

VOLUME 4: APPENDIX V5-4.2: ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS ON SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREA 03. FARR BAY, STRATHY AND PORTSKERRA – ALTERNATIVE ALIGNMENT

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1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This Appendix provides a detailed assessment of Special Landscape Area 03. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra (SLA 03). The location and extent of this SLA is shown on **Figure 1** in **Table 1** below, and on **Volume 2: Figure V5-4.2** in relation to the Proposed Development with the Alternative Alignment.
- 1.1.2 The Proposed Development with the Proposed Alignment is assessed in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-6.3**.

1.2 Methodology

- 1.2.1 The assessment of SLA 03 has been undertaken in accordance with the following guidance document.
- *Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities* (SNH, Working Draft 11, November 2018¹).
- 1.2.2 While this draft guidance applies specifically to National Scenic Areas and National Parks, it is useful in structuring the assessment of effects on SLAs, a designation at regional level.
- 1.2.3 The assessment gives consideration to effects on landscape character and identified Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the SLA. Conclusions made during the assessment of Landscape Character Types (LCTs) (see **Volume 4: Appendix V5-6.1**) are used to feed into this assessment and are cross referenced as necessary.
- 1.2.4 The SLA is deemed to have a high sensitivity to change due to its considerable local importance for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities and cultural heritage associations.
- 1.2.5 This Appendix presents the assessment of the Proposed Development with the Alternative Alignment which would be proposed in the event of Melvich Wind Energy Hub being consented and constructed. All effects are adverse unless otherwise stated. Significant effects are highlighted in bold at steps 3 and 4 in **Table 2**.

¹ Scottish Natural Heritage (2018) *Guidance for Assessing the Effects on Special Landscape Qualities. Working Draft 11. November 2018.*

Table 1: Assessment of Effects on the SLQs of Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra Special Landscape Area

Step 1 The Proposal
<p>The assessment takes into account the infrastructure of the Alternative Alignment in relation to the existing baseline conditions within a 5 km study area beyond which it is considered no significant effects are likely to occur.</p>
Existing Baseline Assessment
<p>The Alternative Alignment lies near the north coast of east Sutherland extending Strathy North 'T' (near Dallangwell) in the east to Connagill 275/132 kV substation, east of Strath Halladale, in the west.</p> <p>The following Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are present within the study area and lie either wholly, or partially within the SLA:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCT 134 Sweeping Moorland and Flows - There are two instances of this LCT at Strathy to the west and east of Strath Halladale. • LCT 136 Rocky Hills and Moorland - There is one instance of this LCT lying in the west of the study area. • LCT 140 Sandy Beaches and Dunes - There is one incidence of this LCT lying west and south of Melvich Bay. • LCT 141 High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays – This LCT forms the majority of the coastline of the study area with two incidences west and east of Melvich Bay. • LCT 144 Coastal Crofts and Small Farms – There are three incidences of this LCT within the SLA at Armadale Bay, Strathy Bay and Melvich Bay. <p>The following Landscape Character Type (LCT) is present within the study area but outwith the SLA.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LCT 142 Strath – Caithness and Sutherland – This LCT comprises Strath Halladale which runs north – south in the eastern part of the study area. <p>There is one Wild Land Area (WLA) partially within the study area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WLA39 – East Halladale Flows which lies in the eastern part of the Study Area almost wholly to the east of Strath Halladale. <p>The Alternative Alignment would not be located within the SLA but may have the potential to affect the following Special Qualities (SQs):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SQ1 - Moorland and Crofting Mosaic; • SL2 - Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea; • SQ3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views; and • SQ4 – Historical Dimension.
Step 2 The Study Area
<p>The relationship of the proposal to the designated landscape (within or outside)</p> <p>The Alternative Alignment would be located to the south of the SLA at approximately less than 100m distant at the nearest point.</p> <p>There is one Wild Land Area (WLA 39 East Halladale Flows) which overlaps the south-eastern portion of the study area. It is shown on Volume 2: Figure V5-4.2 and the identified Qualities are listed in paragraph 4.7.13 of Volume 5: Chapter 4 – Landscape and Visual - Alternative Alignment. The Alternative Alignment would not be located within the WLA. The map and description of key attributes and qualities of WLA 39 can be found here:</p> <p>https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2021-06/Wild%20land%20Description%20East-Halladale-Flows-July-2016-39.pdf</p> <p>Description of the study area and how it has been defined.</p> <p>The study area, a 5 km radius centred on the alternative OHL alignment, was selected on a realistic and pragmatic basis, as beyond which the Alternative Alignment is considered unlikely to result in significant effects.</p>

Direct (physical) effects would not occur as the Alternative Alignment does not lie within SLA 03, although some access junction upgrades would lie on its periphery. Indirect (visual) effects are likely to occur for those areas with theoretical visibility within 5 km but are unlikely to occur beyond 5km from the Alternative Alignment site.

The relevant landscape character assessment covers Caithness and Sutherland and can be found at:

<https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions>

The LCTs within the study area are described in **Tables V1-6.6 to V1-6.11 in Volume 1: Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual.**

Outline Map

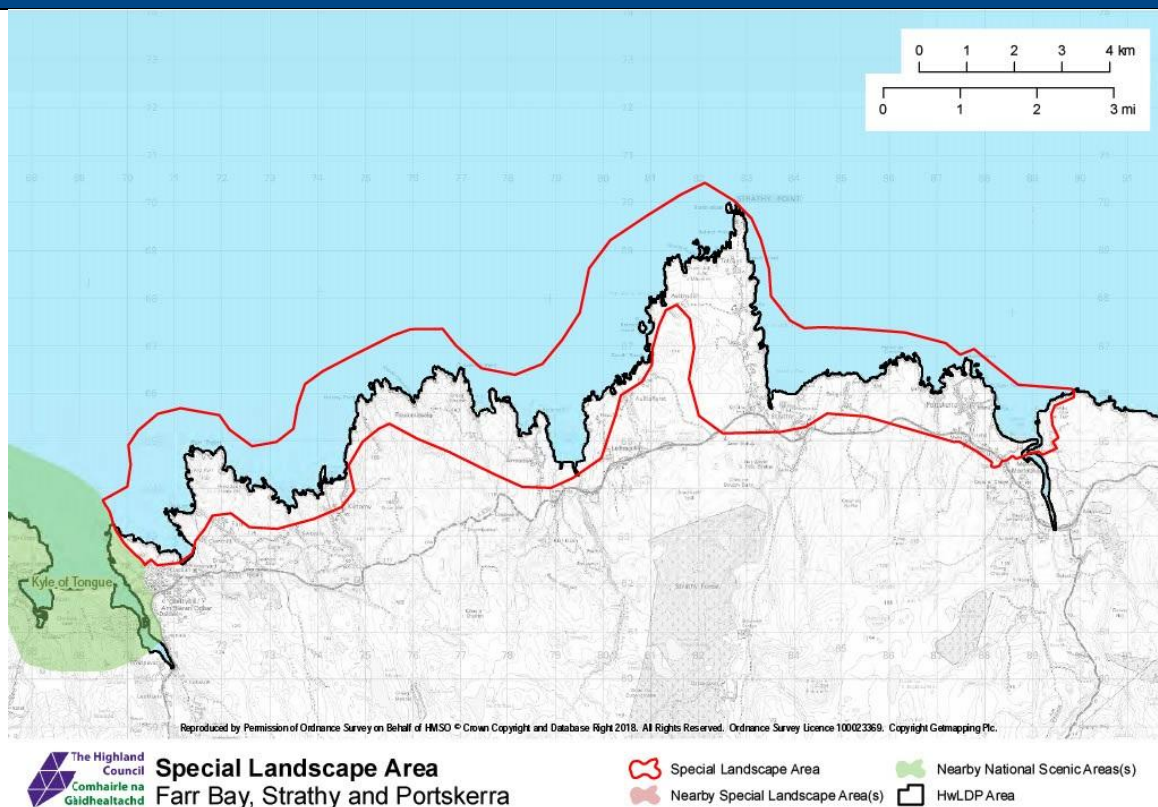


Figure 1 – SLA Boundary

How the Area is used and experienced by people

The part of SLA 03 which lies within the 5 km study area includes townships at Armadale, Strathy, Baligill, Portskerra and Melvich, as well as the isolated property at Bighouse. The A836 passes in and out of the southern edge of the SLA with a number of minor roads and tracks leading to the coastline. There are picnic areas and car parks scattered along the coastline, including Strathy lighthouse and the three sandy beaches at Armadale, Strathy and Melvich Bays. The SLA is therefore experienced by local residents and visitors to the coast as well as by people travelling on the A836 which forms part of the North Coast 500 and National Cycle Route 1.

Step 3 The Assessment

Underpinning landscape characteristics to inform detailed SQ descriptions	Impacts of the Proposed Development on underpinning key characteristics and the effects on SQs
SQ1 – Dramatically intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea	
1. This is a distinctive stretch of rocky coastline which is typically viewed from the cliff tops and enclosed sandy beaches or from the sea by	1. The Alternative Alignment (during construction or operation) would not affect the first underpinning characteristic as it would not impinge on views of

<p>passing vessels. It is deeply eroded by the sea to form a complex assemblage of headlands, cliffs, promontories, stacks, arches, caves and ravines which combine to form unique features along the coastal edge.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> This coast can be an awe-inspiring, particularly during extreme weather or heavy oceanic swells. Access to the cliffs and coastline is readily available and allows opportunities to experience the sea's force and scale at close proximity. By contrast the sandy bays which alternate with the harsher cliffs and headlands provide a more focused and tranquil setting due to their low lying location and the shelter afforded by flanking cliffs. The lighthouse at Strathy is a popular attraction to visitors and is approached via the minor road which serves the string of crofts and houses along the eastern side of the promontory. Traditional netting stations now largely abandoned elsewhere in Highland are still notable around Strathy Point whilst the sheltered harbour at Portskerra is still well-used by local fishermen. 	<p>the rocky coastline from the cliff tops and beaches.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> People experiencing the second underpinning characteristic would be looking out to sea and the Alternative Alignment (during construction or operation) would have no effect on the experience of the sea's force and scale. The Alternative Alignment would not be seen from the beaches at Armadale Bay or Melvich Bay during construction or operation). There is theoretical visibility of the Alternative Alignment (during construction and operation) from the western part of Strathy Bay but the emphasis of the third underpinning characteristic is on the focused and tranquil setting and it is considered unlikely that the presence of construction operations or lattice towers, overhead lines and conductors some distance inland would detract from the experience of the bay. The Alternative Alignment would not affect the fourth underpinning characteristic during construction or operation as it would not be seen in simultaneous views on the approach to the lighthouse which lies outwith the study area. The fifth underpinning characteristic would not be affected by the Alternative Alignment during construction or operation. <p>There would be No effect on this SQ from the Alternative Alignment during construction or operation.</p>
<p>SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Rolling landforms trending towards the coast and opening out over bays provide a distinctive contrast of sequential views and experience of the landscape - enclosed or exposed, framed or open, intimate or expansive. There is a rich tapestry of moorland and crofting settlements with the pattern of buildings and various land cover creating a diverse mix of colour, texture, and form. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> For the first underpinning characteristic, the Alternative Alignment would be visible intermittently during construction and operation the A836 as it wends in and out of the SLA. The changes would be perceptible from localised and fragmented areas over a localised area and would be seen in the context of turbines at Melvich Wind Energy Hub. The Alternative Alignment would not result in any changes to the patterns of landcover and landuse of the SLA during construction or operation. <p>It is considered that the magnitude of change would be no greater than low during construction and operation resulting in a Minor effect, not significant.</p>

SQ3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views	
1. There is a distinct perception and experience of immense space and dynamism, strongly influenced by the combination of big skies, and the distinctive coastal light, and the constantly changing influence of the weather. Fine conditions allow impressive and extensive views to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head while in contrast poor weather restricts views and highlights the sense of remoteness of the landscape. The buildings and structures at Dounreay form prominent features in views from Strathy Point.	1. The Alternative Alignment would be visible in sidelong views, together with Melvich Energy Hub during construction or operation, when looking along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head from some parts of the SLA. It is considered that the magnitude of change would be no greater than low during construction and operation resulting in a Minor effect , not significant
SQ4 – Historical Dimension	
1. The remains of Borge Castle situated on a natural promontory with a defensive bank built across the neck and with some ramparts and some masonry from the keep walls still visible, is one of the few surviving medieval (c.16th-17th century) defended promontory forts in this part of the north coast.	1. The Alternative Alignment would have no effect during construction or operation on this SQ as Borge Castle lies outwith the study area. There would be No effect on this SQ from the Alternative Alignment during construction or operation.
Proposed mitigation of effects, timescales for mitigation to be effective. Level of residual effects on SLQ. Suggestions for further mitigation where relevant.	Mitigation measures to be considered during the implementation of the Alternative Alignment would include the use of best practice construction and restoration techniques as described in Section 6.12 of Volume 1: Chapter 6 . The timescale for mitigation to be effective would be approximately ten years. The residual effects on the SQ of the SLA would remain as described above.
Step 4 Summary of effects on SQs, implications for the SLA and possible future effects on SQs and recommendations for further mitigation	
SQ1 – Dramatically intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea	Construction: No effect Operation: No effect
SQ2 – Moorland and Crofting Mosaic	Construction: Minor effect, not significant Operation: Minor effect, not significant
SQ3 – Big Skies and Extensive Views	Construction: Minor effect, not significant Operation: Minor effect, not significant
SQ3 – Historical Dimension	Construction: No effect Operation: No effect