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Appendix 1.1: Creag Riabhach Screening Opinion

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Proposed Development

- 1.1.1 Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc (SHE Transmission) is a wholly owned subsidiary of the SSE plc group of companies. SHE Transmission, hereafter referred to as 'the Applicant', owns and maintains the electricity transmission network across the north of Scotland, and holds a license under the Electricity Act 1989 to develop and maintain an efficient, co-ordinated and economical system of electricity transmission.
- 1.1.2 The Applicant has submitted an application for consent under Section 37 of The Electricity Act 1989, as amended, to install and keep installed a new single circuit 132 kV overhead line (OHL) to connect the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, north of the village of Lairg, Sutherland, to the National Grid, hereafter referred to as 'the Proposed Development'.
- 1.1.3 The Proposed Development would connect a consented substation at Creag Riabhach Wind Farm¹ (Ordnance Survey (OS) Grid Reference 253060, 927377), located approximately 3 km north of the Crask Inn, to the consented Dalchork substation² (OS Grid Reference 258203, 909564), located approximately 3 km north of Lairg. The OHL would be approximately 22 km in length, and composed of double trident wood pole structures.
- 1.1.4 The location of the Proposed Development is shown on **Figure 1.1: Overview of the Proposed Development**.

1.2 Background to the Proposed Development

- 1.2.1 The requirement for the Proposed Development has been driven specifically by a request for connection for Creag Riabhach Wind Farm (hereafter referred to as 'the Wind Farm'), which was granted consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989, as amended, in January 2016 for up to 22 turbines with a potential installed capacity of up to 72.6 Megawatt (MW). The Applicant, under their licence obligations, is therefore obliged to provide the Wind Farm with a connection to the National Grid.
- 1.2.2 As described in Chapter 2 of this Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report, the Proposed Development was subject to a routeing process in which alternative routes for connection between the Wind Farm and Dalchork substation were compared to find the best option based on the most appropriate balance between environmental, engineering and cost factors.
- 1.2.3 Following this, a study of alignment options within the chosen route was carried out to further refine the design of the Proposed Development.
- 1.2.4 Chapter 4 of this EIA Report discusses the extensive consultation undertaken with statutory and non-statutory consultees following the options study which resulted in further amendments to the alignment, resulting in that presented within this EIA Report.

1.3 Legislative Requirements

- 1.3.1 The Proposed Development is classified as Schedule 2 under the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017, hereafter referred to as 'the EIA Regulations' by virtue of it being classed as:

"The carrying out of development (other than development which is Schedule 1 development) to provide any of the following -

¹ The Creag Riabhach Wind Farm received consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 from The Scottish Ministers on 17th October 2016, under planning reference EC00002078, and is not considered within this EIA.

² The Dalchork Substation received planning permission from The Highland Council on 2nd December 2019, under planning reference 19_00374_FUL.

(2) an electric line installed above ground –

(a) with a voltage of 132 kilovolts or more”

- 1.3.2 A Screening Request was made to the Energy Consents Unit (ECU) in November 2018 to seek confirmation on whether the Proposed Development is classed as EIA Development or not. The Screening Opinion (**Appendix 1.1**) received in January 2019 confirmed that the Proposed Development required an EIA to be undertaken on the following points noted by ECU based on responses received from their consultees:
- potential significant landscape and visual effects resulting from the topography of the area being largely flat in nature or sweeping moorland, and the Proposed Development may be visible for a considerable distance;
 - potential significant environmental effects due to crossing and passing close to protected areas of international and national importance, including Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC);
 - potential significant environmental effects due to crossing and passing close to protected areas classified for protected species, such as breeding waders, waterfowl, raptors and otters; and
 - potential significant effects on forestry due to crossing a large area of coniferous forest.
- 1.3.3 A request for a Scoping Opinion was made to the Scottish Ministers under Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations in March 2019. A Scoping Report was submitted to support the request, which sought input from the ECU, and statutory and non-statutory consultees regarding the information to be provided within this EIA Report.
- 1.3.4 The Scoping Opinion of the Scottish Ministers was issued on 17th July 2019 confirming the scope of assessment to be included within any EIA Report submitted in support of an application for Section 37 consent. Further details of this are contained in Chapter 4: EIA Consultation and accompanying appendices. Relevant comments raised within the Scoping Opinion are included within each technical chapter of this EIA Report, and summarised within a consultation matrix (see **Appendix 4.2**).
- 1.3.5 Subsequent to receipt of the Scoping Opinion, Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) approached the Applicant with information on peatland restoration works being undertaken within and around Dalchork Forest, and requested amendments to the alignment presented at EIA Scoping stage in order to minimise the extent of OHL to be constructed on areas of peatland restoration. Following further surveys and consultation with FLS, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Energy Consents Unit (ECU), the alignment was altered. A section of the OHL was also changed to underground cable near the Crask Inn to mitigate potential visual impacts identified during the landscape and visual amenity assessment. As such, this EIA Report for the Proposed Development has considered the consultation responses received in the Scoping Opinion, but is not based solely upon it given the change to the proposed development. The scope of the EIA Report is based on the consultation undertaken throughout the EIA process, after the receipt of the Scoping Opinion, and as part of the Gate Check process. Further details are given in Chapter 4 of this EIA Report.

1.4 Contents of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report

1.4.1 The EIA Report consists of the following volumes:

- Volume 1 – Non-Technical Summary;
- Volume 2 – Written Statement;
- Volume 3 – Figures; and
- Volume 4 – Technical Appendices.

1.4.2 Volume 2 of the EIA Report contains the following chapters:

- 1: Introduction
- 2: Route Selection and Alternatives
- 3: Description of the Proposed Development
- 4: EIA Consultation
- 5: Methodology
- 6: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- 7: Ecology and Nature Conservation
- 8: Ornithology
- 9: Cultural Heritage
- 10: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology
- 11: Forestry
- 12: Schedule of Environmental Mitigation

1.4.3 A Planning Statement is included with the application as supporting information. The Planning Statement considers the acceptability of the Proposed Development in the context of existing and emerging planning policies.

1.5 Notifications

1.5.1 In accordance with the Electricity (Applications for Consent) Regulations 1990, and Regulation 14 of the EIA Regulations, the application and this EIA Report will be advertised in the local newspaper: the Northern Times. It will also be advertised in the following regional newspapers: Edinburgh Gazette; and the Press and Journal.

The Section 37 application, including this EIA Report and associated documents and figures, will be available for viewing at the following public location: during normal opening hours:

- Lairg Library, Community Centre, Main Street, Lairg, IV27 4DD;
- The Highland Council, Drummie, Golspie, KW10 6TA;
- The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5PB; and
- The Scottish Government Library, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ. Please note 24 hours' notice is required to be given to The Scottish Government Library prior to visiting via SGLibrary@gov.scot.

1.5.2 Electronic versions of the application, including this EIA Report are available to download from the Scottish Governments Energy Consent Unit online portal (<http://www.energyconsents.scot/>) and the Applicants project website (www.ssen-transmission.co.uk/creag-riabhach-wind-farm-connection-project).

1.5.3 This EIA Report is available in other formats if required. For details, including costs, contact:

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