setting, with birch as the dominant species. Birch trees are located in small, close groups and are scattered throughout the area near a minor watercourse. Those young birch trees at the pole stage dominate the landscape, surrounded by dense patches of gorse. The birch trees average around 6 m in height, and among the gorse and thick bracken, some recently regenerated birch trees can also be found. Refer to **Plate 2**.

5.8 Within the OC, there are also isolated pole-stage immature birch trees scattered throughout the landscape. Refer to **Plate 3**.



Plate 2- The woodland features an open upper canopy dominated by birch trees. The trees are widely spaced, with no understorey development of significant natural regeneration. Grid reference: NC 85790 07273.



Plate 3- Broadleaved woodland within the OC is composed of birch trees of an average 6m in height and surrounded by thick gorse. Grid reference: NC 85749 07243.

5.9 The site soils are predominantly Humus-iron podzols.⁴

6. Windblow Risk Impact

6.1 An assessment was undertaken of the risk of windblow to areas of woodland adjacent to the OC which would be exposed due to the tree clearance required for the OC. This assessment was based on the professional judgement of the forestry surveyor with consideration being given to the soil and moisture regime, the topography, tree species, top height, exposure, altitude and aspect in relation to the prevailing wind direction and any previous management regimes. This assessment was also based on site visits and observations, and available data of the site. Reference was also made to Forest GALES 2.5 Forest Research decision support system where appropriate.

6.2 Given the nature of these broadleaved woodlands present on this site, along with the local soils, topography and aspect, it is anticipated that the introduction of the OC will not result in future windblow to the adjoining woods.

⁴ Scottish Government's Scotland's soils website <https://soils.environment.gov.scot>

6.3 The woodland site affected by the Proposed Development has a ‘Detailed Aspect Method of Scoring’ (DAMS)⁵ windthrow hazard class score of 11, classified as low. The site presents mineral soils with shallow rooting that are mostly cool and moist.

7. Woodland Management Impact

7.1 The OHL will create additional challenges for the future management of the forest as it dissects existing management coupes and introduces an electrical hazard. The risks associated with the electrical hazard will be reduced by regular maintenance of the OC, so maintaining the compliance of the OC and reducing any need for future tree clearance operations within the “Red Zone”.⁶

7.2 While the OC will result in the sterilisation of some woodland areas, this is not expected to impact forest restructuring. This is due to the fact that native woodlands are generally not subject to commercial management. Opportunities for mitigation and woodland enhancement are outlined in **Section 8**.

7.3 The OHL will cross the woodland road network at either approximately 45 or 90 degrees and will be built to the regulatory safe height clearances above forest access tracks, which will reduce the hazard in respect of future timber haulage. It may still, however, impact on machine operations within the proximity of the OHL, such as stacking and loading. Mitigation of which could be incorporated into the access design, following discussions with the landowner.

7.4 The OHL may be restrictive to future in-forest machinery access. The requirement for dedicated forestry machine OHL crossing points will be discussed with the landowner, and if required, will be identified once the OHL has been constructed, thus providing a safe OHL crossing point(s) for future working within the woodland.

7.5 The impact of the Proposed Development on the overall viability and continuity of woodland management has been considered. The OC traverses predominantly semi-mature broadleaved woodland located on a slope. This area currently lacks established access infrastructure. However, woodland management activities within this section are minimal and are not expected to increase in intensity in the foreseeable future. Therefore, the Proposed Development is not anticipated to compromise the implementation of future forestry operations or ongoing management and is not considered to materially affect the viability of the existing or future woodland management regime.

⁵ Detailed Aspect method of Scoring (DAMS) Ref. Forest Research, “Forest Gales software programme” and Forestry Commission Leaflet 85 “Windthrow Hazard Classification”

⁶ As specified by the ‘Red Zone’ set out in paragraph 41 of the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) Safety Guide 804. Electricity at Work: Forestry (2020) FISA 804 (ukfisa.com)

- 7.6 The impacts arising from the Proposed Development are not anticipated to affect the wider woodland management regime, nor are they expected to necessitate any alteration to the current or planned species composition

8. Mitigation Opportunities

- 8.1 Mitigation to reduce the extent of tree felling within the OC will be considered and incorporated in those areas of broadleaved woodlands as part of the proposals. Refer to **Section 13.5.3** Good practice and **Section 13.7.1** Mitigation within **Volume 2, Chapter 13: Forestry**. This refers to all the woodlands within Gordonbush Estate affected by the Proposed Development. The Applicant will be using a process of ‘managed resilience’ which will seek to retain naturally regenerated broadleaved trees and shrubs as close as possible to the line to keep as much tree cover as possible. Smaller and lower growing tree species and shrubs can be retained closer to the OHL. OHL vegetation maintenance would take place on a 4-yearly cycle as required.
- 8.2 Impacts on woodland restock opportunities, resulting from the OC sterilisation, could be addressed through the amendment of the Felling Licence Application or the Long-Term Forest Plan (LTFP), adhered to the regulations of the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018, and in line with the UK Forestry Standard guidance to utilise wayleave corridors as designed Open Ground, repurposing currently unplanted areas to maintain the commercial productivity of the woodland.
- 8.3 Before the construction phase, these areas, along with access tracks, will be assessed for selective felling and also crown reduction to determine if greater tree retention is feasible. The final extent of tree retention will depend on the requirements of the Proposed Development, particularly ensuring the safety of OHL wiring operations during construction.
- 8.4 The OC woodland removal area is required for the construction and operation of the new OHL infrastructure. Opportunities will be assessed for encouraging woodland regeneration within the OC, the identification of suitable areas cannot be guaranteed due to the requirement of maintaining the safe energisation of the OHL. Reference to **Tables 9.2 and 9.3** below, will fully mitigate the loss of forest resource within the OC through compensatory planting of the equivalent area (ha) of woodland removed.
- 8.5 Impacts on tree windfirm stability within the remaining crop have been assessed and considered as noted in **Section 6**. Woodland loss and management felling have been minimised through retention of crops identified as likely to be windfirm.
- 8.6 The impact of stability within the remaining crop has been assessed and reported on above.

9. Woodland Removal Impact

Table 9.1: Woodland Removal for Infrastructure

Item	Type of Infrastructure	Woodland type	Area (ha)
Operational corridor	Permanent	Broadleaved woodland	0.59

Table 9.2: Compensatory planting

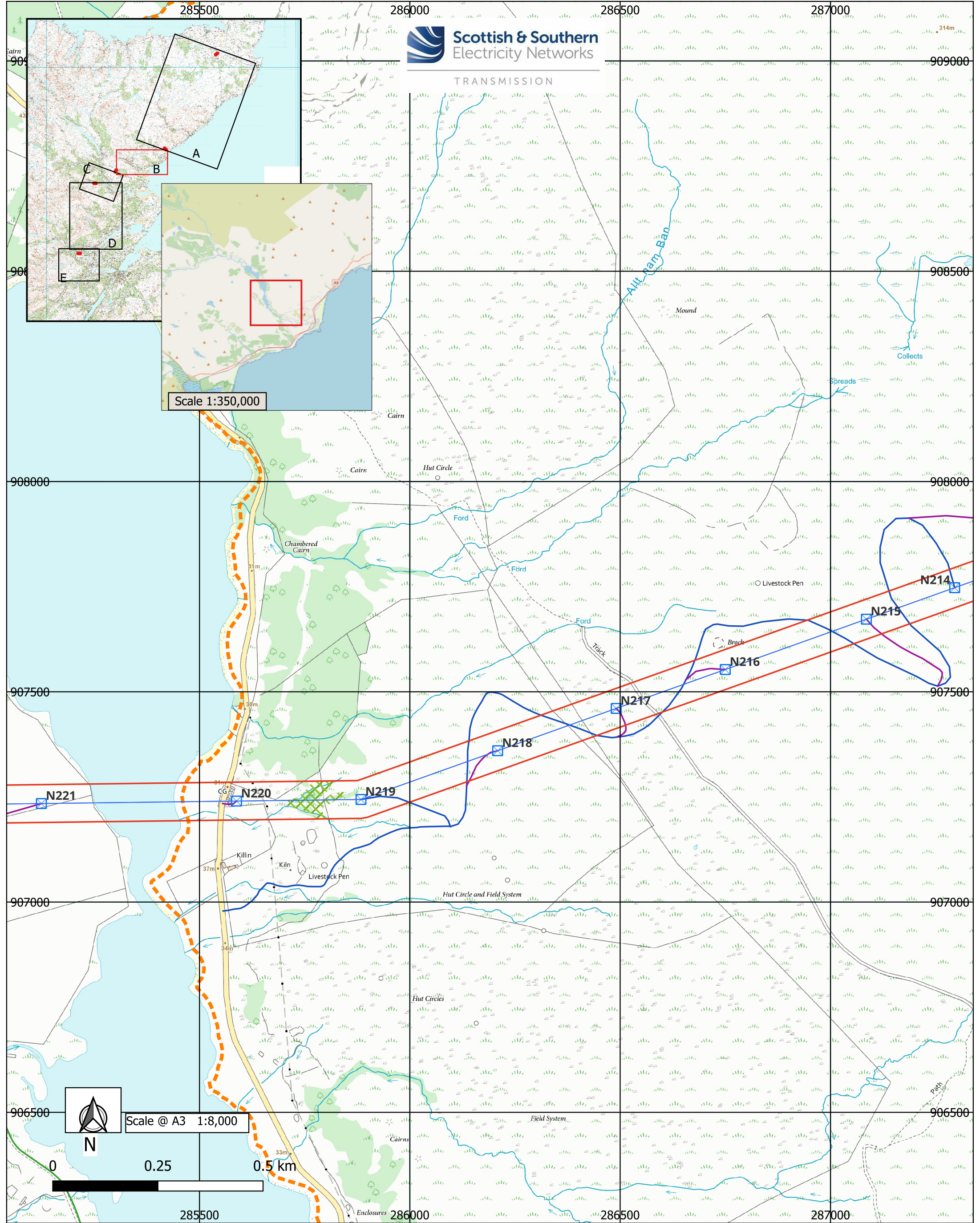
Compensatory Planting Area		0.59
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Table 9.3: Woodland Removal Impact of Infrastructure

Item	Woodland type	
Total Loss of Woodland Area	Broadleaved woodland	0.59
Total Compensatory Planting Area off-site	Broadleaved woodland	0.59
Total Restocking/ Replanting Area on-site		0
Total Net Loss of Woodland Area		0

10. Compensatory Planting

10.1 Compensatory planting to achieve the area quantity (ha) of woodland removal as a result of the Proposed Development will be in accordance with the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy of no net loss of woodland. A compensatory planting strategy is set out in **Volume 5, Appendix 13.3: Compensatory Planting Strategy**.



Legend

Landownership boundary/parcel

Operational Corridor

Central line Operational Corridor

Proposed 400kV OHL Towers

Access Tracks- Existing Upgrade

Access Tracks- New Stone Perm

Access Tracks- New Stone Temp

Broadleaved woodland- Operational Corridor 90m

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Woodland report
Project No- LT000132
Spittal- Loch Buidhe - Beaully 400kV Connection
Figure 1. Woodland Impacted by the Proposed Development
Section B- Gordonbush Estate

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