Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

TRANSMISSION

Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400 kV OHL Connection Environmental Impact Assessment Volume 5 | Technical Appendix

Appendix 13.2 | Native Woodland Management Plan

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VOLUME 5: APPENDIX 13.2 –NATIVE WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. NATIVE WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This Technical Appendix (TA) presents information relevant to the Spittal to Loch Buidhe to Beauly 400 kV Overhead (OHL) Connection. It should be read in conjunction with the Volume 2 of this EIA Report, specifically **Chapter 13: Forestry**, for full details of the Proposed Development.

1.1.2 Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) Transmission, hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant', owns and maintains the electricity transmission network across the north of Scotland. Due to the growth in renewable electricity generation in the north and north-east of Scotland, an upgrade of the transmission network is required to provide the necessary increase in transmission capacity.

1.1.3 The Applicant is applying for consent under Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to construct and operate a new double circuit 400 kV OHL, supported by lattice steel towers between a proposed substation at Spittal (Banniskirk Hub) to a proposed substation near to Beauly (Fanellan Hub). The location of the Proposed Development is shown in **Volume 3, Figure 1.1: Overview of the Proposed Development**.

1.1.4 This Native Woodland Management Plan sets out the methodology and process that will be followed to limit the removal of ancient and native woodland.

1.1.5 Areas of ancient and native woodland have been identified along the Proposed Alignment. These are shown on **Volume 3, Figure 8.1: Designated Sites** and **Figure 1: Woodland Impacted by the Proposed Development** of the individual Woodland Reports within **Volume 5, Appendix 13.1**, respectively. A commitment has been given to further assess these areas in relation to the OHL design and safety requirements, to identify possible woodland/tree retentions.

1.1.6 Prior to felling within the native woodland/tree areas, further mitigation measures will be assessed to identify if further native woodland/tree retention is possible, where safe and practical within the Operational Corridor (OC). During the assessment of further mitigation measures, emphasis will be placed on the native woodland/tree retention objective.

1.1.7 The Applicant Forestry Manager will coordinate the native woodland assessments in liaison with the OHL project team and relevant stakeholders.

1.2 Purpose of Native Woodland Management Plan

1.2.1 As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, it was identified that the Proposed Development would cross a number of woodland areas within private or state-owned landholdings. The landholding property boundaries are identified in **Figure 1: Woodland Impacted by the Proposed Development** within the Woodland Reports in **Volume 5, Appendix 13.1**.

1.2.2 During the EIA process, areas of different classified woodlands under the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) and Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS) databases impacted by OC have been identified. A commitment has been included in this EIA Report to assess the possible mitigation measures that can be established to minimise the felling of these areas. Assessment and prescription of any tree felling mitigation measures, such as retention, must ensure safety during OHL construction and also ensure that the subsequent operation and maintenance of the OHL is not compromised.

1.2.3 This report explains the management strategy that will be undertaken by the Applicant prior to and during the OHL construction phase, to assess what can be implemented to minimise the felling/removal of the Native

Woodland areas within the OC. This document will be integrated into the Construction and Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) supporting the protection of the areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland impacted by the Proposed Development.

1.3 Legislation

1.3.1 The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 (ESQCR, 2002)[1] specify safety standards to protect the general public and consumers from danger of overhead electricity powerlines. These standards outline minimum safety clearances and the Distribution Network Operator's (DNO's) duty to maintain these safety clearances.

1.3.2 The regulations also contain requirements on quality and continuity of electricity supply to ensure an efficient and economic service to customers and consumers.

1.3.3 Further legislation arrived in 2006 with the ESQCR, 2006; Amendments[2], which extended the above duties of the DNO to make their overhead powerlines resilient to the effects of major storms. This includes reducing the risk of falling trees (windblow) and branchwood of hitting the electricity network.

1.3.4 The result of this legislation is that the DNOs in addition to maintaining the vegetation to minimum safety clearances, now must seek to achieve further clearances for trees which may be affected by storm weather conditions.

1.4 Native Woodland Areas and Mitigation

1.4.1 The permanent loss of classified woodland areas within the AWI and NWSS databases as part of the Proposed Development has been mitigated by the appropriate assessment of these woodland/tree locations to ascertain the safe OC width required.

1.4.2 Potentially and subject to confirmation, the width of the OC, could be further reduced through micro-siting within the Limit of Deviation (LoD) where a combination of factors (e.g. topography, tower height, tree species and height) may reduce the area of ancient and semi-natural woodland defined as being within the OC.

1.4.3 Prior to the Proposed Development construction phase, these areas of high ecological value will be further assessed for selective felling to identify if greater tree retentions can be achieved.

1.4.4 There may also be opportunities to further retain or encourage natural regeneration of scrub/understorey layers in areas where existing tree cover does not breach safety clearances and allows for safe construction activity. It is anticipated these sites will present suitable locations to maximise the environmental benefits of this type of natural regeneration by providing important woodland linkage and habitat protection.

1.4.5 The total classified woodland within the AWI and NWSS databases affected by the Proposed Development is 182.89 ha. Of the 182.89 ha, 100.73 ha is Native Woodland, 67.88 ha is Long Established Woodland of Plantation Origin (LEPO), 12.23 ha is Ancient Woodland, and 2.05 ha is Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites

[1] Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 (ESQCR, 2002) URL: www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2665/contents/made
[2] Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity (Amendment) Regulations 2006 (ESQCR, 2006) URL: www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/1521/made

(PAWS). In some instances, AWI and NWSS do overlap, and therefore, areas can be classified under both databases.

1.4.6 The areas provided reflect the total hectares recorded in the NWSS and AWI registers. However, some of these woodlands are currently planted with commercial conifer species and, in some cases, show little or none of the vegetation characteristics typical of native woodland. Descriptions of these varying woodland characteristics are provided in the individual woodland reports in **Volume 5, Appendix 13.1 Woodland Reports**.

1.4.7 Considering the native tree species relevant to the Proposed Development:

- Certain native tree species such as willow, hazel and alder usually coppice well, although success can be limited if large numbers of deer are present due to browsing and this should also be considered.
- The growth heights and structure of the native tree species such as oak and birch bring an increased risk to overhead powerline safety. Generally, oak is quite windfirm, dependent on ground conditions and tree health. Crown reduction is often possible, whilst maintaining a healthy tree.
- Rather than a blanket approach to fell all native trees within the OC, surveys will be conducted to identify possible greater tree retention. Tree pruning to reduce crown height will also be considered where appropriate. This depends on tree species, it is generally accepted that tree species such as birch, aspen and Scots pine are not easily reduced aesthetically.

1.5 Construction Requirements and Native Woodland Survey

1.5.1 The construction phase of the Proposed Development requires various work zones of differing area dimensions to be devoid of tree and shrub vegetation to allow the safe access and undertaking of the construction works and provide the necessary land area to install the Proposed Development project infrastructure.

1.5.2 The work zone categories are:

- Formation of access track corridors (permanent, temporary and upgrades to existing tracks);
- Conductor winches worksite compounds (referred to as Equipotential Zones (EPZs)); and
- OC worksite zone.

1.5.3 Prior to tree felling operations, assessments will be conducted and documented of the native woodland/tree areas in relation to the construction phase works. Tree health, quality and habitat will be visually surveyed and risk assessed in relation to the construction works and OHL dimensions. Where possible, further mitigation measures will be identified in the effort to achieve greater native woodland retention.

1.5.4 The assessment of mitigation measures may include:

- The minor re-routeing within project parameters of new access track builds, to avoid the felling of mature native tree species where possible;
- Identify the minimal requirements/width of the OHL wiring corridor and review work methods in relation to maximising native woodland retentions; and
- The assessment of new build OHL heights across native woodland areas, to identify possible tree/woodland retentions and minimise tree felling through tree pruning and crown reduction where suitable.

1.5.5 The Forestry Manager will co-ordinate the native woodland assessments in liaison with the OHL project team and relevant stakeholders.

1.6 Conclusion

1.6.1 The implementation of the management items as detailed in this report, will allow a balanced and practical approach to identifying further suitable mitigation measures in relation to native tree/woodland retention and the OHL construction, operation and maintenance.

1.6.2 Following completion of the Proposed Development, a set of plans will be produced and submitted to the Scottish Ministers. These plans will show the areas of ancient semi-natural and native woodland locations of the OC and detail any areas of greater woodland/tree retention that may have been achieved, with those areas that have been retained clearly delineated.