

VOLUME 4: APPENDIX V1-11.2: DRAFT OUTDOOR ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

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Figure V1-11.1.1: Outdoor Access Management Plan

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1. DRAFT OUTDOOR ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan has been prepared to detail how existing public access would be managed during the construction and operation of the Strathy South Wind Farm Grid Connection, hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development'. The Proposed Development includes a Proposed Alignment, and an Alternative Alignment, as explained in **Volume 1: Chapter 1 – Introduction and Background** of this EIA Report.

1.2 Methodology

- 1.2.1 This Plan has been prepared in line with the requirements set out in the NatureScot (NS) guidance document 'A Brief Guide to Preparing an Outdoor Access plan (2010)'¹.

1.3 Outdoor Access Baseline

- 1.3.1 The Proposed Development comprises the construction and operation of a linear feature within a relatively remote area where existing outdoor access routes are established and is host to a number of recreational activities, as further detailed below and illustrated on **Figure V1-11.1.1** of this Appendix.

Recreational Access Routes

Scottish Hill Tracks

- 1.3.2 In the western extent both the Proposed and Alternative Alignments would make use of an existing junction off the A836 (located approximately 1 km east of Strathy) leading onto an existing track, for construction access. There would be no requirement to divert or upgrade this route to accommodate the Proposed and Alternative Alignments, as this track was upgraded for use during the construction of the operational Strathy North Wind Farm (as far as the Strathy North Substation). The upgrade is currently being extended, for use during the construction of the consented Strathy Wood and Strathy South wind farms, as far as Strathy South Wind Farm. This track is featured within the guidebook 'Scottish Hill Tracks'. This is a joint publication between the Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society and The Scottish Mountaineering Trust. The track forms part of Scottish Hill Track 344: Strath Halladale, which begins at Trantlemore, approximately 2 km south of the A897, passing Ben Griam Beg and Loch nam Breac towards the Strathy plantation by Lochstrathy bothy. The path then continues down the glen of the River Strathy, ending at Strathy village. During construction, there would be interaction with users of this route.

Core Path Network

- 1.3.3 In the eastern extent both the Proposed and Alternative Alignments would interact with Core Path SU19.03: Kirkton to Upper Bighouse. The path begins at the cemetery close to Kirkton Farm and runs along the west side of the Halladale River where it joins with Bighouse road after approximately 4.6 km. During construction, there would be interaction with users of this route.
- 1.3.4 There are several other Core Paths in the surrounding area, predominately leading north from the A836 towards the coast, however none would be directly affected by either the Proposed or Alternative Alignments.

A836 / National Cycle Network / North Coast 500

- 1.3.5 The A836 provides connections between Tain and Thurso by way of Lairg and Tongue. The A836 is located approximately 2 km north of the Proposed Alignment and 0.3 km north of the Alternative Alignment, at its

¹ A Brief Guide to Preparing an Outdoor Access Plan, Scottish Natural heritage (2010). Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2017-06/B639282%20-%20A%20Brief%20Guide%20to%20Preparing%20Outdoor%20Access%20Plans%20-%20Feb%202010.pdf> [Accessed January 2025]

closest point. The A836 forms part of Sustran's National Cycle Network (NCN) 1 between Lairg and Thurso, and also forms part of the North Coast 500 tourist route.

A897

- 1.3.6 The A897 provides local connections between the A836 to the east of Melvich and Helmsdale in Caithness.

Recreational Activities

- 1.3.7 The Estates within the vicinity of the Proposed and Alternative Alignments are managed for sporting activities, mainly deer stalking.
- 1.3.8 The River Strathy and Halladale River are popular rivers with anglers. The River Strathy is a spate Salmon River which is fished as part of Bowside Fisheries based at Bowside Lodge. A number of tributaries feed into this river from the site and from some small lochans and it enters the Pentland Firth at Strathy Bay after 19 km. The Halladale River is also a spate salmon river which has its origins in the flow country on the Knockfin Heights to the south of Forsinard and runs for 35 km entering the Pentland Firth at Melvich Bay.

1.4 Potential Access Impacts

Construction Phase

- 1.4.1 The primary access impact associated with the Proposed Development would arise during the construction phase of the project. The construction period for both the Proposed and Alternative Alignments is anticipated to be approximately 12 months, with a further six months (approximately) required for dismantling works associated with the existing wood pole overhead line (OHL). However, given the linear nature of the Proposed Development, not all areas would be subject to disturbance during this full period.
- 1.4.2 Proposed construction access would make use of existing tracks as far as practicable, upgraded as required but new routes or tracks to access the towers and other infrastructure would also be required, which could impact recreational activities in the short term.
- 1.4.3 Potential interactions with recreational routes identified in Section 1.3 include:
- There would be interaction with users of Scottish Hill Track 344 by both the Proposed and Alternative Alignments. While there would be no requirement to divert or upgrade this route, it would be utilised by construction traffic and would be crossed by the OHL at NC 8305, 6075 (same point for both alignment options) and the existing wood pole OHL to be dismantled at NC 8340, 6231.
 - There would be interaction with users of Core Path SU19.03 by both the Proposed and Alternative Alignments as the route is proposed to be upgraded for use by construction traffic and would be crossed by the OHL at NC 8946, 5998 (same point for both alignment options).
- 1.4.4 While recreational access could be disrupted by construction activity, any restrictions would be short-term and temporary, taking account of the mitigation measures discussed in Section 1.5 of this Draft Outdoor Access Management Plan.

Operational Phase

- 1.4.5 Potential access impacts during the operational phase would be limited to occasional access for maintenance purposes. It is unlikely that there would be any restrictions to outdoor access during this phase. Should any major maintenance activities be scheduled, consideration and planning for outdoor access management would be reviewed prior to works commencing.

1.5 General Access Arrangements

- 1.5.1 The Applicant is committed to enabling day to day access where the safety of the general public or construction staff is not compromised. During the construction phase, every effort would be made to ensure access to existing routes would be maintained. Furthermore, any construction effects are expected to be short-term and temporary. However, to ensure the safety of the public, some additional measures may be required.
- 1.5.2 Prior to commencement of the construction works, access arrangements and appropriate warnings would be communicated to the local community via the community liaison group, project website and local mailing list.
- 1.5.3 From time to time, short term restrictions to access may be required where there is no safe alternative. These restrictions would be communicated via the same method.
- 1.5.4 The Applicant would liaise with the landowners as required to minimise any disruption to forestry or estate run activities where possible.

Access Arrangements – Existing Routes

- 1.5.5 Where there is potential for interaction along existing recreational routes with construction activities, it is proposed that these interactions will be managed through:
- Warning signage indicating the likelihood of construction traffic will be placed at regular intervals along the walking route;
 - A site information leaflet will be posted at regular intervals along the track, informing members of the public 'what to do' if site traffic is encountered;
 - Speed limit of construction traffic on tracks to be set to 15 mph with appropriate signage highlighted;
 - Site rules will dictate flashing / hazard lights are to be switched on by all construction traffic vehicles while using site tracks;
 - Warning signage for construction staff highlighting that members of the public may be utilising routes (see **Plate 1**);
 - Pedestrian refuges will be provided at regular intervals to provide a safe passing place for construction traffic and path users. This will take the form of a mills barrier (or similar) placed at regular locations in the verge or edge of track where pedestrians can wait for traffic to pass and vice versa; and
 - Training / briefing of all drivers to be aware of path users.
- 1.5.6 The above arrangements will be implemented to ensure both that those wishing to make access are informed of construction hazards, and that construction workers are trained to anticipate and take measures to avoid other access users.



Plate 1: Example Construction Staff Warning Sign

New Permanent and Temporary Access Tracks

- 1.5.7 As part of the Proposed Development, new permanent and new temporary access tracks would be constructed.
- 1.5.8 During construction of these tracks, access would be restricted to the general public on safety grounds. Access gates would be installed to limit unauthorised vehicles from entering the site and pass gates would be installed where the site entrance meets the existing road to accommodate walkers, cyclists and horse riders.
- 1.5.9 Signage would be put in place where the site entrance meets the existing roads and where the existing rights of way intersect the new access tracks with a purpose to highlight to the public the risk of entering the site.
- 1.5.10 Once the Proposed Development becomes operational, the public would be able to fully access the permanent tracks, in line with current access legislation and the temporary access tracks would be removed and the areas restored.

Equestrians

- 1.5.11 The British Horse Society has made recommendations on the interactions between Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) traffic and horses. Horses are normally nervous of large vehicles, particularly when they do not often meet them. Horses are flighty animals and will run away in panic if really frightened. Riders will do all they can to prevent this but, should it happen, it could cause a serious accident for other road users, as well as for the horse and rider.
- 1.5.12 The main factors causing fear in horses in this situation are:
 - Something approaching them, which is unfamiliar and intimidating;
 - A large moving object, especially if it is noisy;

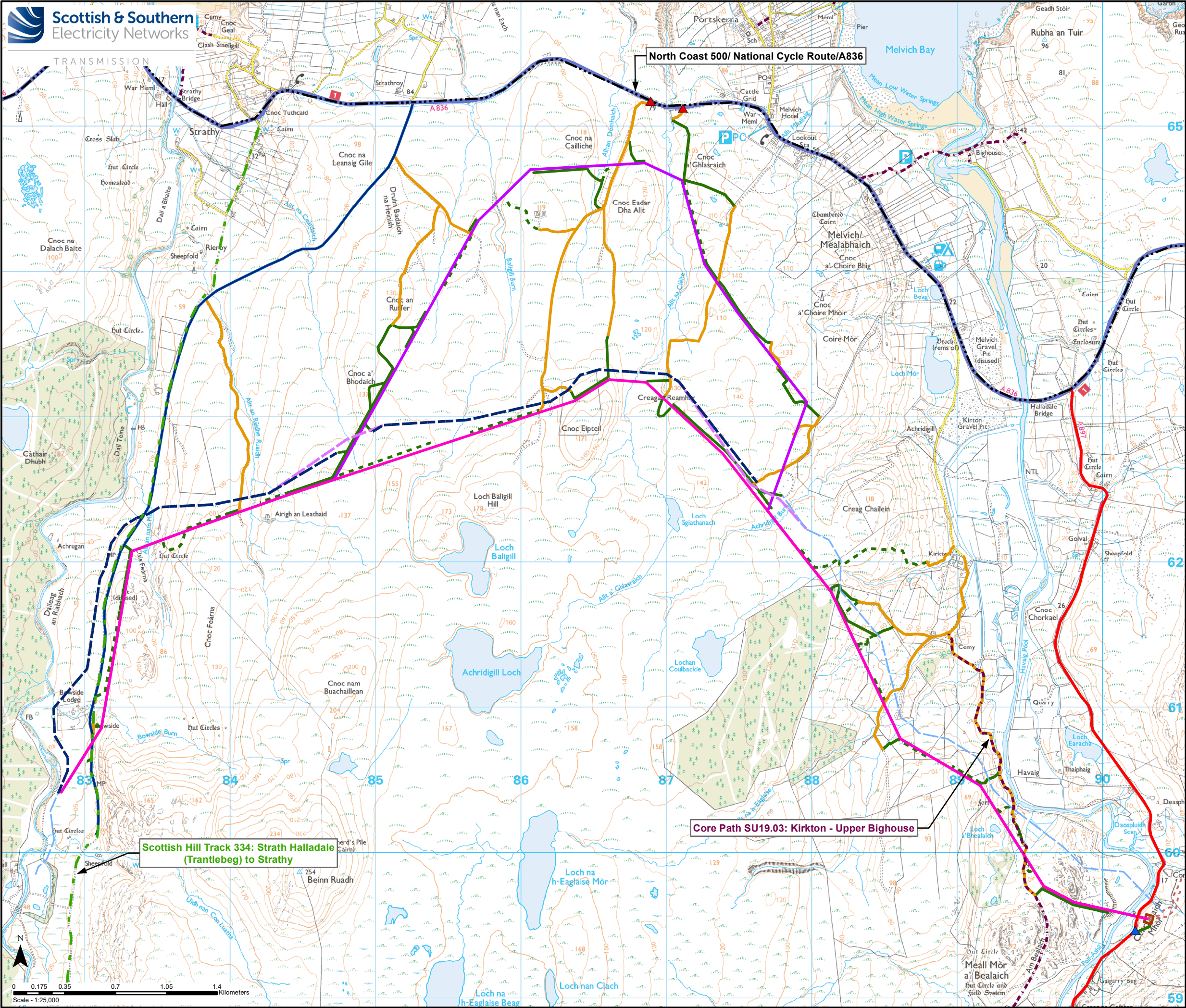
- Lack of space between the horse and the vehicle;
- The sound of air brakes; and
- Anxiety on the part of the rider.

1.5.13 The British Horse Society recommends the following actions that will be included in the Site training for all HGV staff:

- On seeing riders approaching, drivers must slow down and stop, minimising the sound of air brakes, if possible;
- If the horse still shows signs of nervousness while approaching the vehicle, the engine should be shut down (if it is safe to do so);
- The vehicle should not move off until the riders are well clear of the back of the HGV;
- If drivers are wishing to overtake riders, please approach slowly or even stop in order to give riders time to find a gateway or lay by where they can take refuge and create sufficient space between the horse and the vehicle. Because of the position of their eyes, horses are very aware of things coming up behind them; and
- All drivers delivering to the Site must be patient. Riders will be doing their best to reassure their horses while often feeling a high degree of anxiety themselves.

1.6 Conclusions

1.6.1 The Applicant aims to maintain access during construction of the Proposed Development and by implementing the management strategies set out in this Plan, it is believed that this can be achieved while ensuring the safety of the public and construction staff.



Key

- Proposed OHL Alignment
- Alternative OHL Alignment
- Proposed Temporary OHL (Alternative Alignment only)
- Proposed Underground Cable (UGC)
- Proposed Cable Sealing End (CSE) Compound
- Existing Bellmouth (To Be Upgraded)
- New Bellmouth
- Proposed Permanent Access Track
- Proposed Temporary Access Track
- Existing Access Track (to be upgraded)

Existing Infrastructure

- Existing Wood Pole (H Pole) (to be retained)
- Existing Wood Pole (H pole) (to be dismantled)
- Existing Access Track
- Connagill 275/132 kV Substation

Recreation

- North Coast 500 / National Cycle Route
- A836
- A897
- Scottish Hill Track
- Core Path

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