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6. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

6.1 General Introduction

6.1.1 This chapter presents the findings of the Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVIA) for the Proposed Development. The purpose of the LVIA is to identify and describe potential significant effects which may occur as a result of the Proposed Development to views obtained by those living, working and visiting in the area, and the wider landscape resource.

6.1.2 The assessment has been undertaken by two Senior Landscape Architects at ASH design + assessment Ltd (ASH), under the supervision of a Landscape Architect Director, all of whom are chartered members of the Landscape Institute (CMLI). ASH has over 30 year of experience in LVIA across a variety of sectors, including the assessment of electrical transmission infrastructure. The assessment has been prepared with reference to the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd Edition¹, referred to as GLVIA3.

6.2 Scope of Assessment

6.2.1 The LVIA considers all aspects of the Proposed Development during the construction phase and during operation, as described in Chapter 3 of this EIA Report. It gives consideration to potential effects on the character of the landscape and also the visual amenity of those present within the landscape. Although closely related to one another, effects on landscape character and visual amenity have been considered separately for reasons of clarity and robustness.

Study Area

6.2.2 Following an initial site appraisal, review of ZTVs potential perceptibility of the Proposed Development, and consultation with statutory consultees, it was considered by the assessors that any potentially significant landscape and visual effects would be likely to occur within 2 km of the Proposed Development. As such, a 2 km radius study area offset from the centreline of the overhead line component of the Proposed Development has been adopted for the LVIA, as shown on **Figure 6.1: Zone of Theoretical Visibility**.

Defining the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

6.2.3 The ZTV is a computer-generated diagram which uses a terrain model to indicate areas from which the Proposed Development would theoretically be visible. The ZTV for the Proposed Development was generated using ESRI ArcGIS software based on a terrain modelled using Ordnance Survey (OS) Terrain 5 Digital Terrain Model (T5 DTM) data. The ZTV was produced from points representing the anticipated height of poles along the overhead line component of the Proposed Development. The following parameters were used for the purposes of the ZTV:

- pole height – 18 m (to reflect the worst-case scenario²); and
- viewer height – 2 m.

6.2.4 The ZTV shows theoretical visibility for a person standing at ground level, but it does not show visibility from other heights (e.g. 2nd storey, 3rd storey buildings) and so site appraisal is critical in assessing and evaluating on-site visibility.

6.2.5 The ZTV has been run within the study area to a distance of 2 km from each estimated pole location and is shown on **Figure 6.1: Zone of Theoretical Visibility**.

¹ Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. (2013). *Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition*.

² As described in Chapter 3, the majority of poles would be an approximate height of 10 – 15 m, depending on ground conditions and topography, with a vertical limit of deviation of 18 m.

6.2.6 The ZTV is a useful tool to aid the identification of potential effects but is not indicative of an effect in itself since it is generated over a bare ground terrain model and does not take into account potential screening effects of localised features, buildings or vegetation. Nor do they indicate ways in which a development may relate to its broader landscape context.

Consultation

6.2.7 The consultation process is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this EIA Report. However, key points raised by consultees which are of relevance to the subject areas of landscape and visual amenity are detailed in **Table 6-1**:

Table 6-1: Consultation Responses of Relevance to Landscape and Visual Amenity

Consultee	Issue	Action
Scoping Opinion from the Scottish Government, Energy Consents Unit (ECU) 17 th July 2019	ECU states that the scoping report did not identify viewpoints at this stage and that visual material must be provided in accordance with THC requirements.	The scoping report proposed to include visualisations from two locations, referred to as Visualisation Locations (VLs), see paragraph 4.2.2 of scoping report, which would be produced in accordance with THC visualisation standards. These are not referred to as Viewpoints since the LVIA is not adopting a viewpoint based assessment.
	ECU notes that the Council expects the EIAR to consider landscape and visual impact of the development, and that separate assessment and presentation of visual material in different ways is required.	The LVIA is contained within this chapter. As noted in 6.2.1, “although closely related to one another, effects on landscape character and visual amenity have been considered separately for reasons of clarity and robustness.” Visualisations (provided in Figure 3.2 and 3.3) are provided to THC guidance to illustrate the proposed development. The format and focal lengths from proposed locations accord with those specified in Annex B (THC response, see below).
Scoping Response from The Highland Council (THC) Ref. 19/01713/SCOP 6 th June 2019	The council requires separate assessment of landscape and visual effects and “presentation of visual material in different ways”.	The assessments of effects on visual amenity and landscape character have been conducted separately, as per best practice.
	For the visual impact assessment, the council require “single frame images with different focal lengths taken with a 35mm format full frame sensor camera – not an ‘equivalent.’ The preferred focal lengths are 50mm and 75mm.” These images should form part of the ES and not be separate from it.	Visualisations have been produced in accordance with THC (2016) ³ visualisation guidance, see Figures 3.2 and 3.3 .
	The purpose of the selected and agreed viewpoints shall be clearly identified and stated. Clarification of	The LVIA provides a detailed assessment of all landscape and visual receptors in the Study Area

³ The Highland Council (THC) (2016) *Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments*. July 2016.

Consultee	Issue	Action
	whether the viewpoint has been chosen for “landscape assessment, or visual impact assessment, or cumulative assessment, or sequential assessment, or to show a representative view or for assessment of impact on designated sites, communities or individual properties”.	rather than a less detailed viewpoint based assessment. It therefore takes account of the full range of views. Visualisations from two locations are provided for illustrative purposes (Figures 3.2 and 3.3), as described in Chapter 3, to show how the Proposed Development would appear in the landscape.
Scoping Response from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Ref. CEA154979 3 rd May 2019	SNH note the intention to carry out Wild Land Assessments for the Fionaven-Ben Hee Wild Land Area (WLA) and Ben Klibreck-Armine Forest WLA. Given screening from roadside trees and the height of the line, SNH consider that the proposal would have limited visibility over either wild land area, so do not consider that wild land assessments would be required and can be scoped out.	The Screening responses from SNH (26 th November 2018 ⁴) and THC (5 th December 2018 ⁵) advised that an assessment of the impact of the Proposed Development on these two WLAs would be required. The intention to assess effects on wild land was therefore stated in the Scoping report. However, in light of SNH’s Scoping Response and consideration of the revised proposal, wild land assessments have been scoped out of the assessment.
Gate Check Response from SNH Ref. CPA157556 4 th December 2019	SNH have no further comments to make regarding the Foinaven – Ben Hee WLA or the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest WLA. SNH note the intention to underground part of the route around the Crask Inn and consider that this will further reduce landscape and visual impacts.	Noted.

Issues Scoped Out of the Assessment

- 6.2.8 Given the screening from roadside trees, height of the line, the probable existing effects on WLAs from existing commercial forestry and the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, and Scoping consultation with SNH (see **Table 6-1**), the potential for a significant effect to occur as a result of the Proposed Development is considered unlikely. A Wild Land Assessment on the qualities and integrity of the WLA is therefore not considered necessary for the Proposed Development and has been scoped out of this assessment.
- 6.2.9 Effects arising from the process of decommissioning are considered to be of a similar nature and duration to those arising from the construction process and therefore have not been considered separately in this chapter. Where this assessment refers to potential construction impacts, these are also representative of predicted decommissioning impacts.

⁴ SNH Ref. CNS/ELY/Hi/North Highland – Golspie/CEA153230

⁵ THC Ref. 18/05384/SCRE

6.3 Method of Assessment

Assessment Guidance

6.3.1 The LVIA has been prepared with reference to GLVIA3 and Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland⁶.

Professional Judgement

6.3.2 GLVIA3 places a strong emphasis on the importance of professional judgement in identifying and defining the significance of landscape and visual effects. As part of this assessment, professional judgement has been used in combination with structured methods and criteria to evaluate landscape value and landscape and visual sensitivity, magnitude and significance of effect. The assessment has been undertaken and verified by two Chartered Landscape Professionals to provide a robust and consistent approach.

Key Stages of the Assessment

6.3.3 GLVIA3 suggests that landscape and visual effects are assessed from a clear understanding of the development proposed and any mitigation measures which are being adopted.

6.3.4 The GLVIA3 methodology for landscape assessment involves an appreciation of the existing landscape resource, the susceptibility of its key components to accept the change proposed, and an understanding of the potential effects which could occur and how these could affect these key components.

6.3.5 Familiarity with the site and the extent, nature and expectation of existing views is a key factor in establishing the visual sensitivity in terms of the development proposed. The guidelines require evaluation of magnitude of change to views experienced by sensitive receptors, comprising individuals living, working, travelling and carrying out other activities within the landscape, and subsequent evaluation of effect significance.

6.3.6 The potential to mitigate adverse effects should also be considered for both landscape and visual assessment.

6.3.7 There are five key stages to the assessment:

- establishment of the baseline;
- appreciation of the Proposed Development;
- identification of key landscape and visual receptors;
- identification of potential landscape and visual effects; and
- assessment of landscape and visual effect significance.

6.3.8 Detailed methods and criteria for the above key stages are included under the relevant methodology sections for landscape and visual amenity in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.

Limitations of the Assessment and Assumptions

6.3.9 The prominence of the Proposed Development in the landscape would vary according to the prevailing weather conditions. The assessment has been carried out, as is best practice, by assuming the 'worst case' scenario i.e. on a clear, bright day in winter, when neither foreground deciduous foliage nor haze can interfere with the clarity of the view obtained.

⁶ Scottish Natural Heritage, The Countryside Agency. (2002). *Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-02/Publication%202002%20-%20Landscape%20Character%20Assessment%20guidance%20for%20England%20and%20Scotland.pdf> [accessed 11 March 2019].

- 6.3.10 The assessment of visual effects has been undertaken from the nearest public road, footpath or open space to each property and assumptions have been made about the types of rooms, and about the types and importance of views obtained from these rooms.
- 6.3.11 As the Proposed Development is dependent upon a scenario whereby the Creag Riabhach Wind Farm would be present, for the purposes of the assessment, the wind farm and substation are assumed to be constructed and fully operational, and thus part of the baseline for assessment.
- 6.3.12 The limitations of the ZTV are discussed in paragraph 6.2.2 – 6.2.5.
- 6.3.13 A considerable part of the Study Area is commercial forestry plantation undergoing continued felling operations as part of the Forestry and Land Scotland's (FLS) long term forest management. It is therefore understood that the presence of forestry will vary considerably over the construction and operation period of the Proposed Development, and that the potential for screening will vary over time. Given the changing nature of this forest landscape, the assessment considers screening effects of forestry at the time of site assessment (June 2019), but also takes into account the context of a changing commercial forest in the assessment of potential effects upon landscape character and visual amenity.
- 6.3.14 The assessment considers the effects of both the underground cable and the overhead line but separates their associated effects for clarity. Whilst potential for significant effects is limited for an underground cable, it has been considered relevant to discuss potential effects within this assessment given that it has been proposed here to mitigate significant long-term localised landscape and visual effects.

Cumulative Effects

- 6.3.15 Cumulative effects occur where other infrastructure of a similar type would combine with the Proposed Development to form an increased perception of landscape or visual effect. Existing overhead lines (OHLs) and substation infrastructure are already present within the Study Area and therefore there is potential for cumulative landscape and visual effects to occur. In addition, planning applications for similar types of developments within the LVIA Study Area comprise:
- Lairg to Loch Buidhe 132 kV OHL (Ref. No: 19/01236/S37, decision pending) would connect the Loch Buidhe substation to a tower adjacent to the proposed Dalchork substation. The new OHL would be supported by double circuit steel lattice towers between c. 25 m and 40 m in height; and
 - Dalchork substation (Ref. No: 19/00374/FUL consented on 2nd December 2019) which would be an AIS⁷ substation on a platform of approximately 3 hectares at National Grid Reference (NGR) 258203, 909564.
- 6.3.16 Cumulative effects in relation to these developments have been taken into account and are referred to as relevant throughout the LVIA.
- 6.3.17 An assessment of the underground cable has been scoped out of the cumulative assessment given the short-term nature of localised effects and minimal potential for significant cumulative effects.

6.4 Landscape Character

Landscape Character: Introduction

- 6.4.1 Effects to landscape character may arise through the introduction of new components which are out of keeping with established landscape patterns and features. The scale and form of new development can prove to be influential in the context of existing landform, scenic quality, settlement pattern and planting structure. Development may also result in the alteration or fragmentation of important and distinctive landscape components.

⁷ Air Insulated Switchgear (AIS) substation.

6.4.2 This section assesses the potential impacts on landscape character of the Proposed Development. The character of the landscape relates to the natural processes and human activities that have been at work for a long time to shape the land to its present form. Factors contributing to landscape character include topography, vegetation cover, sense of space or enclosure and past and present land use. Landscape character and resources are considered to have an importance in their own right and are valued for their intrinsic qualities. The aim of the assessment is to determine the effect of the Proposed Development on the landscape character of the area and the elements which contribute to its values and sensitivity.

Landscape Character: Methodology

Establishment of the Baseline

6.4.3 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through combination of desk study and site appraisal. The following specific tasks have been undertaken:

- a review of the now superseded Landscape Character Types (LCTs) identified in the Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment (Stanton, 1998)⁸;
- a review of the revised LCTs identified SNH in 2019⁹;
- definition of Local Landscape Character Types (LLCTs) for the purposes of this LVIA; and
- a review of the SNH (2014) Map of Relative Wildness¹⁰, map of Wild Land Areas and Wild Land Area Descriptions for WLA 35 and 37 from the 'Mapping Scotland's Wildness' programme¹¹.

Relative Landscape Value

6.4.4 The relative value of the landscape is an important consideration in informing later judgement of the significance of effects. Value concerns the perceived importance of the landscape, when considered as a whole and within the context of the study area. Landscape value is established through consideration of the following factors:

- presence of landscape designations, other inventory or registered landscapes;
- landscape features or identified planning constraints;
- the scenic quality of the landscape;
- perceptual aspects, such as wildness or tranquillity;
- conservation interests such as cultural heritage features or associations, or if the landscape supports notable habitats or species;
- recreational value; and
- rarity, either in the national or local context or if it is considered to be a particularly important example of a specific landscape type.

6.4.5 It should be noted that absence of a designation does not necessarily mean that a landscape or component is not highly valued as factors such as accessibility and local scarcity can render areas of nationally unremarkable quality highly valuable as a local resource.

6.4.6 Criteria for the allocation of perceived landscape value are outlined in **Table 6-2**.

⁸ Stanton, C. (1998) *Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Assessment*. Scottish Natural Heritage.

⁹ Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) *Scottish Landscape Character Types maps and Descriptions*, January 2019. Available at <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/landscape/landscape-character-assessment/scottish-landscape-character-types-map-and-descriptions>. Accessed on 12.07.19

¹⁰ Scottish Natural Heritage. (2014). *Mapping Scotland's wildness: Map 5 – Relative wildness of Scotland 2014*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-01/Wild%20land%202014%20-%20Phase%201%20-%20Map%205%20-%20relative%20wildness%20-%202014.pdf> [accessed 1st July 2019].

¹¹ Scottish Natural Heritage. (2014). *SNH's Mapping of Scotland's Wildness and wild Land*. [online] Available at: <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2018-02/Mapping%20Scotlands%20Wildness%20-%20non-technical%20methodology%20-%20June%202014.pdf> [accessed 1st July 2019].

Table 6-2: Relative Landscape Value Criteria

Landscape Value	Criteria
High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the landscape is closely associated with features of international or national importance which are rare within the wider context; the landscape is of high scenic quality and forms a key part of an important designated landscape or planning constraint; and / or the landscape is an example of a scarce resource within the local context and is of considerable local importance for its, scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the landscape is associated with features of national or regional importance which are relatively common within the wider context; the landscape forms part of a designated landscape or is associated with other features of importance but is not rare or distinctive within the local context; and / or the landscape is one of a number within the local context appreciated for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities or cultural heritage associations.
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the landscape characteristics are common within the local and regional context and the landscape is not associated with any particular features or attributes considered to be important; and / or the landscape is of poor scenic quality and is not appreciated for any recreational or cultural associations.

Appreciation of the Proposed Development

6.4.7 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline landscape context. It involves an understanding of the proposed activities and changes which would take place during the short-term construction of the Proposed Development and its long-term operation, and of any peripheral or ancillary features proposed. The consideration of any mitigation or other planting in the vicinity is also important in the understanding of potential longer-term effects. As part of this process, the ZTV diagram has been consulted to inform the potential range of effects.

Identification of Key Landscape Receptors

6.4.8 The identification of landscape receptors is the first step in the analysis of the potential for significant landscape effects to take place. Landscape receptors comprise key characteristics or individual features which contribute to the value of the landscape and have the potential to be affected by the Proposed Development. Landscape receptors are identified through analysis of baseline characteristics when considered in relation to the impacts which might result from a development of the type proposed.

Landscape Sensitivity

6.4.9 Landscape sensitivity considers the nature of the landscape and its ability to accommodate development of the type proposed without compromising its key characteristics and components. The appraisal of landscape sensitivity involves consideration of the sensitivity of individual landscape receptors. There are two aspects which are considered when establishing the landscape sensitivity:

- Value: the baseline value of the landscape and the contributory value of individual landscape receptors to the landscape as a whole; and
- Susceptibility to change: the ability of landscape receptors to accommodate development of the type proposed without changing the intrinsic qualities of the landscape as a whole.

6.4.10 Landscape sensitivity has been evaluated with reference to these factors and using a three-point scale as listed in **Table 6-3**.

Table 6-3: Landscape Sensitivity Criteria

Landscape Sensitivity	Criteria
High	A highly valued landscape of particularly distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes of the type proposed.
Medium	A reasonably valued landscape with a composition and characteristics tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.
Low	A relatively unimportant landscape which is potentially tolerant of a large degree of change of the type proposed.

Identification of Potential Effects

6.4.11 The second step in the assessment process involves the identification of potential effects which may occur as a result of the interaction of the effects of the Proposed Development with the identified landscape receptors. The assessment takes into account direct effects upon existing landscape elements, features and key characteristics and also indirect effects which may occur secondary to changes affecting another landscape component or area. The ZTV is used as a tool to gauge the extent of potential indirect change, supported by targeted field surveys.

Magnitude of Change

6.4.12 Magnitude of change concerns the degree to which the Proposed Development would alter the existing characteristics of the landscape. The appraisal of magnitude involves consideration of the nature and scale of the change which would occur in relation to the identified potential effects and also the duration and potential reversibility of the effect. These changes are then combined to evaluate a magnitude rating for the area as a whole.

6.4.13 Magnitude of change is categorised on a four-point scale as listed in **Table 6-4**.

Table 6-4: Magnitude of Landscape Change Criteria

Magnitude of Landscape Change	Criteria
High	Notable change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to a very intensive change over a more limited area.
Medium	Perceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area ranging to notable change in a localised area
Low	Virtually imperceptible change in landscape characteristics over an extensive area or perceptible change in a localised area
Negligible	No discernible change in any landscape characteristics or components

6.4.14 As recommended in GLVIA3, the criteria used to assess magnitude of change are recognised to be reference points along a continuum.

6.4.15 In recognition of the differing changes that would occur during construction works and in the longer term, two ratings for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development and during operation, once construction and reinstatement works have been completed.

Assessment of Effect Significance

- 6.4.16 Evaluation of the predicted significance of effect has been carried out through analysis of the anticipated magnitude of change in relation to the identified landscape sensitivity and using a degree of professional judgement. The assessment takes into account effects upon existing landscape elements, features and key characteristics and assesses the extent to which these would be lost or modified, in the context of their importance in determining the existing baseline character.
- 6.4.17 Effect significance has been evaluated using a four-point scale using the criteria noted in **Table 6-5** to describe effects. Effects are assessed to be adverse, unless otherwise stated as beneficial.

Table 6-5: Landscape Effect Criteria

Landscape Effect	Criteria
Major	The Proposed Development would be at considerable variance with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and would be an influential feature, resulting in considerable alteration to scenic quality and large-scale change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
Moderate	The Proposed Development would be inconsistent with the landform, scale and pattern of the landscape and may be locally influential and / or result in a noticeable alteration to scenic quality and a degree of change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
Minor	The Proposed Development would not quite fit with the scale, landform or local pattern of the landscape and may be locally influential but would result in an inappreciable alteration to scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.
Negligible	The Proposed Development would sit well within the scale, landform and pattern of the landscape and / or would not result in any discernible alteration to the scenic quality or change to the intrinsic landscape character of the area.

- 6.4.18 As for magnitude of change, the differing potential effects have been considered during the construction of the Proposed Development during operation, following completion of construction works and reinstatement.
- 6.4.19 The above criteria and levels of effect represent points on a continuum. Where necessary, interim ratings, such as Minor-Moderate, have been used to indicate the anticipated level of effect. For the purposes of the assessment, effects with a rating of Moderate and above considered to be significant.

Landscape Character: Baseline Conditions

Overview

- 6.4.20 The majority of the Proposed Development is largely situated within an area of commercial forestry, Dalchork Forest, surrounded by open and expansive, undulating moorland. To the north-east and north-west, the distinctive summits and hill ranges of Ben Klibreck and Ben Hee are focal features within the otherwise largely horizontal landscape. Scattered properties are situated along the A836 (and National Cycle Route 1 (NCR1)), along the eastern shores of Loch Shin at Shinness, Achnairn and Tirryside, and within the small settlement of Lairg. Operational Wind Turbines are visible on the skyline situated to the south and south-west and several OHLs of varying voltages are present in the area, ranging from the large steel lattice 132 kV line which runs along the shore of Loch Shin, to smaller wood pole 33 kV and 11 kV lines which criss-cross the landscape. These elements of human development within the immediate context of the Proposed Development contrast with the perceived wildness, openness and expansiveness of the more distant moorlands to the north-east and north-west. The consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and associated substation, which are considered as part of the LVIA baseline, would be experienced to varying degrees in the northern part of the Study Area, partially screened by forestry.

Designated and Protected Landscapes

6.4.21 There are designated and protected landscapes of regional / local and national importance within the Study Area.

Special Landscape Areas

6.4.22 Special Landscape Areas (SLAs) are regional designations identified within the Local Development Plan, in this case by THC, as areas which are locally or regionally important for their special landscape qualities. There is one SLA located within the Study Area: the Ben Klibreck and Loch Choire SLA, located approximately 1.9 km east of the Proposed Development, at its closest point. Given that a very small part of this SLA is found within the Study Area, an assessment of effects on the SLA is scoped out of the LVIA.

Wild Land Areas

6.4.23 WLAs have been defined by SNH as those areas comprising the greatest and most extensive areas of wild characteristics within Scotland. Although not a designation, WLAs are given protection within the Planning System through Scottish Planning Policy (SPP). There are two Wild Land Areas (WLAs) located within the Study Area. The Ben Kilbreck – Armine Forest WLA (WLA 35), is located around 20 m east of the Proposed Development, at its closest point; and the Foinaven – Ben Hee WLA (WLA 37), is located around 300 m west of the Proposed Development, at its closest point.

6.4.24 As noted in 6.2.8, a Wild Land Assessment is scoped out of this assessment.

Landscape Character

6.4.25 SNH, in conjunction with partner Councils, has undertaken detailed review and classification of various landscape areas and types of Scotland. This process subdivides the landscape into particular units which are considered to have a consistent and recognisable landscape character, known as Landscape Character Types (LCTs). This study was originally undertaken at a regional level in the 1990s but has been updated through the identification of new LCTs at a national scale in January 2019.

6.4.26 The study area for the Proposed Development was originally covered by the Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment (Stanton, 1998)¹² and LCTs identified within this document were used as reference for routeing and alignment studies; and Screening and Scoping consultations.

6.4.27 The revised Scottish LCT dataset (SNH, 2019¹³) amalgamates some of the original LCTs included in the Stanton (1998) classification leading to a broader characterization of the landscape. Both datasets have been considered and new Local Landscape Character Types (LLCTs) have been defined for the purposes of this LVIA. These areas provide a more fine-grained and representative classification of the character of the Study Area.

6.4.28 Three LLCTs have been defined and are illustrated on **Figure 6.2: Landscape Designations, Constraints and Character**:

- Sweeping Moorland LLCT (see **Table 6-6**);
- Commercial Forestry LLCT (see **Table 6-7**); and
- Settled Strath and Slopes LLCT (see **Table 6-8**).

¹² Stanton, C. (1998) *Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Assessment*. Scottish Natural Heritage.

¹³ Scottish Natural Heritage (2019) *Scottish Landscape Character Types maps and Descriptions*, January 2019. Available at

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

Accessed on 12.07.19

Table 6-6: Baseline Description of Sweeping Moorland LLCT




	
Description	<p>Covering the northern part of the Study Area, this is an open, gently undulating landscape of moorland, peatland and pockets of rough grazing near the public road. The area is sparsely settled, featuring only the properties at the Crask Inn next to the A836 road which runs through the middle of the LLCT. A few rough tracks are present, including a couple leading up to the summit of Ben Klibreck. There are few trees, confined to a few small clusters by the River Tirry, and shelterbelt trees along the A836 road. There is a strong sense of remoteness, naturalness and exposure associated with the largely uninhabited, relatively inaccessible moorland expanse. Views are long, largely uninterrupted and panoramic, towards distant hills. The consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm is present in the north of the LLCT.</p>
Key Positive Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presence of two WLAs, cultural heritage features and ecological designations • sense of remoteness, naturalness and exposure • high scenic quality associated with long range panoramic vistas • recreational opportunities including the NCR 1 and walking routes
Key Negative Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notable man-made development in the form of consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm
Landscape Value	<p>Two WLAs (Foinaven – Ben Hee WLA and Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest) and features of cultural heritage and ecological value are present within this LLCT. These features are of national and regional importance and the landscape is valued for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities and cultural heritage associations. The presence of Creag Riabhach Wind Farm does however alter the perceived landscape value.</p> <p>Landscape Value is considered to be Medium-High.</p>

Table 6-7: Baseline Description of Commercial Forestry LLCT



<p>Description</p>	<p>This LLCT covers the majority of the study area and is dominated by active managed commercial forestry. Forest activity, including felling and replanting, is present throughout this frequently changing forest landscape. There are some areas of broadleaf woodland along watercourses. Settlement is sparse, limited to one property at Rhian Bridge, but the area is relatively accessible: traversed by the A836, several forestry tracks, a minor road and a Scottish Hill Track. Some local distribution lines are present, crossing through felled corridors through trees.</p>
<p>Key Positive Components</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • active, productive, dynamic landscape • pockets of broadleaf woodland, adding a variety of colours and textures to the largely monotonous conifer plantation • recreational opportunities and some features of cultural heritage value
<p>Key Negative Components</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • felled and windblown trees appear as scars and give a heavily managed appearance • dark green stands of conifers can appear monotonous
<p>Landscape Value</p>	<p>This LLCT is not covered by any landscape designations and these landscape characteristics are relatively common with the local and regional context, but there are some features of cultural heritage value. Whilst the forest is of some value for recreational opportunities and as a forest resource, the generally managed character and uniform appearance is considered likely to be less valued locally.</p> <p>Landscape Value is considered to be Low.</p>

Table 6-8: Baseline Description of Settled Strath and Slopes LLCT

	
Description	<p>The southern third of the Study Area comprises a relatively settled and flat LLCT on the shores of Loch Shin, which slopes up to An t-Sròn and Cnoc a' Chatha by Saval. Properties, crofts and farms are situated along minor roads with relatively open outlooks over fields and rough grazing. The active commercial forestry of the adjacent LLCT is present in vistas to the east. Vertical man-made features are noticeable in the landscape, including local distribution lines, steel lattice towers and wind turbines which are situated outside the LLCT to the south and south-west. In addition, the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm may be experienced to the north from some parts of the LLCT. There are several features of cultural heritage value and the area is valued for its scenic quality and recreational opportunities. There is a settled and rural sense of place.</p>
Key Positive Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cultural heritage features and recreational opportunities • scenic quality and expansive views across Loch Shin and across open fields • settled and rural sense of place
Key Negative Components	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • views to active commercial forestry landscape to east • presence of steel lattice towers and distribution lines which partially reduce rural sense of place
Landscape Value	<p>This LLCT is not covered by any landscape designations and landscape characteristics are relatively common within the local and regional context. It is, however, appreciated for its scenic quality, recreational opportunities and cultural heritage associations.</p> <p>Landscape Value is considered to be Medium.</p>

Landscape Character: Assessment of Effects

6.4.29 The extent to which the Proposed Development would affect the existing landscape character varies depending on the individual components of the Proposed Development and the capacity of the existing landscape to accommodate these various components.

6.4.30 The following section provides an assessment of the effects that the Proposed Development would have on the LLCTs during construction and also in the longer term during the operational phase, in accordance with the impact criteria outlined in the methodology above.

Table 6-9: Assessment of Effects on Sweeping Moorland LLCT (see **Table 6-6** for Baseline Description)

<p>Landscape Receptors</p>	<p>The principal aspects of this landscape which may be affected by the Proposed Development comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sense of remoteness, naturalness and exposure • high scenic quality associated with long range panoramic vistas • presence of notable man-made development in the form of consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm
<p>Landscape Sensitivity</p>	<p>This landscape is highly valued and its vast open scale and horizontal structure makes it sensitive to new vertical elements. However, the presence of consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm reduces this sensitivity to some degree.</p> <p>Sensitivity to development of the type proposed is considered to be Medium-High.</p>
<p>Potential Effects</p>	<p>The experience of construction works for the proposed underground cable and OHL and longer term presence of the OHL, including terminal poles could potentially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • diminish the sense of remoteness and naturalness; • interrupt the horizontal character and panoramic views; and • increase the presence of man-made development
<p>Effects Magnitude</p>	<p>The Proposed Development would cross this LLCT, from the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm substation over open ground to cross over the A836; then alongside the road and through shelterbelt trees to a terminal pole on the eastern side of the road. Then, as an underground cable, it would cross under the A836 and pass through open ground alongside the A836 on its western side, crossing under the A836 to a terminal pole approximately 400 m east of the road. As an OHL, it would then continue into the adjacent Commercial Forestry LLCT. Since it would be present within this LLCT, potential effects on this LLCT would be direct.</p> <p><u>Overhead Line</u></p> <p>During construction of the OHL, activity and installation would be noticeable adjacent to the A836 road. The majority would be within shelterbelt trees and a small section would be experienced in the context of Creag Riabhach wind farm and substation. The perceived magnitude of change would reduce noticeably between construction and operation.</p> <p>The magnitude of change is likely to be Medium during construction and Low during operation.</p> <p><u>Underground Cable</u></p> <p>Construction of the underground cable would be very noticeable in open areas near the River Tirry, but after reinstatement would not be perceptible. The perceived magnitude of change would reduce noticeably between construction and operation.</p> <p>The magnitude of change is likely to be Medium during construction and Negligible during operation.</p>
<p>Effects Significance</p>	<p><u>Overhead Line</u></p> <p>During construction of the OHL, there would be a noticeable increase in movement and activity within parts of this LLCT, but the majority of this would be experienced in the context of the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and nearby commercial forestry. Nevertheless, there may be some reduction to the sense of remoteness and naturalness and interruption of panoramic views, while increasing the presence of man-made development. The effect significance would likely be Minor-Moderate and not significant during construction.</p> <p>During operation, the OHL would be experienced within this LLCT. There would be some slight reduction to the sense of remoteness and naturalness and increased presence of man-made development, but the effect would be less evident than during construction, since terminal poles and OHL components would be associated / situated with other vertical landscape features (e.g. shelterbelt trees) or experienced against a backdrop of active, managed forestry. The effect significance would likely be Minor and not significant during operation.</p> <p><u>Underground Cable</u></p>

	<p>During construction of the underground cable, there would be a noticeable increase in movement and activity within more open localised parts of this LLCT. There would be some reduction to the sense of remoteness and naturalness and interruption of panoramic views, while increasing the presence of man-made development. The effect significance would likely be locally Moderate and locally significant during construction (for the area around the Crask Inn and River Tirry) and Negligible elsewhere during construction and not significant.</p> <p>During operation, following reinstatement, the underground cable would not be perceptible. The effect significance would likely be Negligible and not significant during operation.</p>
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Table 6-10: Assessment of Effects on Commercial Forestry LLCT (see **Table 6-7** for Baseline Description)

Landscape Receptors	<p>The principal aspects of this landscape which may be affected by the Proposed Development comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dominance of forest within landscape • felled and windblown trees giving heavily managed appearance • recreational opportunities and features of cultural heritage value
Landscape Sensitivity	<p>This landscape is not particularly valued and its landcover and character present potential opportunities to accommodate developments of this type.</p> <p>Sensitivity to development of the type proposed is considered to be Low.</p>
Potential Effects	<p>The experience of construction works and longer term presence of the Proposed Development could potentially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • alter the perceived dominance of forestry and tree cover within this landscape through the severance of forest blocks, woodlands and shelterbelts • increase the presence of felled and windblown trees which may intensify the managed appearance of the landscape • distract from the setting of existing features including features of cultural heritage value and recreational opportunities
Effects Magnitude	<p><u>Overhead Line</u></p> <p>The Proposed Development would cross this LLCT, passing through planted and felled areas of commercial forestry, which will continue to change and grow at varying rates. Since it would be present within this LLCT, potential effects on this LLCT would be direct.</p> <p>During construction of the proposed OHL, activity and installation would be present but screening by trees would reduce perceptibility of this within the local area, and it would not be likely to differ notably from ongoing forest operations and activity.</p> <p>During operation, new poles and some areas of felling would be introduced, but these would be screened by trees and landform from many areas, or where experienced, would be perceived within this active, changing, managed commercial landscape where there are several vertical landscape features.</p> <p>The magnitude of effect is likely to be Negligible during construction and operation.</p> <p><u>Underground Cable</u></p> <p>The underground cable would not be present within this LLCT. Construction activity may be experienced on the periphery of this LLCT but during operation would not be perceptible. In considering this landscape as a whole, the magnitude of effect is likely to be Negligible during construction and operation.</p>
Effects Significance	<p><u>Overhead Line</u></p> <p>During construction, activity would not present a change from the existing forest operations.</p> <p>During operation, it is unlikely that the Proposed Development would alter the perceived dominance of forestry and tree cover, although some forest blocks would be severed by the new OHL and associated construction works, but a very small proportion of the whole LLCT. There may be a small increase to the presence of felled and windblown trees, but this would not change the character of this landscape given the prominent presence of this within the baseline. Screening from trees and route selection minimise any distractions</p>

	<p>from the setting of existing landscape features.</p> <p>The effect is likely to be Negligible during construction and operation and therefore would be not significant.</p> <p><u>Underground Cable</u></p> <p>The underground cable would not affect the landscape character of this LLCT and the effect is likely to be Negligible during construction and operation and therefore would not be significant.</p>
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Table 6-11: Assessment of Effects on Settled Strath and Slopes LLCT (see **Table 6-8** for Baseline Description)

Landscape Receptors	<p>The principal aspects of this landscape which may be affected by the Proposed Development comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scenic quality and expansive views • views to active commercial forestry landscape to east • settled and rural sense of place • presence of steel lattice towers and distribution lines which partially reduce rural sense of place
Landscape Sensitivity	<p>This landscape is moderately valued and its settled sense of place and presence of existing distribution infrastructure make it potentially tolerant of some degree of change of the type proposed.</p> <p>Sensitivity to development of the type proposed is considered to be Medium.</p>
Potential Effects	<p>The experience of construction works and longer term presence of the Proposed Development could potentially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • change the scenic quality and be present in views to active commercial forestry • reduce the rural sense of place • increase the presence of OHL infrastructure
Effects Magnitude	<p><u>Overhead Line</u></p> <p>The Proposed Development would be present on the periphery of this LLCT, partially screened by road-side forestry and clusters of vegetation, although it would also cross through some more open sections alongside the A836. The OHL would terminate at the Dalchork substation, which is part of a separate planning application (and not part of this LVIA).</p> <p>During construction, activity would be perceptible in open areas adjacent to the A836 but this would not be noticeably different to forestry operations and activity.</p> <p>During operation, it would be partially screened by trees but also experienced in more open views, seen at a distance in a landscape where there are other similar features and in the context of commercial forestry.</p> <p>The magnitude of change is likely to be Low during construction and operation.</p> <p><u>Underground Cable</u></p> <p>The underground cable would not be perceptible from this LLCT. The magnitude of effect would be Negligible during construction and operation.</p>
Effects Significance	<p><u>Overhead Line</u></p> <p>During construction, activity would not present a change from the existing forest operations.</p> <p>During operation, the Proposed Development would be perceptible within the landscape and may very slightly change the scenic quality and reduce the rural sense of place by increasing the presence of OHL infrastructure in the landscape. However, given its context alongside other vertical structures and within a commercial forestry landscape, it would result in an appreciable alteration to the landscape character of the LLCT.</p> <p>The effect is likely to be Minor during construction and operation and therefore would be not significant.</p> <p><u>Underground Cable</u></p>

The underground cable would not affect the landscape character of this LLCT and the effect is likely to be Negligible during construction and operation and therefore would **not be significant**.

Summary of Effects on Landscape Character

6.4.31 Anticipated effects to LLCTs are summarised in **Table 6-12**. For the purposes of this assessment, effects with a Moderate rating or greater are considered to be significant.

Table 6-12: Summary of Effects on Landscape Character

OHL: Overhead Line

UGC: Underground Cable

(L): 'Localised' Effect

(E): 'Elsewhere' Effect

LLCT	Effect During Construction						Effect During Operation					
	Not significant			Significant			Not significant			Significant		
	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate- Major	Major	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate- Major	Major
Sweeping Moorland LLCT	UGC (E)		OHL	UGC (L)			UGC	OHL				
Commercial Forestry LLCT	OHL UGC						OHL UGC					
Settled Strath and Slopes LLCT	UGC	OHL					UGC	OHL				

6.4.32 Overhead Line: As can be seen from the above table, no significant effects to landscape character are likely in relation to the Proposed Development OHL. Whilst the proposed construction works and permanent OHL are likely to be perceptible within this landscape, a number of factors are likely to reduce the extent to which these changes would influence landscape character. These include: the existing diverse character of the local areas predominantly affected; screening from trees; the presence of similar development in parts of the Study Area; its context within or adjacent to active commercial forestry through most of the Study Area; and the presence of nearby existing wind farms and the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm. It is therefore not considered likely that any noticeable change or deterioration in landscape characteristics and values would take place.

6.4.33 Underground Cable: During construction, there would be locally significant effects on the Sweeping Moorland LLCT, affecting the area around the Crask Inn, but this would be short term. Elsewhere during construction, effects would be non-significant. All other landscape effects relating to the underground cable are likely to be non-significant.

Cumulative Landscape Effects

6.4.34 The above landscape assessment considers a baseline whereby the Proposed Development would be experienced in the context of other similar development, as described in paragraph 6.3.14 – 6.3.15. This includes the existing network of steel lattice and wood pole OHLs within the Study Area, and the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and associated substation.

6.4.35 Further consideration of a separate cumulative baseline scenario has also been conducted, whereby it is assumed that other similar *proposed* and *consented* developments have also been built (i.e. Dalchork

substation and the Lairg to Loch Buidhe 132 kV OHL). Both the Dalchork substation and the Lairg to Loch Buidhe OHL would be situated in the southern part of the Study Area, within the Settled Strath and Slopes LLCT, to the south and south-east of the Proposed Development. Within this LLCT, the addition of the Proposed Development to a landscape featuring this substation and OHL and other existing steel lattice and wood pole OHLs, would have the potential to very slightly decrease the rural sense of place and marginally increase the perceived dominance of electrical and distribution infrastructure in the landscape. However, it is not likely that the Proposed Development would represent a significant change to the landscape character of this area, and would be a barely perceptible change in the context of other similar features seen against a backdrop of commercial forestry.

- 6.4.36 Overall, it is not considered that the addition of the Proposed Development to these other cumulative developments of a similar type would result in a sufficiently increased perception of OHL and grid development within the landscape to a degree where this would become a more dominant or character defining feature than it would be within the assumed cumulative baseline scenario.

6.5 Visual Amenity

Visual Amenity: Introduction

- 6.5.1 This section discusses the findings of the detailed visual assessment undertaken for the Proposed Development. It describes and evaluates the potential change in existing views obtained from residential properties, places of work, routes, popular destinations and strategic vantage points during the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Development, and the extent to which these would affect residents, visitors and users of the landscape.
- 6.5.2 Visual amenity relates to the way in which people visually experience the surrounding landscape. Adverse visual effects may occur through the intrusion into established views of new features, out of keeping with the existing structure, scale and composition of the view. However, visual effects may also be beneficial where an attractive focus is created in a previously unremarkable view or the influence of previously detracting features is reduced. The significance of effects will vary, depending on the nature and degree of change experienced and the perceived value and composition of the existing view.

Visual Amenity: Methodology

Establishment of the Baseline

- 6.5.3 Establishment of the baseline conditions has been undertaken through combination of desk study and site appraisal. The following specific tasks have been undertaken:
- generation and review of the ZTV diagram;
 - site appraisal and identification of sensitive visual receptors; and
 - field survey to establish the nature and context of individual visual receptors and the key elements and qualities of the existing view.

Appreciation of the Proposed Development

- 6.5.4 Appreciation of the Proposed Development involves the accumulation of a thorough knowledge of the proposal, its nature, scale and location within the baseline visual context, and any peripheral or ancillary features proposed. As part of this process, the ZTV diagram has been consulted to inform the potential range of effects.

Identification of Key Visual Receptors

- 6.5.5 For there to be a visual effect there is the need for a viewer. Individuals experiencing views from locations such as buildings and recognised routeways used by the public have been included in the assessment. Those experiencing views are referred to as visual receptors.

- 6.5.6 Potential visual receptors have been identified through analysis of the ZTV in combination with targeted field survey.
- 6.5.7 Preparation of the visual baseline is followed by the systematic identification of likely effects on the potential visual receptors. This is a two-fold process, giving consideration to how effects may arise from aspects of the Proposed Development, and how these changes may be accommodated in the existing baseline view.
- 6.5.8 Locations of visual receptors identified for inclusion in the assessment were visited and key information on the nature, composition and characteristics of the existing visual experienced recorded. Consideration is given to the likely perceived value of a particular view to the viewer, taking into account the nature of the receptor and the potential activity they may be involved in, and factors such as elevation, extent and key features or attractions which may feature in the view.

Visual Receptor Sensitivity

- 6.5.9 The evaluation of visual sensitivity considers both the perceived *value* of the existing view to the receptor and the *susceptibility* of the visual receptor to change. Consideration is therefore given to the following:
- the susceptibility of the receptor to change, which is a combination of the nature of the receptor and the potential activity they may be involved in;
 - the perceived value of a particular view to the viewer, which takes into account visual context, including key features and attractors/ detractors which may feature in the existing view and affect the value of that view to the receptor; and
 - the aspect and direction of change in respect of the most valued views from the receptor location including the relative elevation compared to the changed element of the view.
- 6.5.10 Visual sensitivity has been evaluated with reference to these factors above and using a three-point scale as listed in **Table 6-13**.

Table 6-13: Visual Sensitivity Criteria

Visual Sensitivity	Criteria
High	Where the appearance of the Proposed Development would affect or alter an important part of a highly valued, impressive or well composed view with no detracting features.
Medium	Where the appearance of the Proposed Development would affect or alter a fairly important part of a valued or pleasing view or a notable part of a less well composed view with some detracting features.
Low	Where the appearance of the Proposed Development would affect or alter an unimportant part of the overall view or would affect or alter a view which is of limited value or poorly composed, with numerous detracting features.

Identification of Potential Visual Effects

- 6.5.11 The next stage in the assessment process, having identified potential visual receptors and their sensitivity to the Proposed Development, is to ascertain the magnitude of change which would result from the Proposed Development.

Magnitude of Change

- 6.5.12 Magnitude of change concerns the extent to which the existing view would be altered by the Proposed Development. The evaluation of magnitude gives consideration to factors such as the scale or extent of the changes within the view, the extent to which this may alter the composition or focus of the view and the duration and reversibility of these changes. Magnitude of change is categorised on a four-point scale as listed in **Table 6-14**.

Table 6-14: Magnitude of Visual Change Criteria

Magnitude of Visual Change	Criteria
High	The Proposed Development would result in a very noticeable change in the existing view.
Medium	The Proposed Development would cause a noticeable change in the existing view.
Low	The Proposed Development would cause a perceptible change in the existing view.
Negligible	The Proposed Development would cause a largely imperceptible change in the existing view.

6.5.13 In recognition of the differing changes that would occur during construction works and in the longer term, two rating for magnitude of change have been included: during the construction of the Proposed Development and during operation, once construction and reinstatement works have been completed.

Assessment of Effect Significance

6.5.14 The level of effect identified concerns the importance of changes resulting from the Proposed Development. Evaluation of the visual effect is based on consideration of the magnitude of change in relation to visual sensitivity, taking into account proposed mitigation measures, and is established using professional judgement. The assessment takes into account likely changes to the visual composition, including the extent to which new features would distract or screen existing elements in the view or disrupt the scale, structure or focus of the existing view.

6.5.15 Effect significance has been evaluated using a four-point scale and using the criteria noted in **Table 6-15** to describe effects.

Table 6-15: Visual Effect Criteria

Visual Effect	Criteria
Major	The Proposed Development would form a prominent and very detracting feature, resulting in a very noticeable deterioration to an existing highly valued and well composed view.
Moderate	The Proposed Development would introduce some detracting features to an existing highly valued and well composed view, or would be prominent within a pleasing or less well composed view, resulting in a noticeable deterioration of the existing view.
Minor	The Proposed Development would form a perceptible but not detracting feature within a pleasing or valued view or would be a more prominent feature within a poorly composed view of limited value, resulting in a small deterioration to the existing view.
Negligible	The Proposed Development would form a barely perceptible feature within the existing view and would not result in any discernible deterioration or improvement to the view.

6.5.16 As for magnitude of change, the differing potential effects have been considered during the construction of the Proposed Development and following completion.

6.5.17 The above criteria and levels of effect represent points on a continuum. Where necessary, interim ratings (such as Minor-Moderate) have been used to indicate the anticipated level of effect. For the purposes of this assessment, effects of Moderate, Moderate-Major and Major are considered to be significant.

Visual Amenity: Baseline

6.5.18 The baseline landscape and its broad visual context are described in Section 6.4.

Visual Receptors

6.5.19 Visual receptors included in the assessment are indicated on **Figure 6.3: Visual Receptors** and described in **Appendix 6.1**.

6.5.20 The visual receptors identified can be subdivided into two separate categories:

- receptors obtaining views from building locations; and
- receptors obtaining views from routes.

Views from Buildings

6.5.21 Ten building or building group receptor locations have been identified within the Study Area for the Proposed Development. These locations are described fully in **Appendix 6.1** and summarised as follows:

- **Tirryside and Achfrish (B1-B3):** Receptors in locations 1-3 are situated in 1 – 1.5 storey properties, croft houses and a campsite to the west of the Proposed Development. Properties are oriented in a mixture of directions, but the majority of main views are south, south-east and south-west, partially filtered / screened by local vegetation or neighbouring properties, across rough fields to forested hills, with wind turbines on the horizon, and steel lattice towers visible in some views;
- **Blarbuie (B4):** Receptors in location 4 are situated in four 1.5 storey semi-detached properties with eastern, panoramic views across open rough grazing fields to low, rolling forested hills, with a local distribution line receding in the main view. There may be side views of the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm, partially seen above forestry;
- **Collabol (B5):** Receptors in location 5 are situated in three 1.5 storey houses, with farm buildings, with southern main views across Loch Shin and some foreground vegetation filtering the view;
- **Saval (B6):** Receptors in location 6 are situated in cottage properties and a farm in an elevated position above Lairg. Receptors here have southern elevated panoramic main views over the valley and onto surrounding hills, with wind turbines visible on the horizon;
- **Dalchork (B7):** Receptors in location 7 are situated in properties and a farm with outbuildings next to a group of mature trees and recent native woodland planting to the rear. Main views are to the south-west across a valley, limited by foreground trees and farm buildings. Rear views are onto young native woodland, across the public road onto active commercial forestry;
- **Dalmichy (B8):** Receptors in location 8 are situated in a 1.5 storey property in a slightly elevated position, with an outbuilding, next to a small cluster of pine trees. Main views are elevated and open to the south-west, but there are also open valued views in other directions;
- **Rhian Bridge (B9):** Receptors in location 9 are situated in a property enclosed within a copse of trees with a domestic wind turbine; and
- **Crask (B10):** Receptors in location 10 are situated in an Inn and house in an isolated position by the A836 road, with scattered trees. Main views are south along the A836, looking across a small valley onto moorland and forestry, partially filtered by nearby trees. Valued expansive views are also obtained to the west, across open moorland to distant hills. Some tips of consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm may be experienced in rear views.

Views from Routes

6.5.22 Six routes have been identified within the Study Area with the potential for views of the Proposed Development to be obtained as follows:

- Section of **A836 / NCR 1 (R1)**: This route comprises a main, single carriageway public road crossing the length of the Study Area from north to south. Views to the east are largely onto commercial forestry whereas views to the west are more variable: either across open moorland, onto commercial forestry, or onto nearby building clusters. The consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm turbines would be visible to varying degrees along the route: in very close proximity from the northernmost section of the route; and partially screened by forestry from other sections;
- Part of a **mountain route to Meall nan Con / Ben Klibreck (R2)**: This route is a rough hill path that leads to the summit of the Munro Ben Klibreck from Vagastie Bridge on the A836. Within the study area, this route connects Vagastie Bridge with Cnoc Sgriodain. Receptors traveling along this route experience open, panoramic vistas across extensive moorland, the A836 road and areas of commercial forestry to the south. The consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm would be visible to the west in close proximity;
- Part of **Scottish Hill Track 341 by the Crask Inn (R3)**: This route is the north-western part of a Scottish Hill Track which runs from the Crask Inn to Lairg by Loch Choire. Receptors on R3 experience largely open views across moorland and up to Ben Klibreck, although views south are contained by commercial forestry;
- Part of **Scottish Hill Track 341 and minor road (R4)**: This route is a minor road and the south-western part of a Scottish Hill Track which runs from the Crask Inn to Lairg by Loch Choire. Receptors on R4 experience views of commercial forestry and a local distribution line. Views are largely enclosed by trees but open across areas of clearfell;
- Sections of **A838 and minor roads near Tirryside, Collaboll and Achfrish (R5)**: This route consists of and single-track roads with passing places near the shores of Loch Shin. Views from these roads are largely open towards Loch Shin and onto fields and clusters of neighbouring properties. Steel lattice towers local distribution lines, and wind turbines are also visible in some views; and
- **Core Path near Loch Shin (R6)**: This route is a core path between the A836 road and the shores of Loch Shin. Views are expansive, generally focussed on the north-west, west and south-west views across Loch Shin.

Visual Amenity: Assessment of Effects

6.5.23 The following section gives a description of predicted effects on receptors identified within the Study Area. For the purpose of this assessment significant effects are those considered to be Moderate or greater. Individual receptor references relate to those indicated on **Figure 6.3: Visual Receptors**, and described in **Appendix 6.1**. **Appendix 6.1** provides further information on distances of receptors from the Proposed Development and the nature of the predicted effect.

Views from Buildings

Visual effects considered to be Significant

6.5.24 As a result of the overhead line, no visual effects on receptors in buildings would be significant during construction or operation.

6.5.25 As a result of the underground cable construction, of the ten visual receptor groupings assessed, only receptors at the Crask properties (B10) were identified as being likely to experience **temporary significant visual effects**. Visual effects would likely be adverse and of Moderate-Major significance but temporary, anticipated during the construction period only.

6.5.26 This receptor location comprises a 1.5 storey inn and house in an isolated position with scattered trees, by the A836. Main views are south along the public road, looking across a small valley onto moorland and forestry. Valued expansive views are also experienced to the west, across open moorland to distant mountains. The turbines of the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm may be visible above trees. Receptors at this location are considered to have High sensitivity to change.

6.5.27 The underground cable would pass close to these properties (around 80 m) and construction would be prominent in valued views to the west, main views to the south, and rear views, in close proximity, although partially screened by local vegetation. Visual effects would reduce to Negligible (**not significant**) once construction and reinstatement had been completed as the underground cable would not be visible in the long term.

Effects considered to be Not Significant

6.5.28 As a result of the overhead line, all visual effects experienced by receptors in buildings are considered likely to be **not significant** during construction and operation, ranging between Negligible and Minor-Moderate Adverse. For these receptors, visual effects during construction and operation would be similar, since construction activities would appear to be akin to existing forestry operation activity. Minor-Moderate visual effects would be experienced by receptors at the Crask properties (B10) who would have filtered main and rear views of a terminal tower transitioning to an overhead line, in slightly elevated positions, in the context of commercial forestry and shelterbelt trees. Minor Adverse visual effects would be experienced by receptors in North Tirryside (B1), Tirryside (B2), Achfrish (B3), Blarbuie (B4), Colaboll (B5) and Dalmichy (B8) due to partial filtering / screening of the overhead line by trees; and its context seen within an active commercial forest landscape. Negligible visual effects would be experienced by receptors in Saval (B6), Dalchork (B7) and Rhian (B9), where the overhead line is considered likely to be barely perceptible in the view due to screening from vegetation and landform and context within an active commercial forest landscape.

6.5.29 As a result of the underground cable, visual effects experienced by receptors in all but one building location (B10) within the study area are considered likely to be No View or Negligible and **not significant** during both the construction and operational phases.

Views from Routes

Visual effects considered to be Significant

6.5.30 As a result of the overhead line, no visual effects on receptors on routes would be significant during construction or operation.

6.5.31 As a result of the underground cable construction, of the six routes assessed, only receptors on part of one route were identified as likely to experience **localised significant temporary visual effects**: those on the A836 and NCR 1 (R1) passing the Crask Inn. Visual effects would likely be adverse and of Moderate significance but temporary and localised, anticipated during the construction period for the underground cable and restricted to this section of the route only.

6.5.32 This route is a main, fast single carriageway public road that extends the length of the study area. Receptors on this route experience a variety of views in different directions, but the majority are onto commercial forestry.

6.5.33 Views from the Crask section of this route are more open and panoramic, extending across moorland to distant hills, including the summit of Ben Klibreck. Commercial forestry is visible from this section to south and shelterbelt roadside trees are seen to the north, with turbines of the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm partially visible to varying degrees above shelterbelt trees. Receptors on this section of the route are considered to have High sensitivity to change given the highly valued and open nature of the views.

6.5.34 From the Crask section of this route, the underground cable would pass close to receptors (around 40 m) and construction would be noticeable in valued views. Localised visual effects would reduce to Negligible (**not significant**) once construction and reinstatement had been completed as the underground cable would not be visible in the long term.

Effects considered to be Not Significant

- 6.5.35 As a result of the overhead line, all visual effects experienced by receptors on routes are considered likely to be **not significant** during construction and operation, ranging between Negligible and Minor-Moderate Adverse. For these receptors, visual effects during construction and operation would be similar, since construction activities would appear to be akin to existing forestry operation activity.
- 6.5.36 As a result of the overhead line, Minor Adverse visual effects would likely be experienced by receptors on R2, R3, R4 and the majority of R1 due to filtering / screening of the Proposed Development by trees; and its context seen within an active commercial forest landscape and adjacent to the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm. Negligible visual effects would likely be experienced by receptors on R5 and R6 where the Proposed Development is considered likely to be barely perceptible in the view due to screening from vegetation and landform and context within an active commercial forest landscape.
- 6.5.37 As a result of the underground cable, the visual effects experienced by receptors on all but one assessed routes (R1, see 6.5.22-24) are considered likely to be **not significant** (ranging between No View and Minor Adverse) during both the construction and operational phases.

Summary of Effects on Visual Amenity

- 6.5.38 Anticipated effects to visual receptors are summarised in **Table 6-16**. For the purposes of this assessment, effects with a Moderate rating or greater are considered to be significant.

Table 6-16: Summary of Effects on Visual Receptors

(Where L= Localised effect; E = Elsewhere effect; **OHL** = Effects resulting from the proposed overhead line; **UGC** = Effects resulting from the proposed underground cable)

Receptor Type	Component of Proposed Development	Effect During Construction						Effect During Operation							
		Not significant				Significant		Not significant				Significant			
		No View	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate- Major	Major	No View	Negligible	Minor	Minor - Moderate	Moderate	Moderate- Major	Major
Receptors in Buildings	OHL		3	6	1					3	7				
	UGC	9					1		9	1					
Receptors on Routes	OHL		2	3+1E	1L					2	4				
	UGC	3	1+1E	1		1L			3	3					

- 6.5.39 As can be seen from the above table, all effects on visual receptors as a result of the overhead line are likely to be **not significant**.
- 6.5.40 As a result of the underground cable, potential **temporary significant visual** effects are likely for a small number of visual receptors in a localised area during its construction. These receptors are situated in the Crask (B10) properties and on the localised Crask section of the A836 and NCR 1 (R1). However, once construction and reinstatement works are complete, all visual effects associated with the underground cable would likely be of non-significant levels.

Cumulative Visual Effects

- 6.5.41 The above visual assessment considers a baseline whereby the Proposed Development would be seen in the context of other similar development, as described in paragraph 6.3.14-6.3.15. This includes the existing network of steel lattice and wood pole OHLs within the Study Area, and the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm and associated substation.
- 6.5.42 Further consideration of a separate cumulative baseline scenario has also been conducted, whereby it is assumed that other similar *proposed* and *consented* developments have also been built (i.e. Dalchork substation and the Lairg to Loch Buidhe 132 kV OHL). Both the Dalchork substation and the Lairg to Loch Buidhe OHL would be situated in the southern part of the Study Area, to the south and south-east of the Proposed Development, in the vicinity of visual receptors at North Tirryside (B1), Tirryside (B2), Achfrish (B3), Colaboll (B5), Saval (B6) and Dalchork (B7) and on a core path (R6) and part of the A836 and NCR 1 (R1). For visual receptors in these locations, the presence of this substation and OHL and other existing steel lattice and wood pole OHLs in the visual context, would potentially reduce sensitivity to the introduction of the Proposed Development. These developments would be visible in combination in several views, to varying degrees, most notably from receptors on parts of the A836 and NCR 1 (R1), and in building locations B1-B3, B5 and B7. The addition of the Proposed Development may result in perceptible increases in electrical and distribution infrastructure to views but it would not significantly increase their prominence in views.
- 6.5.43 Overall, it is not considered that the addition of the Proposed Development to these other cumulative developments of a similar type would likely result in a sufficiently increased perception of OHL and grid development to significantly affect the visual amenity of the Study Area within the assumed cumulative baseline scenario.

6.6 Mitigation Proposals

- 6.6.1 The design of the Proposed Development has evolved to its current state in response to the potential for localised but significant landscape and visual effects in the Crask Inn area. In this location, an underground cable was deemed the most appropriate form of development in order to mitigate significant long-term local landscape and visual effects through design. Alternatives considered are described in more detail in Chapter 2.
- 6.6.2 As no long-term significant landscape or visual effects are anticipated to arise in relation to the Proposed Development, no specific mitigation measures are proposed. General best practice standards during construction, and a high standard of reinstatement as would be set out within the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP), would assist in minimising the degree of landscape and visual effects.

Statement of Significance

- 6.6.3 A detailed Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Proposed Development. This has concluded that there would no significant landscape and visual effects associated with the overhead line during construction or operation. There may, however, be some temporary significant visual effects to a small number of individual visual receptors in a localised area as a result of the underground cable construction, but there would be no significant effects after completion and reinstatement. Furthermore, no significant cumulative landscape or visual effects are anticipated. The overall landscape and visual effect of the operation of the Proposed Development is therefore likely to be **not significant**.