

CONTENTS

4.	EIA CONSULTATION	4-2
4.1	Introduction	4-2
4.2	Pre-Application Consultation	4-2
4.3	Scoping	4-4
4.4	Energy Consents Unit Gate Check	4-6
4.5	Key Issues Raised through EIA Consultation	4-6
4.6	Potentially Significant Issues	4-9
4.7	Scoped-out Issues	4-9
4.8	Other Issues	4-12

Appendices (Volume 4)

Appendix 4.1: Summary of EIA Consultation Responses and Action Taken

4. EIA CONSULTATION

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Best practice in EIA encourages consultation and engagement with stakeholders early in the process, with advice and input from key consultees being sought at the early stages of a project, to inform decisions about the Proposed Development.
- 4.1.2 This Chapter describes the pre-application consultation, Scoping process and further consultation that was undertaken to determine the scope of the EIA Report, and the consultations that were undertaken to inform the local community of the Proposed Development. This Chapter also includes a brief description of the environmental features of potential significance associated with the Proposed Development which are addressed in detail in the EIA Report, and those that are scoped out.

4.2 Pre-Application Consultation

- 4.2.1 Stakeholder consultation has been ongoing since the early stages of the project in route and alignment selection, which has continued throughout the EIA process. This Section provides a summary of the main consultation responses received, which have been taken into account in determining the final alignment of the Proposed Development.
- 4.2.2 Detail of the consultation undertaken during route and alignment selection, and the responses received, is provided within the Report on Consultation, which is provided as a separate report within the application for Section 37 consent.

Consultation with Consultees

Scottish Natural Heritage

- 4.2.3 Due to the location of the Proposed Development and the ecological, ornithological and wild land sensitivities of the surrounding area, ongoing consultation has been carried out between the Applicant and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Initial consultation was carried out in September of 2017 in order to set out the proposed approach for ornithological surveys and agree the methodology to be used, a response to which was received in March of 2018. As part of their response, SNH identified protected and sensitive areas within the vicinity of the development site, and advised on the nature and extent of surveys to be undertaken. SNH were in broad agreement with the methodology proposed and the scope of Vantage Point (VP) surveys to be undertaken to assess likely ornithological impacts, and proposed an amendment to the direction of one VP and the inclusion of an additional VP.
- 4.2.4 Following initial site surveys, it was proposed that additional Black Grouse and raptor surveys be undertaken to assess potential impacts from the Proposed Development on these species. Further to this, surveys specific to divers on Loch Dubh Cùl na Capulich, and an additional VP, were proposed to be undertaken, which were subsequently agreed with SNH.
- 4.2.5 Consultation with SNH continued through the design stages to ensure environmental aspects within their interest, inclusive of designated sites, wild land areas (WLAs), and carbon rich soils, would be adequately addressed through the EIA process. On-site meetings with SNH representatives were undertaken in September 2018 to discuss the salient issues. As a result, several revisions of the north end of the alignment, near Loch Dubh Cùl na Capulich and through the open land north of Dalchork Forest, were carried out in order to minimise or avoid potential adverse effects to the qualifying features of Ben Klibreck SSSI and the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SAC/SPA through mitigation by design of the Proposed Development.

Forestry Commission Scotland

- 4.2.6 Pre-application engagement was undertaken with the Forestry Commission Scotland¹ in order to set the parameters of study for assessment of effects on forestry, as well as the design of the operational corridor (OC) for the Proposed Development. Following these discussions, the OC was refined along the alignment to minimise the OC width, whilst taking account for variations in topography, tree species, and ground conditions and also ensuring clearance distances can be maintained in line with the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations (ESQCR) 2002.
- 4.2.7 Pre-application engagement was undertaken with Forest Enterprise Scotland², as the majority landowner along the proposed OHL alignment, with a view to minimise any potential for effect to the ongoing management of the Dalchork Forest complex. A number of meetings were held throughout the development and EIA processes to understand their concerns and refinements were undertaken to address these as far as reasonably possible.

Forestry and Land Scotland

- 4.2.8 On 18th July 2019 FLS contacted the Applicant citing concerns with the alignment of the OHL put forward in the Scoping Report, specifically in relation to peatland restoration works being undertaken within Dalchork Forest alongside potential landscape effects. Due to the concerns raised in their response, FLS stated they would object to the proposal and would therefore be unwilling to sign a wayleave agreement. In order to address these concerns, FLS proposed an alternative alignment which largely bypassed the current and future restoration areas, whilst being mindful to ongoing woodland management requirements.
- 4.2.9 In order to fully understand the implications and potential environmental effects of the alternative route, the Applicant commissioned supplementary surveys in relation to engineering design, forestry, terrestrial ecology, and soils and hydrology to cover the data gaps, as portions of the alternative alignment fell outwith the study areas for the previous surveys.
- 4.2.10 A meeting was held between the Applicant, FLS and the soils and hydrology consultant for the Proposed Development on 6th September 2019 to discuss FLS's concerns in relation to the Proposed Development's potential effects on the peatland restoration works. The outcome of this meeting was to set out a programme of Ground Investigation (GI) works and further peat probing to better understand the potential effects of installing a wood pole OHL on, or near to, restored areas. These site works were carried out through week commencing 16th September 2019. The meeting also resulted in amendments to the alignment, representing a compromise between the EIA Scoping alignment and the alternate alignment initially suggested by FLS.
- 4.2.11 A subsequent meeting was held by the same parties on 8th October 2019 with the findings of the site works presented alongside a peat investigation report. FLS were satisfied that the Proposed Development, following the compromise alignment (displayed as the proposed overhead line and underground cable on **Figure 2.5: Alignments Comparison and Forestry and Land Constraints**), would be unlikely to result in adverse effects on the peatland restoration works.
- 4.2.12 Given their involvement in the peatland restoration works, the Applicant maintained a dialogue with SNH regarding the alterations to the Proposed Development. SNH provided email correspondence on 9th October 2019, following contact by the Applicant after the final meeting with FLS, welcoming the intent to minimise the length of OHL passing through peatland restoration areas, and advising of further actions to undertake in relation to monitoring of disturbance / damage to the areas and remedial actions to undertake in this event.

¹ Forestry Commission Scotland has since become fully devolved to the Scottish Government, and is now Scottish Forestry

² Forest Enterprise Scotland has since become fully devolved to the Scottish Government, and is now Forest and Land Scotland

Consultation with the Local Community

- 4.2.13 As a responsible developer, the Applicant has undertaken voluntary consultation with the local community to seek their opinion on the proposals. In order to gain feedback a public exhibition event was held to provide information on the project, how the preferred alignment was selected, the project timescales and next steps.
- 4.2.14 The exhibition was held on 24th July 2018 at Lairg Community Hall (15:00 – 19:00). The Applicant contacted the Lairg Community Council and local councillors directly to inform them of the upcoming event, and it was also advertised on the project webpage. The Applicant also undertook a targeted mail drop to 456 properties in the local community to advertise the event.
- 4.2.15 A series of A1 exhibition boards were on display at the event to introduce the project, explain the proposal and illustrate various route options considered, along with the preferred alignment. A brochure was available providing key information about the project and contact details for attendees.
- 4.2.16 Comments from the public were sought through completion of a comments form that was available at the exhibition and on the project website. Attendees were encouraged to complete and return these forms in order to provide feedback to the project team. Five members of the public attended the event and no comments forms were received.
- 4.2.17 On 25th June 2019, the Applicant attended the Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra Community Council meeting in Strathnaver Hall. The Applicant invited members of the community via a targeted mail drop to attend the meeting to provide further information about the Proposed Development. No members of the public attended the meeting and no comment forms were received.
- 4.2.18 Consultation with the community councils will continue throughout the project as it develops, and, on receipt of s37 consent, throughout the construction phase of the works.

4.3 Scoping

- 4.3.1 A Scoping Opinion was sought from the Scottish Ministers on the environmental information to be provided in the EIA Report. The specific aims of the Scoping Report were to:
- set out the approach to the EIA, including the proposed content and structure of the EIA Report;
 - identify the issues which are to be assessed as part of the EIA;
 - agree the general approach to the assessment and the methodologies that would be used; and
 - identify those issues which should be scoped out of the EIA.
- 4.3.2 The Scoping Report was issued to the organisations listed in **Table 4-1**, following agreement on the consultee list by ECU.

Table 4-1: Consultees in Receipt of the Scoping Report

Statutory Consultees	
ECU	SEPA
The Highland Council	SNH
Historic Environment Scotland	
Non-Statutory Consultees	
British Telecommunications plc	National Grid
Brora District Salmon Fishery Board	NATS Safeguarding
Civil Aviation Authority – Airspace	RAF
Defence Infrastructure Organisation	RSPB Scotland
Fisheries Management Scotland	Scottish Forestry (formerly Forestry Commission Scotland)
Forestry and Land Scotland	Scottish Rights of Way and Access Society (Scotways)
Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd	Scottish Water
Ironside Farrar Environmental Consultants	Scottish Wild Land Group
John Muir Trust	Scottish Wildlife Trust
Kyle of Sutherland District Salmon Fishery Board	The Crown Estate Scotland
Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust	Transport Scotland
Marine Scotland Science	Visit Scotland
Mountaineering Council of Scotland	Wild Land Ltd
Community Councils	
Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra Community Council	Lairg Community Council

Scoping Opinion

- 4.3.3 A Scoping Report was issued to the Energy Consents Unit (ECU) on 28th March 2019³, based on the preferred alignment at the time (**Figure 2.4**: EIA Scoping Alignment), to determine the environmental information to be provided in the EIA Report. A Scoping Opinion was issued by the Scottish Ministers on 17th July 2019.
- 4.3.4 As discussed within Section 4.2 above, detailed consultation was carried out with FLS which resulted in an alteration to the alignment of the Proposed Development compared with that presented within the Scoping Report (**Figure 2.4**: EIA Scoping Alignment). Furthermore, the Applicant has decided to underground a short section of the line around the Crask to mitigate potential visual impacts (**Figure 3.1**: The Proposed Development). The Applicant has considered the changes made to the alignment since the EIA Scoping Opinion was adopted in July 2019 and determined they are not significant enough to warrant re-scoping the Proposed Development due to the likely significant environmental impacts remaining comparable with those of the Scoping alignment.
- 4.3.5 This EIA Report considers the consultation responses received in the Scoping Opinion received in July 2019, but is not based solely upon it given the change in alignment. The EIA Report is also informed by subsequent discussions with consultees (notably FLS and SNH), and considers further feedback from consultation obtained via the Gate Check Report (discussed in Section 4.4 below). The Gate Check Report was also issued to a number of non-statutory consultees where they stipulated that they must be re-consulted on changes or where

³ Under the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

their specific interests may be affected by the change in alignment. This was to help ensure a robust consultation process and Section 37 application.

- 4.3.6 **Appendix 4.1** of this EIA Report includes a matrix detailing the key issues that were raised by consultees and how and where they are addressed in the EIA Report. Relevant comments are also addressed at the beginning of each technical chapter of this report.

4.4 Energy Consents Unit Gate Check

- 4.4.1 Prior to submission of the Section 37 application, and in accordance with the ECU's gate checking procedure for Applications under Section 37 of The Electricity Act (1989), a Gate Check Report was submitted to the ECU and distributed to statutory and non-statutory consultees on 26th November 2019. The principal aims of the Gate Check Report are to; outline the design iterations that have occurred through the EIA process; state the consultations that have occurred with statutory (and non-statutory) consultees and the local community; and a summary on how advice received from consultees during and following scoping has been taken forward.
- 4.4.2 As discussed in Section 4.3 above, the Gate Check process was used to carry out further formal consultation with statutory and non-statutory consultees and inform the scope of this EIA. The following sections of this Chapter consider the consultee responses received both as part of Scoping and the Gate Check process.

4.5 Key Issues Raised through EIA Consultation

Scoping

- 4.5.1 The Scoping Opinion made reference to site specific issues of interest to the Scottish Ministers, to be considered and addressed in addition to those laid out in responses from consultees. The issues raised were as follows.

Scottish Water Assets

“Scottish Water provided information on whether there are any drinking water protected areas or Scottish Water Assets on which the development could have any significant effect. Scottish Ministers request that the company contacts Scottish Water...and makes further enquiries to confirm whether there [are] any Scottish Water assets which may be affected by the development, and includes details in the EIA report of any relevant mitigation measures to be provided.”

- 4.5.2 Scottish Water were contacted via the email address provided on 23rd July 2019 to request information on the presence of any Scottish Water assets in the vicinity of the Proposed Development. A response was received on 25th July 2019 indicating the presence of infrastructure at the residence of Dalchork, south of Dalchork Bridge, and a raw water pipe at Loch Beannach. The infrastructure at Dalchork would not be affected by the Proposed Development as it is approximately 400 m away from the OHL at the closest point. The Proposed Development would cross the raw water pipe at a near perpendicular angle around 170 m north of the haul road which adjoins the A836 south of the residence of Dalmichy (crossing point approximately at OS Grid Reference 258010, 912720). Mitigation measures to protect this asset are set out in Chapter 3 of this EIA Report.

Private Water Supplies

“Scottish Ministers request that the Company investigates the presence of any private water supplies that may be impacted by the development. The EIA report should include details of any supplies identified by this investigation, and if any supplies are identified, the Company should provide an assessment of the potential impacts, risks, and any mitigation which would be provided.”

- 4.5.3 Chapter 10 of this EIA Report discusses private water supplies (PWS), detailing the methods used for identification of such and the likely effects of the Proposed Development on them. During assessment, four

properties were identified within 1 km of the Proposed Development as being served by PWS. The Crask Inn and The Crask Inn House share a supply, while Rhian and New Log Cabin are each served by separate supplies. Only the PWS serving Rhian is considered to be at risk of impact from the Proposed Development, as its catchment includes a number of wood pole locations and a helicopter delivery site. As such, mitigation measures and a schedule of monitoring are detailed within Chapter 10, and summarised within Chapter 12, to ensure no adverse effects are likely to arise on this PWS.

Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessment

“Scottish Ministers request a peat landslide hazard and risk assessment (PLHRA), the assessment should be undertaken as part of the EIA process to provide Ministers with a clear understanding of whether the risks are acceptable and capable of being controlled by mitigation measures. The PLHRA requires to be in accordance with Peat Landslide Hazard and Risk Assessments: Best Practice Guide for Proposed Electricity Generation Developments (Second Edition).”

- 4.5.4 A PLHRA has been carried out as part of the assessment of impacts upon soils and hydrology, in accordance with the noted guidance. The PLHRA is included as **Appendix 10.1**.

Landscape and Visual Assessment

“The scoping report did not identify viewpoints at this stage. Visual material must be provided in accordance with The Highland Council requirements. The Council expects the EIAR to consider the landscape and visual impact of the development. The Council makes a distinction between the two. These elements require separate assessment and therefore presentation of visual material in different ways. The preferred format and focal lengths for visualisations from agreed viewpoints are clearly set out in the Highland Council response in Annex B.”

- 4.5.5 Section 4.4.2 of the Scoping Report identified two suitable locations for the preparation of visualisations of the Proposed Development: one north of the Crask Inn, at the junction between the A836 and the adjoining track, and one at the public road near Tirryside. A third visualisation was requested by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) from the Altbreck Broch near the separately proposed Dalchork substation. These three visualisations (**Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 9.2**) are included with the EIA Report and accord with the Highland Council requirements.
- 4.5.6 Chapter 6 of this EIA Report considers the landscape and visual impacts of the Proposed Development.
- 4.5.7 While the LVIA does make reference to the visualisations, the two photomontages included with Chapter 3 of this EIA Report are a visual aid to assist the reader in understanding the likely physical appearance of the Proposed Development within the setting. Whilst these complement the visual assessment, they are not referred to as ‘Viewpoints’ since the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), does not adopt a viewpoint-based assessment.
- 4.5.8 A detailed visual assessment has been carried out and is included within Chapter 6 of this EIA Report. Rather than being based on a small number of viewpoints, the visual assessment takes consideration of likely visual receptors with the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. This includes consideration of views from residential properties, workplaces, public roads and Core Paths within 2 km of the Proposed Development.

Further Engagement

“Ministers are aware that further engagement is required between parties regarding the refinement of the design of the proposed development regarding, among other things, surveys, management plans, peat, and finalisation of viewpoints, cultural heritage, cumulative assessments and request that they are kept informed of relevant discussions.”

4.5.9 Letters were issued to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Visit Scotland as responses to their Scoping Comments to address some of the points raised on 11th December 2019 and the Scottish Ministers were copied in to this correspondence.

Gate Check

4.5.10 Following issue of the Gate Check Report to consultees, a few further key issues arose in written responses and during a consultation meeting held on 16th December 2019 between the Applicant, the ECU, The Highland Council (THC), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Forestry (SF).

4.5.11 The ECU noted that two areas of note that consultees often don't receive feedback on are PLHRA and PWS. A PLHRA is included with this EIA Report as Appendix 10.2, while likely effects on PWS are considered within the Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils chapter, with a schedule of monitoring proposed for one PWS to ensure no adverse effects on the quality or quantity of supply.

4.5.12 SEPA emphasised the need to ensure all development components were shown on figures, both temporary and permanent, to allow a full understanding of potential effects on peat soils and areas of GWDTE. The relevant figures associated with chapters 3, 7 and 10 of this EIA Report, which address the description of the proposed development, GWDTE habitats and peat soils, respectively, display these elements.

4.5.13 SEPA also noted the importance of effective peat soils management, and that re-use proposals for excess excavated peat should be complementary to the current peatland restoration works being undertaken at the site. The Peat Management Plan (**Appendix 10.1**) has been devised to ensure appropriate measures and controls would be in place for all handling of peat soils. At this stage, insufficient information is available to devise a re-use scheme which would complement current restoration works; however, the Applicant would liaise directly with Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and the SNH Peatland Action Group as part of the Stage 2 Peat Management Plan to ensure that all re-use proposals would align with current restoration works.

4.5.14 SNH, in their written response of 4th December 2019, also raised comments in relation to peat soils, particularly in relation to the Peatland Action restoration areas at the site. They advised that pre- and post-construction monitoring should be carried out via drone survey to assess the condition of the peatlands following construction of the Proposed Development. As set out in Chapter 10 of this EIA Report, drone surveys are proposed in line with these comments.

4.5.15 SNH also commented on use of bentonite in horizontal drilling beneath the River Tirry, which could support freshwater pearl mussels which would be adversely affected in the event of a leak. Mitigation and pollution prevention measures are set out within Chapters 7 and 10 of this EIA Report to ensure waste products from drilling, including bentonite, are not released into the river; adherence to these measures would prevent any adverse effects upon freshwater pearl mussels.

4.5.16 THC raised concerns in relation to cumulative traffic and transport impacts, in the event that the Proposed Development and nearby similar developments, including the Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, Dalchork Substation and the Lairg to Loch Buidhe OHL, progressed simultaneously. The Transport Assessment, included as **Appendix 3.4**, includes an assessment of cumulative traffic impacts with these other developments.

4.5.17 The RSPB, in their written response, noted the use of helicopters during construction, and advised that the Highland Raptor Study Group be contacted for information regarding golden eagle territories so that flight routes taken can be agreed so as to avoid disturbance. Once the Principal Contractor is brought on board by the Applicant and the construction process better defined, the Highland Raptor Study Group will be contacted for such information to ensure avoidance of golden eagles by helicopter flights.

4.5.18 The RSPB also highlighted the Applicant's recently published 'A Network for Net Zero', which sets out a voluntary approach to achieving biodiversity net gain on their projects. Net gain is proposed for projects gaining consent from 2025, while 'no net loss' is proposed for all projects gaining consent from 2020 onwards. The Applicant would carry out a separate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment for the Proposed Development following submission of the Section 37 application, and in consultation with FLS, involving a specific survey of the site and surrounding area to identify opportunities for net gain, or no net loss. Where any habitats are considered irreplaceable within the current BNG guidelines produced by CIEEM, IEMA and CIRIA⁴, restoration efforts may be explored instead where not already covered by the Peat Management Plan (**Appendix 10.1**), and presented alongside the BNG proposals.

4.6 Potentially Significant Issues

4.6.1 Consultation responses received through both the scoping process and the ongoing stakeholder consultation exercise highlighted the following key environmental considerations that should be specifically addressed in the EIA Report:

- *potential effects on European (Natura) Protected Areas;*
- *potential effects on protected species, both terrestrial and ornithological;*
- *potential adverse effects on areas of deep peat and Priority Peatland Habitat;*
- *potential effects on areas of peatland restoration works;*
- *potential effects on groundwater dependent terrestrial ecosystems;*
- *potential effects on forestry and woodland interests through felling;*
- *potential effects on local roads arising from use by construction vehicles; and*
- *potential effects on the landscape and visual receptors.*

4.7 Scoped-out Issues

4.7.1 The Proposed Development is considered unlikely to result in significant effects in terms of the EIA Regulations on the following topics, which were referred to in the Scoping Report as topics to be scoped out from further consideration within the EIA Report. There was general agreement amongst consultees, as detailed within the Scoping Opinion (see **Appendix 4.1**) and comments following the Gate Check, as to the proposed scope of the EIA Report.

4.7.2 Individual elements scoped out of any particular topic are detailed in the relevant technical chapter.

Population and Human Health

4.7.3 Potential effects on population and human health may relate to effects on TV and radio reception, noise and vibration, or electromagnetic fields (EMF).

Radio and TV Interference

4.7.4 Potential effects from OHLs on TV signals are due to physical obstruction of the signal. The Proposed Development would not represent a significant obstruction and it is not anticipated that any adverse effects on TV reception would be experienced. The operation of high voltage OHLs can generate electromagnetic fields over a wide range of frequencies, from power (50 Hz) to radio frequencies. It is anticipated that the Proposed Development would emit low-level radio frequency interference (RFI) but that in practice little radio and television interference would arise, except when directly beneath the OHL. It has therefore been scoped out of the EIA.

⁴ CIEEM, IEMA, CIRIA. (2019). *Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development; A Practical Guide*. [online] Available at: <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/C776a-Biodiversity-net-gain.-Good-practice-principles-for-development.-A-practical-guide-web.pdf> [Accessed 19 December 2019].

Noise and Vibration

- 4.7.5 Any effects relating to noise or vibration would be most likely to occur during the construction phase of the Proposed Development. The effects of noise and vibration during construction would be temporary and intermittent and would be managed through the implementation of a Noise Management Plan, which would include working hours agreed with THC. The Noise Management Plan would be developed as part of the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP).
- 4.7.6 With the implementation of the Noise Management Plan, no significant effects from Noise and Vibration would be likely and therefore are scoped out of the EIA.

EMF

- 4.7.7 Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) arise from electric charges. Transmission lines comply with the government policy of adopting the guidelines of the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) on exposure to EMF. The Applicant considers that compliance with government policy on levels of exposure to EMFs, which in turn is based on the advice of the government's independent scientific advisers, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) (now part of the Health Protection Agency), ensures the appropriate level of protection for the public from these fields. The NRPB keeps the results of EMF health studies under constant review to ensure that the guidelines for limiting exposure are based on the best available scientific information.
- 4.7.8 Both electric and magnetic fields diminish quickly with distance. For a 132 kV OHL, typical magnetic fields diminish to near zero at around 50 m from the centreline, while electric fields do so in around half the distance⁵. As the closest property, the Crask Inn, is located approximately 450 m from the nearest point of the OHL, and the EMF of the underground cable would diminish much more rapidly with distance, it is therefore considered unlikely that significant effect on human health associated with EMFs would result from the Proposed Development, and it has been scoped out of the EIA.

Land Use and Amenity

- 4.7.9 The Proposed Development would cross land used predominantly for forestry. A separate assessment on the effects of the Proposed Development on forest interests is included as Chapter 11 of this EIA Report. Whilst construction work may result in some temporary loss of land or access restrictions, permanent loss of land to pole locations would be minimal and would present very little restriction to existing land uses. Significant effects on land use would be unlikely and therefore this assessment has been scoped out of the EIA.

Recreation and Tourism

- 4.7.10 The Proposed Development would utilise the A836 for construction and maintenance, which also comprises part of National Cycle Route 1. However, it would not form any restriction to the usage of this route. The Proposed Development would not cross any recognised Core Paths, with the closest identified being the SU16.05 west of the A836 and SU16.01 at Lairg, and construction works are unlikely to require access along any routes which are Core Paths. Where there may be interactions with recreational users an outdoor access plan would be prepared as part of the CEMP and signage would be erected at suitable locations to warn of construction traffic.
- 4.7.11 The visual effects on these public roads and recreational routes is considered within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) Chapter.

⁵ EMFs.info (2018) *Summaries of fields from all power lines* [online] Available at: <http://www.emfs.info/sources/overhead/summaries/> [Accessed 29 August 2018].

- 4.7.12 There are several accommodation businesses in the area, including bed and breakfasts, hotels, lodges and a caravan site. Ferrycroft Visitor Centre within Lairg also provides a local tourism service. It is considered unlikely that any local businesses would be adversely affected by the Proposed Development.
- 4.7.13 Visit Scotland, in their consultee response to the Scoping application, noted that, based on the Scottish Government's 2008 research on the impacts of wind farms on tourism, an independent tourism impact assessment should be carried out. As discussed within the letter response from the Applicant to Visit Scotland, noted in paragraph 4.5.9 above, the Proposed Development is not a wind farm and does not fall within the scope of the findings of the research.
- 4.7.14 Consequently, it is considered that a tourism impact assessment would be unnecessary and this topic has been scoped out of the EIA.

Socio-economics

- 4.7.15 The Applicant would promote tendering opportunities through the 'SSE Highlands and Islands Open 4 Business' platform. Through this platform, the Proposed Development is expected to provide local employment opportunities during construction to local tradesmen and labourers.
- 4.7.16 In addition, the Proposed Development would result in some local revenue generation through demand for accommodation providers, spend in local shops and material supplies. Whilst these socio-economic effects would have a positive effect on the local economy, they are likely to be negligible to minor on a local and regional scale and thus not considered to be significant. There may be individual secondary effects of displacement on local employers, i.e. the number of jobs accounted for by the loss of jobs elsewhere in the locality. These effects, should they occur, would be highly localised and on an individual basis.
- 4.7.17 Due to the location and the scale of the Proposed Development, it is considered that effects on socio-economics during both construction and operation of the Proposed Development are likely to be minimal and therefore further assessment of this topic has been scoped out of the EIA.

Accidents and Disasters

- 4.7.18 The EIA Regulations require the consideration of the vulnerability of the Proposed Development to accidents and disasters. This requirement is interpreted as requiring the consideration of low likelihood / high consequence events which would result in serious harm or damage to environmental receptors.
- 4.7.19 Given the nature of the Proposed Development, the potential for effects related to the vulnerability to accidents and disasters are likely to be limited to those associated with unplanned power outages, due to extreme weather or structural damage.
- 4.7.20 Crisis management and continuity plans are in place across the SSE Group. These are tested regularly and are designed for the management of, and recovery from, significant energy infrastructure failure events. Where there are material changes in infrastructure (or the management of it) additional plans are developed.
- 4.7.21 Other accident and disaster risks associated with an OHL relate to electrical discharge through accidental contact with live lines or structural collapse of the poles.
- 4.7.22 Minimal clearance distances are set for construction of lines in order to minimise risk of contact from moving plant or vehicles. Vegetation below active lines is cleared and maintained so as to prevent contact with conductors. Warning signs are placed on all poles to warn of risk of electrocution and, where necessary, fencing or other barriers are installed around the base as a safeguard.

- 4.7.23 Poles and their accessory components, such as insulators and brackets, undergo regular inspection and maintenance to prevent both structural and electrical failure. Poles are also positioned at a safe distance from residences and other properties so that the risk of damage or injury is minimal in the unlikely event of structural failure.
- 4.7.24 Assessment of the vulnerability of the Proposed Development to accidents and disasters has therefore been scoped out of the EIA Report.

Air Quality and Climate Change

- 4.7.25 The Proposed Development has limited potential to impact local air quality. There is a potential to give rise to some localised and temporary construction related releases associated with dust and construction plant and traffic exhaust emissions. However, the nature of the construction activities is that these would be localised, short term and intermittent.
- 4.7.26 The potential for such nuisance effects on residential or recreational amenity during construction would be strictly controlled in accordance with the project CEMP.
- 4.7.27 In regard to climate change, in the context of the EIA process climate change is considered both in relation to the contribution of the Proposed Development to increasing or decreasing gaseous emissions with Global Warming Potential (GWP) and in relation to climate change adaptation. Emissions associated with the Proposed Development would be limited to temporary and short term emissions of exhaust gases from vehicles and construction plant, and the potential for the release of carbon dioxide as a result of dewatering and exposing peat and peat soils during construction. Neither source is considered likely to be significant in terms of GWP. Measures to mitigate release of CO₂ as a result of drying or oxidation of peat are set out within Chapter 10 (Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils) of this EIA Report.
- 4.7.28 The Proposed Development would enable a connection of a renewable source of energy to the National Grid, helping to reduce reliance on fossil fuels which produce harmful emissions.
- 4.7.29 With regard to climate adaptation, consideration would be given the potential implications of climate change on the OHL design and the design of pole support structures (e.g. design for increased flood risk and adverse weather). However, no potential for significant impacts have been identified and it is therefore scoped out of further consideration in the EIA.
- 4.7.30 It is considered that due to the lack of likely significant effects, no assessment is required as part of the EIA for Air Quality and Climate Change, and has therefore been scoped out.

4.8 Other Issues

- 4.8.1 The 2017 EIA Regulations introduced a number of factors to be considered within an EIA Report; specifically, those factors listed under Regulations 4(3) and 4(4), and Schedule 4. **Table 4-2** describes how this EIA Report has addressed these factors.

Table 4-2: Assessment of Factors Identified in Regulations 4(3), 4(4) and Schedule 4

Topic	Potential for Significant Effects
Population and Human Health	This Chapter (4: EIA Consultation) addresses potential effects relating to the population and human health through consideration of EMF, EMI, noise and / or vibration effects under Section 4.6: Scoped-out Issues.
Biodiversity (in particular species and habitats protected under Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora)	The requirement to consider impacts on biodiversity is addressed in Chapter 7: Ecology, and Chapter 8: Ornithology.
Land and Soil (and natural resources availability)	The potential impacts on geological receptors, peat and groundwater resources are considered in Chapter 10: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils.
Water (and natural resource availability)	The potential impacts on the water environment are considered in Chapter 10: Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Geology and Soils.
Air and Climate	This Chapter (4: EIA Consultation) addresses potential effects on air and climate under Section 4.6: Scoped-out Issues.
Material Assets, Cultural Heritage	Chapter 9: Cultural Heritage, includes and assessment of the potential for significant effects on material assets and cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological assets and historic landscape.
Landscape	Chapter 6: Landscape and Visual Impact, considers the potential impacts and potential cumulative impacts on the landscape and visual receptors.
Major Accidents and Disasters	This Chapter (4: EIA Consultation) addresses potential effects relating to major accidents and disasters under Section 4.6: Scoped-out Issues.
Interaction Between Factors (cumulative effects)	The potential for cumulative effects is outlined within Chapter 5: Methodology, and detailed within each of the technical chapters (6 – 11), where appropriate.